



IRHA International Rainwater Harvesting Alliance

Alianza Internacional para la Gestión del Agua de Lluvia (IRHA)
Alliance Internationale pour la Gestion de l'Eau de Pluie (IRHA)

bRAINstorming

NEWSLETTER NO. 26 - OCTOBER 2009

Our newsletter focuses on the activities in Rainwater Harvesting, field of the International Rainwater Harvesting Alliance (IRHA) and its partners.

Topic of this issue: Sulabh International Social Service Organization

Editorial

Dear Rainwater Harvesters, Readers, the IRHA Members and Friends,

At the beginning of the XXI century, when man, having already stepped on the moon a long time ago, is now turning its eyes toward Mars; when technical progress has gone so far as to allow new cities to be built on oceans and seas; when scholars, having pierced the enigma of genetic code, start healing illnesses considered until now to be incurable; there is still an incredibly difficult problem not yet solved: SANITATION! On the midway of the term fixed by the United Nations for reducing poverty, it is time to promote the best practices, as well as the organizations, which contribute substantially to the ongoing fulfillment of the Millennium Goals.

Inevitably, the first name which comes to mind is the Indian organization Sulabh International Social Services, which has been working in that field since 1970. The motion which led to its creation is a very noble one: the liberation of the scavengers (also called "untouchables"), the members of the most denied Indian cast, from the traditional obligation of cleaning bucket toilets manually. To this challenge, Dr Pathak, the founder and the motor of the organization, added another goal: to turn the population away from the odious practice of open defecation.

Today, about 5500 public toilets have been constructed by Sulabh throughout the entire country and 6 million people use them everyday. About 50,000 scavengers have been freed from the humiliating charge imposed on their social layer. Of course, a lot remains to be done, and Sulabh does it courageously, professionally, faultlessly.

In April 2009, I visited the office of the Sulabh organization. This newsletter will be a tribute to its excellent work and a guiding tour of the Sulabh campus in New Delhi for those of you who do not know it yet.

Vessela Monta

Dossier: SULABH INTERNATIONAL SOCIAL SERVICE ORGANIZATION



Photo credit: Sulabh International

My visit to the Sulabh Campus in New Delhi was an experience which I will never forget. Our organization, the International Rainwater Harvesting Alliance, IRHA, has started a collaboration with the technical branch of the Sulabh International Organization, and thus, at the end of April 2009, I was going to their office to finalize our contract. While there, I was honoured to meet one of the most eminent figures in the social movement for equity in the world, Dr Bindeshwar Pathak.

Dr. Bindeshwar Pathak



Photo credit: Sulabh International

One of the greatest humanists and social reformers of contemporary India, Dr Bindeshwar Pathak cannot leave anybody feeling indifferent. His peaceful and thoughtful presence cannot hide the strength of his character, the deep knowledge of the human being, the clear vision of the needs of the deprived layers of Indian society and the ways of improving the injustice. His own life has proved my first impression.

[Read more](#)

...unexpectedly, I started my working day in prayer!



Photo credit: Sulabh International

The working day starts, as usual, with a prayer. The staff members are standing in the hall and are all singing. I look at their faces: mild, smiling, concentrated on the song and obviously enjoying this moment of peace and unity. Dr Pathak starts to speak, addressing some individuals in the audience directly, they answer his questions smiling. I don't understand everything, but the message is clear: "We work together for a better world". There is humour, lightness and a feeling of unity. A young man wants to read a poem he wrote the previous day. It is a poem dedicated to cleanliness, hygiene and... toilets! He does it and he is warmly applauded. Somebody starts singing Dr Pathak's Hymn of Harmony and the audience joins him, filling the hall with a beautiful chant.

I am in the Sulabh International Social Service premises in New Delhi. "Sanitation is our religion!" and "Please smile, you are in Sulabh!" say the slogans on the wall of the meeting hall.

A Poem



The Author.

Photo credit: Sulabh International

The Hymn of Harmony

by Dr Bindeshwar Pathak

Let's all come together and build a happy Sulabh world
A happy co-existence, a harmonious order
Where there is no place for sectarian walls
Dividing us along religious, caste or gender
Let's all come together and build a happy Sulabh world.

[Read the entire poem](#)

Sulabh International Social Service Organization and its Activities

The Sulabh International Social Service Organization (www.sulabhinternational.org), a non-profit voluntary organization, was founded in 1970 by the eminent social reformer, action sociologist and internationally known expert on Low Cost Sanitation, Dr. Bindeshwar Pathak. It is registered under the Society Registration Act XXI of 1860, an Act of the Government of India.

Sulabh Technology and its global recognition



Photo credit: Sulabh International

In the year 1969, when Dr. Pathak was associated with the Gandhi Centenary Committee in Bihar, a State in India, he was assigned the task of finding an alternative to manual scavenging. He studied the various designs of prevailing low cost sanitation at that time, done in both India and abroad, and after extensive research at ground level, he came up with the simple and cost effective sanitation technology of twin-pit pour-flush toilets, popularly known as Sulabh Shauchalaya in India.

[Read more](#)

Concept of Public Toilets developed by Sulabh



Photo credit: Sulabh International

Sulabh has built a chain of public toilets on a 'pay and use' basis; these are located in important places such as markets, bus stands, cinemas, hospitals and railways, with the aim of dissuading people from defecating in the open. It has also constructed, and is now maintaining, 7500 community toilet-cum-bath complexes on the 'pay and use' basis, with attendant services round the clock. The world's biggest toilet-cum-bath complex was built at Shirdi in the Nasik district, Maharashtra, next to the holy shrine of Shri Sai Baba, a place of religious importance. Sulabh complexes have been welcomed both by people and authorities due to their cleanliness and good management.

