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# The Worth of Water

Designing Climate Resilient Rainwater  
Harvesting Systems

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# Foreword

At the time of writing, the world faces two challenges to our continued existence on the Earth, the Covid19 pandemic and the global impacts of climate change. The worldwide response to both has been informed by science. Science provides evidence and advice, prompting governments to act and business and individuals to respond.

The worldwide adaptations we humans have made to combat Covid19 show how a shared global framework, informed by scientific evidence and advice, can motivate radical action. The Covid19 response proves that when faced with an existential threat to our survival, we humans can change how we act, how we think and how we interact. On the other hand, the pandemic appears to have pushed all discussion of climate change, and the corresponding individual lifestyle and governance changes required, down the priority list.

Numerous scientific reports have shown evidence of the impacts of global warming and of the necessary actions needed to keep within 1.5–2°C limits. The scientific approach to policy change to date has been to provide evidence and data to support an informed debate and trust our politicians, legislators and business leaders to act accordingly. The Covid19 response features government action and lifestyle interventions to combat the effects of the public health emergency. This has not been the case with climate change.

Low income countries across the world are characterised by low levels of daily income, lack of adequate housing, water and sanitation infrastructure, limited health capacities and weak governance. High income countries in the so-called developed world have not prioritised this cohort of our brothers and sisters who face the brunt of climate change. On the contrary, reduced development budgets from wealthy countries have accentuated and promoted divisions and inequalities in these countries. In terms of addressing climate change, middle and high income countries have turned inwards. The rich world which has reached a high level of income largely founded on the use of non-renewable resources is in effect pulling the ladder up after it and leaving low income countries to fend for themselves.

The utilisation and distribution of the planetary resources is not shared equally. It is estimated that humanity needs 1.7 Earths to meet present consumption, with

some high income countries needing the equivalent of 4 Earths to sustain their current lifestyle. In the face of this, there is a need for low income countries, and for the communities that make up these nations, to develop resilience. Resilience is the ability of a community to cope with destabilizing forces. In terms of water supply, sanitation and hygiene, this will mean increased reliance on self-supply. Decentralised technology in the areas of water supply and storage, used water treatment and water reuse will lead to a plug-and-play world where locally available materials will be adapted to each biosphere, with systems designed, maintained and operated by locals. A feature of these systems will be the safe and efficient harvesting of rainwater.

Water has been central to the ability of societies to blossom. The collapse of many ancient civilisations and cultures was due, in no small part, to local water-related shocks. The current challenges that the society is facing are more complex and dangerous, the threat occurring at both local and global level.

The worth of water is a combination of the value of water, as a life-support system, and the value in water, as the basis of economic life. The future will see the worth of water becoming central and will involve water being at the centre of all government and economic decisions. Recognising this is the foundation of combating the current pandemic and climate change and creating the conditions necessary for our planet to support all its children sustainably and within the planetary boundaries.

Thousands have lived without love, none without water.

W.H. Auden.

# Preface

Living as we are in a post climate change era, adaption and innovation are terms that point the way toward the future. The world needs to adapt to new climatic patterns. These new climatic conditions threaten the very survival of some countries, they threaten our cities and communities and they threaten our ability to feed ourselves. Given the importance of water in the lives of all humans, we simply cannot live without it; it is no surprise that major changes are occurring in how we use water. The first chapter considers the historical concept of the Linear Economy of Water (LEW). It goes on to show how the increased emphasis on sustainability and global demographics led to the adoption of the Circular Economy of Water (CEW). This lays the emphasis on recycling and reuse of water and views water and all of the contents of domestic, industrial and agricultural waters as a resource. The CEW also considers multiple water sources including surface water and ground water together with alternative sources such as rainwater, brackish and saline water, brines, and used water. These sources of different water qualities are available for different water use applications. Therefore, the CEW supplies multiple waters for multiple purposes for multiple users. In contrast to the LEW, which focused on supplying potable water quality, the CEW deals with varying water qualities and the principle of multiple waters gives rise to the term “fit for purpose”. This denotes that the water from the used water source can be utilised by an application without the used water requiring treatment.

