

**THE GOVERNMENT OF THE
DEMOCRATIC SOCIALIST
REPUBLIC OF SRI LANKA**

NATIONAL RAINWATER POLICY

Ministry of Housing, Construction and Water Supply

“Sethsiripaya”

Battaramulla

Content

01. Introduction	1
02. The Basis and the Characteristics of Policy	2
2.1 Principles underlying the Policy	2
2.2 Policy Statement	3
2.3 Policy Objectives.....	3
2.4 Policy Goals.....	3
03. Scope and Applicability of the Policy.....	4
04. Strategies for Implementation.....	4
05. Stakeholders.....	5
06. Legislative Support.....	6

01. Introduction

Inspired by the timeless wisdom of King Parakramabahu the Great, who proclaimed, “Let not even a drop of water that comes from rain flow into the ocean without being made useful,” Sri Lanka has long recognized the value of rainwater as a vital national resource. In the face of increasing climate variability, water scarcity, and growing demands on water resources, the promotion and implementation of rainwater harvesting (RWH) has become an important national priority for enhancing water security, climate resilience, and sustainable development.

By its geographical position and the location of its Central hills, Sri Lanka is blessed with two monsoons, namely the South-West from May to September, and the North-East from December to February, interspersed by two inter monsoons. All areas of Sri Lanka receive rainfall every year, although the amount, intensity, and seasonal distribution vary considerably across the country, making rainfall a consistently available natural resource across all climatic zones. However, the effects of impending extreme climatic changes of natural phenomena, being observed and predicted both globally and locally, should not leave any room for complacency in this regard.

Due to seasonal and regional disparities, improper land management practices such as unrestrained filling up of lowlands and restriction of natural drainage paths, the insufficiency in the mechanisms of storage and gradual release of this asset, along with other acts of willful commission and careless omission by humans, a substantial amount gets converted to surface water accelerating its path to the sea, evaporating en route, and sowing the seeds of water stress in the process.

The dearth of rain causes droughts in some parts of the country, while at times, simultaneously, in other parts, the excess causes floods, compelling management of large quantities of storm water, the failure of which results in flooding of low-lying areas and wastage of substantial amounts of water by unutilized runoff into the Indian Ocean.

The challenge of supplying adequate water and disposal of its excess to meet the societal needs and ensure equitable water access throughout the year, for citizens, both rural and urban, all fauna and flora, and other living forms, has been identified as one of the most critical problems facing the decision makers of Sri Lanka.

The Government of Sri Lanka has recognized the negative social and environmental implications caused by developments that diminish the natural soil retention capacity to store rainwater. This has resulted in hardship to people, a multitude of economic losses, and costs of consequent relief efforts due to recurrent droughts and floods. Much attention has been paid to conventional, centralized approaches thus far, with limited attention paid to alternatives. It has therefore acknowledged the importance of bridging the gap between the dearth and excess, using harvested rainwater as an integrated adaptive measure, in the light of high temporal and seasonal variation in rainfall, ranging from 750-6000 mm per annum across the country.

Collecting rainwater contributes to minimizing the usage of other limited water sources. RWH is a primary element of integrated water management and reduces pressure on public water utilities and infrastructure, while making cities more resilient to the effects of climate change. Architects, planners, and designers have a social and environmental responsibility to consider RWH as part of a set of sustainable design choices, aimed at bringing sustainable energy, water, and other green infrastructure into the heart of our communities.

RWH also has a recognized role to play in reducing flood risks and solution to satisfy an increasing consumer demand for “green” and “sustainable” homes. The use of rainwater for groundwater recharging

is a significant adaptation opportunity to increase resilience to climate change and reduce hydrological vulnerability.

The general public, institutions, industries, healthcare facilities, schools, etc., need to be made aware of the tangible benefits of capturing rainwater, and the importance of RWH for water conservation in both micro- and macro-watershed systems, considering both the water quantity and quality aspects.

This policy aims to describe measures of rainwater harvesting and management applicable to both domestic and institutional levels to ensure that best use is made of rain for augmentation of available water supplies, for reuse and recharge, and for the common good, including watersheds, ecosystems and nature reserves. The policy supports the Government's intent to achieve development goals through comprehensive management of the island's water resources.

