

# India's Centre for Science and Environment Wins Stockholm Water Prize



**The Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) in New Delhi, an influential Indian non-governmental organisation led by Ms. Sunita Narain, a dynamic advocate for water, environment, human rights, democracy and health, will receive the 2005 Stockholm Water Prize from HM King Carl XVI Gustaf of Sweden in August. In its Citation, the Nominating Committee lauded CSE and Ms. Narain**

*“for a successful recovery of old and generation of new knowledge on water management, a community-based sustainable integrated resource management under gender equity, a courageous stand against undemocratic, top-down bureaucratic resource control, an efficient use of a free press, and an independent judiciary to meet these goals.”*

The Stockholm Water Prize is awarded annually to individuals and institutions for their outstanding contributions to the world of water. This year's prize to CSE acknowledges the growing crisis of water management in many regions of the South and the need for new approaches that provide local food and water security to communities. CSE's work, through its many publications, its research and advocacy has helped create new thinking on how traditional systems of water management, which use rainwater endowment, once rejuvenated could become the starting point for the removal of rural poverty in many parts of the world.

### **Building a Water-Literate Society**

It is clear that the management of water, and not scarcity of water, is the problem in many parts of the world. CSE's work on rainwater

harvesting has shown the many ingenious ways in which people learnt to live with water scarcity. The solution, practiced diversely in different regions, lies in capturing rain in millions of storage systems – in tanks, ponds, stepwells and even rooftops – and to use it to recharge groundwater reserves for irrigation and drinking water needs.

The world faces a critical challenge to improve the productivity of rainfed and marginalised lands. In this challenge, water can turn a large part of the country's currently parched lands into productive lands, reduce poverty and increase incomes where it is needed the most. CSE has shown through its advocacy that localised water management is a cost-effective approach and more importantly that local water management – harvesting and storing water where it falls – can only be done through community participation.

The work of CSE has highlighted that water cannot become everybody's business until there are fundamental changes in the way water is managed. Policy will have to recognise that water management, which involves communities and households, has to be done co-operatively. For this, the organisation forcefully argues that the prevalent mindset that water management is the exclusive responsibility of government must give way to a paradigm built on participative and local management of this critical life source. This powerful idea is gaining ground to become the policy and practice in many regions of the world.

The 2005 Stockholm Water Prize is given for CSE's contribution to build a water-literate society that values the raindrop and teaches society to learn from the frugality of our ancestors, to build a water prudent



Upscaling is possible. Government programmes learn from micro-level experiences of people. A large-scale replication of traditional understanding to secure land and water futures.

world. The movement has the potential to change the water futures of the world.

## Reviving Ancient Water Harvesting Techniques

CSE has lobbied successfully for rainwater harvesting to be an accepted, important element in India's water strategy. CSE's founder director Anil Agarwal co-edited with Narain, the eye-opening 1997 book, *Dying Wisdom: Rise, Fall and Potential of India's Water Harvesting System*, spawned a rediscovery of this practical, traditional and inexpensive technique to capture rainwater for drinking and agricultural purposes, and to help alleviate pressure on India's centralised water system – itself a remnant of colonial times. *Making Water Everybody's Business* (2001) expanded upon *Dying Wisdom* by documenting traditions, practices, technologies and policies of water harvesting in India, and by assessing state government efforts to deal with drought.

CSE's National Water Harvesters Network has put the ancient wisdom into practice by creating awareness, undertaking policy research and lobbying to bring about change in policy as required so that water management is decentralised and water availability increased.

## Tackling Global Climate Change, Scrutinising Indian Companies

CSE has worked actively with both global and Indian issues. Through Narain – a winner of the Indian government's highest civilian honour, the Padma Shri – CSE became involved in discussions on the Kyoto Protocol to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. Claiming that the Kyoto emission quotas favoured rich countries, CSE campaigned that the atmosphere is a global common and should be equally shared by all citizens. CSE campaigned to bring policy changes in the areas of air pollution, industrial pollution, water management and pesticide use. In India, CSE's Green Rating Project (GRP), for example, is a respected civil society initiative to develop an alternative form of governance to control industrial pollution. Its ratings scorecard has led to sharpened scrutiny on the activities of the paper and automobile industries.

## Building Fact-based Credibility

CSE has distinguished itself in the global crowd of NGOs through its insistence on hard facts before rhetoric. This philosophy has given the Centre considerable social capital within civil society, politics and the media in the push for policy change. CSE's research programme on ecosystems

and their relation with the human populations they support showed that, in India and elsewhere, environmental degradation leads to human poverty, rather than the converse. This degradation, among other things, burdens women by increasing their daily responsibilities to collect wood for fuel and water to run households. In all that it does, CSE works to build decentralised decision making processes that involve all stakeholders, preferably locally. Rainwater harvesting, managed at the village level by women, is one such example.

Dedication to its core values – environmental sustainability; respect for science, nature's diversity and traditional knowledge; equity and public participation; education and training, documentation and pollution monitoring – have also given CSE the credibility to litigate against formidable adver-

saries such as the soft drink industry. The 2003 CSE study of popular soft drinks and bottled waters, identified pesticides from contaminated groundwater that could cause cancer, damage the nervous and reproductive systems, cause birth defects and severely disrupt the immune system.

CSE uses media outreach and information dissemination effectively to support its advocacy. The Centre produces an impressive and steady output of timely publications and other learning aids, including the fortnightly magazine, "Down to Earth". The magazine, which critiques current policies has become an important voice of the practitioners of hope and change.

Web Sites to Visit: [www.cseindia.org](http://www.cseindia.org)  
[www.rainwaterharvesting.org](http://www.rainwaterharvesting.org)



An upturned cup on a saucer! An ingenious system to harvest rainwater on an artificial catchment, called Kundi, found in desert state of Rajasthan. With one hectare of land, and 100 mm of rainfall, one can harvest 1 million litres of rainwater.

## The Stockholm Water Prize



The Stockholm Water Foundation was established in 1990 to encourage research and development of the world's water environment by awarding the international Stockholm Water Prize. The Stockholm International Water Institute administrates the activities of the Stockholm Water Foundation.

Founders of the Stockholm Water Prize are Swedish and international companies in co-operation with the City of Stockholm. They are:

Anglian Water, Bacardi, DuPont, Europeiska Insurance, Fujitsu Siemens Computers, General Motors, Grundfos Management, Hewlett Packard, Hilton and Scandic, ITT Flygt, Kaupthing Bank Sverige, Kemira Kemwater, KPMG Sweden, P&G, Ragn-Sells, Scandinavian Airlines (SAS), Snecma, Stockholm Water Festival, Swedish Railways (SJ), Uponor Group, Water Environment Federation