Water and its properties are a function of its peculiar molecular structure. Chapter 2 presents this molecular structure of water and discusses how this structure influences the behaviour of the water molecule. The influence of polarity and hydrogen bonding on the three states of water and other properties of water such as density, cohesion, adhesion and surface tension are also discussed. The high heat energy required to warm water and its role in moderating the Earth’s climate and the effect that increased temperatures have on the global system are examined. Finally, the unique properties of water as a universal solvent are presented.

Water quality, potable water production, water quality parameters and the treatment processes involved in potable water production are presented in Chap. 3. The means of removing these parameters, referred to as the removal mechanisms, are

defined. There is also discussion on the type of treatment afforded and the parameters removed. The role of these removal mechanisms in a conventional rainwater harvesting system is presented. The location of the removal mechanisms in the rainwater harvesting system is emphasised.

The term “the worth of water” was developed to reflect the importance of the social life of water. Chapter 4 presents a technology portfolio of the worth of water from the ancient world to the present. In contrast to the present global situation, ancient cultures were aware of the worth of water and the importance to society of the social life of water. Case studies are presented from these cultures showing the technology and the importance of this technology to the very existence of these cultures. Ancient technologies from Iran, Peru and Yucatan are illustrated. The chapter goes on to examine examples of the worth of water and their suitability and importance to developing countries. A particular example of an innovative method of promoting water and water technologies in developing countries is presented in a village technology education centre. Finally, the chapter presents case studies of rainwater harvesting systems and their adaptation in the developed world and such modern countries as Singapore and South Korea.

Rainwater harvesting (rwh) technology captures water and conveys it to storage. Chapter 5 considers the water flows in a typical roof rwh system. The components of the rwh system are also discussed. A summary of the three types of roof rwh systems – direct system, gravity system and indirect systems – is presented as are some alternative methods of rwh systems which utilise ground-based systems for irrigation water or groundwater recharge. These include lined underground reservoir, contour ridges, contour stone bunding, terracing contour bunds, permeable rock dams, recharge pits/trenches and check dams.

The health implications of using rwh are an important consideration, and Chap. 6 investigates if domestic water supply systems supplied with harvested rainwater present an increased risk to health over systems supplied with potable mains water. Several studies are reviewed which conclude that the main risk to public health of mains-supplied hot water systems is the operation, maintenance, age, location and temperature of the system. Rainwater harvesting systems contain an inherent water treatment train which improves the water quality at different parts of the rwh system. Results from laboratory experiments conducted using a variety of water-related bacteria to determine the time required to reduce a bacterial population by 90% at a given temperature are compared with international studies. The results show that after 5 min of exposure at 60 and 55 °C, respectively, *Salmonella* and *Pseudomonas aeruginosa* and total viable count at 22 and 37 °C concentrations were reduced to zero. The conclusion from this chapter is that hot water systems supplied with harvested rainwater do not present an increased risk to health over hot water systems fed with mains water.

A design methodology to establish if rwh is feasible and to enable the designer to select the optimum rwh storage tank size is presented in Chap. 7. The design methodology consists of two stages. Stage 1 involves the designer establishing the hydraulic efficiency for a site. This involves calculating the rwh demand profile and rwh supply profile for this location. The supply coefficient is then established which



is defined as the percentage of demand that the rwh system can supply for a selected time period. Stage 2 involves the designer calculating the optimum rwh storage tank volume. This can be established according to one of three methods, basic method, intermediate tabular method and/or a detailed daily storage model. A number of worked examples are detailed to explain the design methodology.

Chapter 8 presents a number of financial management tools which can be used to evaluate the economic performance of a rwh system. The simple payback period is used to determine the length of time a rwh investment reaches a break-even point. This is calculated by dividing the initial cost of the investment by the annual savings generated. The second tool discussed is the net present value (NPV) method, which takes into account the time value of money to evaluate the cost of ownership of a rwh system over its entire lifetime. The third technique discussed is where the cost of ownership over the lifetime of an asset is annualised and the equivalent annual cost (EAC) is calculated. A series of worked examples are presented which compare the costs of a rwh system compared to various alternative public water supply options.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the importance of water within each of the goals is addressed in Chap. 9. The fundamental concept of sustainable development is discussed within the growing uncertainties of climate change and global population growth. The SDGs have the potential to form a template for development, and the importance of water within each goal is addressed. Finally, a critical review of the SDGs is presented. Some of the contradictions inherent within the SDG agenda are discussed and critically evaluated.