The low cost facilities of individual household toilets and community-cum-bath complexes are being used by more than ten million people everyday (Human Development Report 2006-UNDP).

Biogas Plants



26th April 2009, Sulabh's campus:
Cooking with gas received from the
composting of the human excreta
from the nearby public toilet.

Sulabh is the first to generate biogas from human excreta on a large scale in public toilets. Based on the 'Sulabh Model' design, more than 192 biogas plants have been installed in public toilets to generate energy and produce bio-fertilizer for agricultural purposes. The organization has developed a new and convenient technology by which the effluent of the human excreta based biogas plants turns into a colourless, odourless and pathogen free manure, safe for aquaculture, gardening or discharge into any water body.

Other Technologies

Sulabh has also developed the following technologies, which are demonstrated in its campus in New Delhi:

- Waste-water treatment through Duckweed for smaller towns.
- Use of water-hyacinth for enhancing the production of biogas.
- Conversion of vegetable waste into manure through Sulabh Thermophilic Aerobic Composting (STAC).

Liberation of Scavengers and their Training & Rehabilitation



The President of India, Smt.
Pratibha Devisingh Patil, speaks
with women liberated from the
label "scavengers".

Photo credit: Sulabh international

In the past, in India, the scavenging was done by a particular class of people, those lowest in the caste hierarchy. For a very long time they have been subjected to all types of indignities. The main thrust of Sulabh Sanitation Movement is the liberation of scavengers from the demeaning task of manual scavenging, by adopting the technology of twin-pit pour-flush latrines. The programme does not end with the liberation of scavengers. The question of their alternative employment by providing training is an important issue and Sulabh has launched a number of programmes for training and rehabilitation. It created the Vocational Training Centre in its campus in New Delhi where wards of scavengers, along with others, are trained in vocational trades. There is also an English Medium Public School in the campus to impart quality education to children from weaker sections of society.

Nai Disha



Photo credit: Sulabh International

With the idea to set up a centre to impart vocational training to women who have been hitherto engaged in the profession of scavenging, in April 2003, Sulabh inaugurated a centre called 'Nai Disha' at Alwar in Rajasthan. Twenty eight women were educated and trained in food processing, beauty-care and tailoring. They were paid a monthly salary, so that they did not return to their earlier profession. Now another group of 28 women scavengers is undergoing training in this centre. Last year, 36 women from Nai Disha were invited to New York by the United Nations. The world body was impressed by their story of uplift. The trip also included a memorable day when the women, dressed in their traditional best, walked the catwalk with some leading Indian models.

Sulabh has also set up a similar vocational training centre at Tonk in Rajasthan, to provide training for the 225 wards of scavengers located there. It is sponsored by the Department of Social Welfare, Government of Rajasthan.

Museum of Toilets



Photo credit: Sulabh International

The most amazing display I encountered, among all the tremendous achievements in Sulabh's campus, was the Museum of Toilets. It is both a funny and extremely serious illustration of a very smart message: sanitation has its own history and evolution. It has its intimate side, but it is not a taboo topic anymore. We must speak about it, know about it and work for it.

[Read more](#)

Activities undertaken by Sulabh International Social Service Organization in other countries



Front view of a Sulabh Toilet Complex at Kabul.

Photo credit: Sulabh international

The Sulabh's competence in the field of social work, in the engineering concept and execution and its high proficiency in innovative technologies, are recognized internationally. They are increasingly involved in projects outside of India, which highlights the growing interest in having Sulabh as an implementation partner. Thus, Sulabh has already made its presence felt in a big way in countries like Bhutan, Afghanistan and even in a number of African countries.

[Read more](#)

Sulabh International Academy of Environmental Sanitation and Public Health

In May 2009, the International Rainwater Harvesting Alliance (IRHA) entered into Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Sulabh International Academy of Environmental Sanitation and Public Health, one of India's leading voluntary organizations engaged in environmental sanitation, health and hygiene programmes.

As per the Memorandum of Understanding, the Academy will seek the assistance and cooperation of Sulabh International Social Service Organization and sister organizations, in the implementation of rainwater harvesting and other programmes of the IRHA.

[Here is a non-exhaustive introduction to this reputed organization](#)

Upcoming newsletter

The next issue of the IRHA "bRAINstorming" e-newsletter will deal with Rainwater Harvesting development in Great Britain.

IRHA will be asking you, our newsletter readers, to contribute to the writing of our future issues. Please send your articles, photos or comments linked to the topic announced. We thank you in advance for taking the time to making your e-newsletter and helping the IRHA focus on your needs.

Become a member

The IRHA members benefit from our extensive network and contribute to increasing rainwater harvesting benefits in the world.

Become a member online (choose one of these):

- [Student Membership](#)
- [Organization Membership](#)
- [Individual Members](#)
- [Supporting Friends Membership](#)
- [Private Sector Members](#)

Subscription/unsubscription

To subscribe or unsubscribe, please send a message to:

English: newsletter-en@irha-h2o.org

French: newsletter-fr@irha-h2o.org

Spanish: newsletter-sp@irha-h2o.org

IRHA – International Environment House II,
Chemin de Balxert 7-9, 1219 Geneva, Switzerland

Tel: +41 22 797 41 57 & +41 22 797 41 58

Website: www.irha-h2o.org - E-mail: secretariat@irha-h2o.org