Build Solid Ground is a project funded by the European Union Development Education and Awareness (DEAR) programme and implemented by a consortium of 14 organisations from seven EU countries. The focus of the project is building critical understanding and active engagement for sustainable development goal 11, “sustainable cities and communities”. Chapter 10 investigates the key components necessary to achieve a resilient city and community.

Chapter 11 presents a detailed discussion of the planetary boundaries. This is a framework, based on science, which identifies nine processes and systems that regulate the stability and resilience of the Earth system and the interactions of land, ocean, atmosphere and life that together provide conditions upon which our societies depend. The planetary boundaries (PBs) framework arises from the scientific evidence that the Earth is a single, complex, integrated system. Each of the planetary boundaries, climate change, biodiversity loss, stratospheric ozone depletion, ocean acidification, nutrient cycles, land system change, freshwater use, atmospheric aerosol loading and chemical pollution are discussed in detail in this chapter.

Human societies have been adapting to their environments throughout history by developing technology, cultures and livelihoods which are suited to local conditions. Climate change raises the possibility that existing societies will experience climatic shifts that previous experience has not prepared them. Chapter 12 discusses the role of rwh to enable society to adapt to climate change. It examines the fact that present infrastructure, with a maximum lifespan of 30 years, will not be the infrastructure of the future. Grey, green or hybrid infrastructure and the increasing role

to be played by decentralised systems are examined. The role of rwh technology in future systems is compared to the role played by wind and solar energy resources. The chapter discusses that though rwh will not supply 100% of water demand, it can supply a substantial alternative source of water. The potential in developing countries for rwh technology to provide the opportunity to leapfrog capital-intensive water projects by going straight to decentralised water collection systems is stressed. The role of multiple waters in climate adaption is examined as is the concept of peak water. Finally, the potential for rwh technology to facilitate the rebalancing in society of the human technology environment nexus is addressed.

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# Introduction

## Organisation of the Book

The book is presented in three parts. Chapters 1, 2, 3, and 4 discuss some of the scientific principles and core concept within the book. Chapters 5, 6, 7, and 8 assess some of the technical, economic and health aspects of rainwater harvesting systems. Chapters 9, 10, 11 and 12 then discuss rwh within the context of sustainable development and climate adaption.

Chapter 1 introduces the concepts of the linear economy of water (LEW), the circular economy of water (CEW), the worth of water and multiple waters. In contrast to the LEW, which focused on supplying potable water quality, the CEW deals with varying water qualities, and the principle of multiple waters gives rise to the concept that the use of the water governs the water quality. Chapter 2 presents the molecular structure of water and discusses how this structure influences the behaviour of the water molecule. Water quality, potable water production and water quality parameters and the treatment processes involved in potable water production are presented in Chap. 3. The term “the worth of water” was developed to reflect the importance of the social life of water. Chapter 4 presents a technology portfolio of the worth of water from the ancient world to the present. Chapter 5 considers the water flows in a typical roof rainwater harvesting (rwh) system. A summary of the three types of roof rwh systems – direct system, gravity system and indirect systems – is presented as are some alternative methods of rwh systems which utilise ground-based systems for irrigation water or groundwater recharge. The health implications of using rwh are an important consideration and Chap. 6 investigates if domestic water supply systems supplied with harvested rainwater present an increased risk to health over systems supplied with potable mains water. A design methodology to establish if rwh is feasible and to enable the designer to select the optimum rwh storage tank size is presented in Chap. 7. Chapter 8 presents a number of financial management tools which can be used to evaluate the economic performance of a rwh system. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the importance of water within each of the goals is addressed in Chap. 9. Chapter 10 gives a

brief overview of the objectives of the EU DEAR project “Build Solid Ground” and the components of resilient cities and communities. Chapter 11 presents a detailed discussion of the planetary boundaries. This is a framework, based on science, which identifies nine processes and systems that regulate the stability and resilience of the Earth system and the interactions of land, ocean, atmosphere and life that together provide conditions upon which our societies depend. Chapter 12 discusses the role of rwh to enable society to adapt to climate change.

# Contents

<b>1</b>	<b>The Worth of Water</b> .....	1
1.1	Introduction .....	1
1.2	The Linear Economy of Water .....	2
1.3	The Circular Economy of Water .....	4
1.4	Multiple Waters, Multiple Uses, Multiple Qualities .....	6
1.5	The Worth of Water .....	11
<b>2</b>	<b>Properties of Water</b> .....	13
2.1	Introduction .....	13
2.2	Molecular Structure of Water .....	14
2.3	The Properties of Water .....	16
2.4	The Three States of Water .....	17
2.5	The Global Water Cycle .....	18
2.6	The Density of Water .....	19
2.7	Water and Heat .....	21
2.8	Cohesion and Adhesion .....	22
2.9	Surface Tension .....	24
2.10	Water as a Universal Solvent .....	27
<b>3</b>	<b>Removal Mechanisms</b> .....	29
3.1	Introduction .....	29
3.2	The Water Treatment Process .....	30
3.3	The Rainwater Harvesting Treatment Train .....	32
<b>4</b>	<b>The Worth of Water Technology Portfolio</b> .....	37
4.1	Introduction .....	37
4.2	Qanat Civilisation .....	38
4.3	Peru – Puquios .....	46
4.4	Rome – Impluvium .....	49
4.5	Chultuns of the Maya Civilisation .....	50
4.6	Rainwater Harvesting Solutions in Uganda .....	52

4.7	Sri Lanka Rainwater Technicians . . . . .	59
4.8	Village Technology Education Centre (V <sub>TEC</sub> ), Sierra Leone . . . . .	63
4.9	Angel House. . . . .	71
4.10	Ultra Pure Water: Water from Heaven . . . . .	72
4.11	Rainwater Harvesting Systems in Ireland . . . . .	74
4.12	Singapore: The Role of Rainwater Harvesting in a Resilient Water Supply System. . . . .	77
4.13	Rain Cities of South Korea . . . . .	80
<b>5</b>	<b>Rainwater Harvesting Systems . . . . .</b>	<b>83</b>
5.1	Introduction . . . . .	83
5.2	Roof Rainwater Harvesting Systems . . . . .	84
5.3	Water Flows Within the RWH Process . . . . .	85
5.4	RWH Components . . . . .	86
5.5	Delivery System. . . . .	92
5.6	Ground RWH Systems. . . . .	94
<b>6</b>	<b>Health Effects of Utilising RWH . . . . .</b>	<b>97</b>
6.1	Introduction . . . . .	97
6.2	Health Concerns. . . . .	98
6.3	Persistence of Waterborne Pathogens and Growth in Water . . . . .	99
6.4	Public Health Risks Associated with rwh . . . . .	99
6.5	Rainwater and Hot Water Systems. . . . .	101
6.6	Heat Inactivation Rates for Waterborne Disease . . . . .	103
<b>7</b>	<b>Answering the Demand Versus Supply Question. . . . .</b>	<b>105</b>
7.1	Introduction . . . . .	106
7.2	Water Flows Within the rwh Process. . . . .	106
7.3	Determining if a rwh System Is Feasible for Your Site . . . . .	107
7.4	Stage 1 Hydraulic Efficiency of the rwh System. . . . .	109
7.5	Stage 2 Rainwater Storage Tank Sizing . . . . .	115
7.6	Worked Examples . . . . .	120
<b>8</b>	<b>The Economics of Rainwater Harvesting . . . . .</b>	<b>135</b>
8.1	Introduction . . . . .	135
8.2	Economic Analysis Tools. . . . .	140
8.3	A Methodology for the Economic Appraisal of rwh Systems. . . . .	145
<b>9</b>	<b>Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). . . . .</b>	<b>159</b>
9.1	Introduction . . . . .	159
9.2	Universality, Integration, Transformation . . . . .	161
9.3	Water and the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals . . . . .	163
9.4	Making Sense of the SDG's. . . . .	168
9.5	Enough – For all – Forever . . . . .	169
9.6	The Contradiction of Growth. . . . .	170
9.7	End Poverty in All Its Forms Everywhere . . . . .	170
9.8	Are the SDGs Ideals Masquerading as Goals? . . . . .	171

<b>10 Resilient Cities and Communities</b> . . . . .	173
10.1 Introduction: Build Solid Ground Project . . . . .	174
10.2 Understanding the Components of a Resilient City and Community . . . . .	175
10.3 SDG11: “ <i>Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable</i> ” . . . . .	177
<b>11 Planetary Boundaries</b> . . . . .	179
11.1 Think Global Act Local . . . . .	180
11.2 Planetary Boundaries . . . . .	181
11.3 Climate Change . . . . .	183
11.4 Biodiversity Loss and Species Extinction . . . . .	184
11.5 Stratospheric Ozone Depletion . . . . .	184
11.6 Ocean Acidification . . . . .	186
11.7 The Phosphorus and Nitrogen Cycle (Biogeochemical Flows) . . . . .	186
11.8 Land-System Change (e.g. Deforestation) . . . . .	188
11.9 Freshwater Use . . . . .	189
11.10 Atmospheric Aerosol Loading (Microscopic Particles in the Atmosphere That Affect Climate and Living Organisms) . . . . .	190
11.11 Chemical Pollution (e.g. Organic Pollutants, Radioactive Materials and Plastics) . . . . .	191
<b>12 Climate Adaptation &amp; RWH</b> . . . . .	193
12.1 Climate Adaption . . . . .	193
12.2 Design Water In . . . . .	194
12.3 Centralised Versus Decentralised . . . . .	195
12.4 Multiple Waters for Multiple Users for Multiple Uses . . . . .	195
12.5 RWH as a “Renewable” Water Supply . . . . .	196
12.6 Water and Agriculture . . . . .	196
12.7 RWH as a Leapfrog Technology . . . . .	197
12.8 RWH as a Driver of the Bluewater Economy . . . . .	197
12.9 Health Risks of RWH . . . . .	198
12.10 The Role of RWH in the SDGs and the Planetary Boundaries . . . . .	198
12.11 Peak Water . . . . .	199
12.12 The Circular Economy of Water . . . . .	199
<b>References</b> . . . . .	201
<b>Index</b> . . . . .	203



# List of Figures

Fig. 1.1	The linear economy of water . . . . .	3
Fig. 1.2	Multiple waters generated from a domestic house . . . . .	7
Fig. 1.3	The circular economy of water . . . . .	8
Fig. 2.1	Molecular structure of water . . . . .	14
Fig. 2.2	Polarity of water molecule . . . . .	15
Fig. 2.3	Hydrogen bonding does not last very long . . . . .	15
Fig. 2.4	Hydrogen bonding in liquid water . . . . .	16
Fig. 2.5	The three states of water . . . . .	17
Fig. 2.6	The water cycle . . . . .	18
Fig. 2.7	Crystalline structure of ice showing some hydrogen bonding. . . . .	20
Fig. 2.8	The distinctive colour is due to colloidal particles . . . . .	21
Fig. 2.9	Cohesion and adhesion . . . . .	23
Fig. 2.10	Cohesion causes water to form droplets, adhesion allows water droplets to stick to leaves . . . . .	23
Fig. 2.11	Surface tension. . . . .	24
Fig. 2.12	Example of surface tension . . . . .	24
Fig. 2.13	Detergent molecule . . . . .	25
Fig. 2.14	Capillary action . . . . .	26
Fig. 2.15	Water transport in plants . . . . .	26
Fig. 2.16	Oil and water – immiscible liquids . . . . .	28
Fig. 2.17	Water as a universal solvent. . . . .	28
Fig. 3.1	Typical removal mechanisms within a water treatment plant . . . . .	30
Fig. 3.2	Removal mechanisms within a typical roof rainwater harvesting system . . . . .	32
Fig. 3.3	Rainwater storage tank functions as a bio-reactor. . . . .	35
Fig. 4.1	Cross section through a qanat showing the horizontal qanat tunnel tapping the groundwater aquifer above the impermeable layer, mother well, vertical shafts and qanat outlet to distribute water to users. . . . .	39

Fig. 4.2	Photos from the Qanat Museum in Yazd, Iran showing qanat teams and their equipment excavating the vertical shafts for a qanat . . . . .	40
Fig. 4.3	Traditional qanat water clock “clepsydra” . . . . .	41
Fig. 4.4	A payab is a sloping gallery, connecting the ground surface to the qanat’s gallery . . . . .	42
Fig. 4.5	Qanat gallery . . . . .	42
Fig. 4.6	Water distribution structure at qanat outlet dividing water into two thirds: one third . . . . .	42
Fig. 4.7	The Hasan Abad Moshir qanat feeds this water reservoir located in a neighbourhood in Yazd, Iran. . . . .	43
Fig. 4.8	Water reservoir at Ardestan, Iran showing hemispherical roof and four wind towers (badgirs) . . . . .	43
Fig. 4.9	Showing the entrance to the water reservoir at Ardestan, Iran via a sloping tunnel called a “payab” . . . . .	44
Fig. 4.10	Photo on left shows exterior of a wind tower, photo on right shows ventilation channels in the base of the tower . . . . .	45
Fig. 4.11	Photos showing exterior and interior of a payab in a bazaar in Kashan, Iran. . . . .	45
Fig. 4.12	Photo shows the spiral well like structure (ojos) with their funnel like structure . . . . .	47
Fig. 4.13	Photo shows a series of ojos, which functioned as ancient pumps driving water through the underground network of puquios . . . . .	47
Fig. 4.14	Top left photo shows outlet of puquios, bottom centre photo shows view of outlet structure lined both sides with stones, top right photo shows agriculture system still irrigated today with water supplied by the ancient puquios network . . . . .	48
Fig. 4.15	<b>(a)</b> Circular stone opening used to access stored rainwater in underground chamber. <b>(b)</b> Impluvia designed to capture and store rainwater. . . . .	50
Fig. 4.16	Chulton cisterns used by the Maya Civilisation. . . . .	51
Fig. 4.17	51% of Ugandans lack access to a safe drinking water supply . . . . .	52
Fig. 4.18	Home made rwh conveyance system. . . . .	53
Fig. 4.19	Roof of underground rwh storage tank . . . . .	54
Fig. 4.20	Showing conveyance system to deliver an annual volume of 50,000 litres to the underground rwh tank. . . . .	54
Fig. 4.21	The interior of the rwh tank is lined with locally available plastic . . . . .	55
Fig. 4.22	The photos show the conveyance system comprising steel gutter and pipes discharging to a corrugated steel rwh tank . . . . .	56
Fig. 4.23	Shows the above ground rwh 800 litre tank with tap outlet at base . . . . .	57
Fig. 4.24	Shows the school rwh system for school kitchen and latrines. . . . .	58
Fig. 4.25	Shows the components of the village rwh system which is used for year round supply of drinking water only . . . . .	59
Fig. 4.26	Construction of 5 m <sup>3</sup> ferrocement rainwater harvesting tank . . . . .	60
Fig. 4.27	Shows the components of the rwh system including instructions for use. . . . .	61

Fig. 4.28	rwh system installed in post tsunami houses at Kalutara, Sri Lanka, 2007	62
Fig. 4.29	The daily struggle for water in Sierra Leone	63
Fig. 4.30	Shows tactile working demonstration units for rainwater harvesting, solar water disinfection, latrine slabs and low cost canzee pumps for rwh systems	65
Fig. 4.31	Shows students during the practical skills training courses	66
Fig. 4.32	$V_{TEC}$ students learning to monitor water quality in the household systems	67
Fig. 4.33	$V_{TEC}$ Students building full scale rwh systems at the training centre	68
Fig. 4.34	Each $V_{TEC}$ centre becomes a production centre for components within the village rwh supply chain	69
Fig. 4.35	Example of a household rwh system installed by a $V_{TEC}$ graduate comprising standardized, modular, plug and play rwh components fabricated using locally available parts within the $V_{TEC}$ centre	70
Fig. 4.36	RWH system at Angel Town, London Borough of Lambeth	71
Fig. 4.37	Shows components of a typical roof rwh system in Ireland	74
Fig. 4.38	Shows the components of an agricultural rwh system in Ireland	76
Fig. 4.39	Components of a school rwh system, Ireland	77
Fig. 4.40	Singapore Four Taps water management strategy	78
Fig. 4.41	Rainwater is harvested from all impermeable surfaces in Singapore	78
Fig. 4.42	Shows a typical “unprotected catchment” in Singapore where rainwater is harvested	79
Fig. 4.43	“NEWater” all wastewater is now considered a resource and is treated to a potable standard in Singapore	79
Fig. 4.44	rwh “piggy banks” in Seoul	81
Fig. 5.1	Roof rwh system catchment and collection areas	85
Fig. 5.2	Schematic of water flows in a typical roof rwh system	86
Fig. 5.3	Gutters must be kept clear and free flowing	87
Fig. 5.4	Downpipe sealed at ground level	87
Fig. 5.5	Roof rwh system at Eden, UK	88
Fig. 5.6	Mesh is often fitted to prevent debris building up in the gutter	88
Fig. 5.7	Example of a typical first flush device	89
Fig. 5.8	Filtration system components	90
Fig. 5.9	Calming inlet to rwh storage tank	91
Fig. 5.10	Example of a Type AA air gap backflow prevention device	91
Fig. 5.11	Direct rwh system – rainwater collected and pumped directly to points of use	92
Fig. 5.12	Gravity rwh system – rainwater is collected in a storage tank and distributed by gravity to the points of use	93
Fig. 5.13	Indirect rwh system harvested rainwater collected in storage tank, pumped to an elevated tank and fed by gravity to the points of use	94

Fig. 6.1	Typical household water consumption rates from a study by the authors in Ireland . . . . .	102
Fig. 7.1	Typical Household water consumption rates . . . . .	106
Fig. 7.2	Schematic showing rainwater harvesting water flows . . . . .	107
Fig. 7.3	Design Methodology to determine if rwh is feasible for your application . . . . .	108
Fig. 7.4	Schematic of design parameters to be used in the detailed approach. . . . .	118
Fig. 7.5	Rainfall profile for site in Dublin, Ireland . . . . .	121
Fig. 7.6	Average monthly rainfall (mm) and harvestable rainfall yield for Dublin site. . . . .	122
Fig. 7.7	Comparison of harvestable rainfall yield and monthly demand for example 1 . . . . .	124
Fig. 7.8	Comparison of harvestable rainfall yield, monthly demand and potential storage volume . . . . .	125
Fig. 7.9	Plot of monthly rainfall depths . . . . .	127
Fig. 7.10	Average monthly rainfall and harvestable rainfall yield . . . . .	128
Fig. 7.11	Comparison of harvestable rainfall yield and monthly demand . . . .	130
Fig. 7.12	Comparison of harvestable rainfall yield, rwh demand and rwy system deficit or surplus. . . . .	131
Fig. 8.1	Breakdown of combined water and wastewater tariff. (Source: <a href="http://www.globalwatersecurity.org">www.globalwatersecurity.org</a> ). . . . .	136
Fig. 8.2	Global variation in average combined water and wastewater tariff. (Source: <a href="http://www.globalwatersecurity.org">www.globalwatersecurity.org</a> ). . . . .	137
Fig. 8.3	“House A” – House supplied by mains water only . . . . .	143
Fig. 8.4	“House B” – house supplied by rwh system and mains water. . . . .	144
Fig. 8.5	Outlines the methodology for the economic appraisal of rwh systems. . . . .	145
Fig. 8.6	Annual water and used water costs to the householder for House A . . . . .	148
Fig. 8.7	Annual water and used water costs to the householder for House B . . . . .	149
Fig. 8.8	Typical Low Cost rwh system in Sierra Leone . . . . .	155
Fig. 9.1	Making Sense of the SDGs . . . . .	162
Fig. 9.2	Water is fundamental to the achievement of each of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals . . . . .	163
Fig. 10.1	Building resilient cities and communities will be increasingly difficult given the challenges of climate change and urbanisation . .	173
Fig. 10.2	Shows the requirements to achieve a sustainable resilient city and community. . . . .	177
Fig. 10.3	Shows the targets of SDG11 to make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable . . . . .	178
Fig. 11.1	Stratospheric layers . . . . .	185

# List of Tables

Table 1.1	Reclaimed water quality criteria for agricultural irrigation. . . . .	10
Table 3.1	Physical, chemical and biological removal mechanisms utilised in a typical water treatment plant and some of the technologies employed in removing the various parameters. . . . .	31
Table 7.1	RWH demand vs supply design methodology . . . . .	109
Table 7.2	Surface Yield Coefficient (adapted from BS EN 16941–1:2018) ..	111
Table 7.3	Tabular Representation of Stage 1 Design Summary . . . . .	114
Table 7.4	Making sense of the annual rwh supply coefficient . . . . .	114
Table 7.5	Tabular Method . . . . .	117
Table 7.6	Average monthly rainfall depths (mm) for Dublin, Ireland. . . . .	120
Table 7.7	Tabular Method Results. . . . .	123
Table 7.8	Tank sizing based on 5% of rwh yield. . . . .	126
Table 7.9	Tank sizing based on 5% of rwh demand . . . . .	126
Table 7.10	Average monthly rainfall depths (mm) for Freetown, Sierra Leone . . . . .	127
Table 7.11	Tabular Results for Freetown, Sierra Leone . . . . .	130
Table 7.12	Intermediate Tabular Storage Design Outputs. . . . .	132
Table 8.1	Combined Water and Wastewater Tariffs, based on the charge for a household of 4 persons using 15m <sup>3</sup> /month (adapted from GWI Global Survey, 2019) . . . . .	138
Table 8.2	Net Present Value. . . . .	141
Table 8.3	Mains water supplied and costs to supply. . . . .	146
Table 8.4	Typical rwh system component costs for a domestic installation in Ireland. . . . .	147
Table 8.5	shows a typical maintenance schedule for a domestic rwh system. . . . .	148
Table 8.6	Template to calculate annual equivalent cost of the rwh system. . .	150
Table 8.7	Results of annual equivalent cost analysis for worked example 8.1 . . . . .	151

Table 8.8 Net Present Value (NPV) Analysis comparing House A with House B . . . . . 154

Table 8.9 Consumption Tariffs and estimated rwh system costs for Freetown, Sierra Leone . . . . . 156

Table 8.10 Typical rwh storage tank costs for Freetown, Sierra Leone . . . . . 156

Table 8.11 Results for Simple Payback analysis for rwh system compared to alternative water supply options . . . . . 157

Table 8.12 Annual Equivalent Cost Analysis for Freetown . . . . . 158

Table 8.13 Unit costs for each water supply option . . . . . 158

# Chapter 1

## The Worth of Water



### 1.1 Introduction

The way we view water has changed over the last decade of the twentieth century and the first decades of the twenty-first century. Previously water was subject to a linear form of treatment where it was abstracted, treated before use to drinking water (potable) standards, used and treated again before finally being discharged back to the environment through ground or surface water. Water Engineering involved the identification and evaluation of raw water sources, with a view to using a water source that required minimal treatment to remove natural pollutants such as nitrates. This raw water was then impounded, sometimes in reservoirs or dams. Quality issues arose in depth of draw off, as spring and autumn turnovers in the impounded water gave rise to chemicals being dissolved in the water and requiring treatment. All impounded water was then treated in water treatment plants to potable water quality standards.