02. The Basis and the Characteristics of Policy

2.1 Principles underlying the Policy

1. Fundamentals of RWH are based on conservation, sustainability, water security (quality, quantity accessibility, and availability), traditional and new knowledge, and global and local practices.
2. Governance of RWH should be implemented under the respective institutional setup, laws, regulations, and policies at national, regional, and community levels for sustainable implementation, adaptation, modification, rehabilitation, operation and maintenance, monitoring, and evaluation.
3. RWH is integrated with the existing policies, development targets (SDGs, NDCs, national targets, etc.), laws and regulations (with respect to land, soil, plantation, agriculture, irrigation, climate change, infrastructure, urban and rural development, etc.), and evolving technologies.
4. RWH is promoted for uses and applications such as domestic, institutional, commercial, and industrial, and agricultural uses, and groundwater recharging for demand management, storm water management, and improved access.
5. RWH promotes equitable sharing of water resources through addressing gender inequalities, improving access to marginalized communities, and reducing rural-urban disparities.
6. RWH strengthens climate resilience through storm water management, minimization of soil erosion and land degradation, and reduction of urban thermal pollution effects while ensuring water security.
7. RWH enhances the economic viability and sustainability of water resources management through innovative financing mechanisms, optimization of infrastructure operation and maintenance costs, reduction of economic losses related to water supply services, and capacity building for planning, design, implementation, monitoring, and maintenance at national, regional, and community levels.
8. RWH promotes the One Health concept in built and natural environments through the reduction of energy consumption, improvement of livelihoods, and strengthening the natural ecosystems.

2.2 Policy Statement

RWH is recognized as a sustainable and integrated approach to water resource management that enhances water security, climate resilience, and environmental sustainability. It is guided by principles of conservation, equity, and the use of both traditional and modern knowledge, and is implemented within existing institutional, legal, and policy frameworks. The approach aligns with national and global development priorities while supporting diverse water uses, including domestic, agricultural, commercial, and groundwater recharge. It promotes equitable access, particularly for marginalized communities, and contributes to climate adaptation through improved storm water management, reduced environmental degradation, and enhanced ecosystem health. Emphasis is also placed on cost-effective investments, innovative financing, and a “One Health” perspective that links human well-being, livelihoods, and environmental integrity. The efforts target the use of rainwater harvesting as a supplementary drinking water source, aiming to fulfill a minimum average of 30% of drinking water demand in the Dry Zone and a minimum average of 15% in the Wet Zone.

2.3 Policy Objectives

Strengthen Governance and Integration:

To establish and reinforce effective institutional, legal, and regulatory frameworks for, RWH, ensuring alignment with national policies, development goals, and sectoral strategies.

Enhance Water Security:

To promote RWH as a sustainable solution to improve the availability, quality, and reliability of water resources for multiple uses, including domestic, agricultural, industrial, and groundwater recharge, and as an alternative water source in areas facing constraints in accessing conventional water sources

Promote Equity and Inclusive Access:

To ensure equitable access to water through RWH by addressing gender disparities, supporting marginalized and vulnerable communities, and reducing rural–urban inequalities.

Build Climate Resilience and Environmental Sustainability:

To enhance resilience to climate change by integrating RWH into storm water management and flood prevention, reducing soil erosion and land degradation, and supporting ecosystem health.

Optimize Investments and Support Sustainable Systems:

To encourage cost-effective and innovative financing mechanisms for RWH, reduce operational costs, improve system efficiency, and contribute to sustainable livelihoods and reduce demand on conventional water supply systems.

2.4 Policy Goals

- Strengthening National and Global Commitments
- Optimizing Water Demand, Water Use, and Economic Efficiency
- Ensuring sustainable ecosystems, communities, and One Health initiatives
- Enhancing Climate Resilience and Green Outcomes
- Decentralizing Water Security for Self-Reliance

03. Scope and Applicability of the Policy

The policy scope encompasses the planning, implementation, and management of RWH systems across domestic, institutional, commercial, industrial, and agricultural sectors, including groundwater recharge and storm water management, at national, regional, and community levels. It operates within existing legal and institutional frameworks and aligns with national and global development priorities, while integrating RWH into land-use planning, infrastructure development, and climate adaptation strategies. The scope promotes the use of both traditional and modern technologies to enhance water security, environmental sustainability, and climate resilience, while ensuring equitable access for all. It also includes provisions for innovative financing, research and development, efficient operation and maintenance, and continuous monitoring, supporting a holistic One Health approach that links water management with ecosystem health, energy efficiency, and improved livelihoods. One Health approach offers a robust solution to address the challenges at the human–animal–plant–environment interface and reduce public health risks due to emerging and endemic zoonotic diseases, including water-related diseases such as dengue.

The RWH policy;

- Applies nationwide across domestic, institutional, agricultural, industrial, and commercial sectors,
 - Promotes adoption for multiple uses, including groundwater recharge, high value uses such as industrial and commercial utilization, popularization at public buildings and areas in urban regions, and storm water management,
 - Prioritizes implementation in water-scarce, high-demand, and low water quality regions,
 - Supports context-specific applications across the island to address floods, droughts, and ecosystem sustainability,
- Mandates RWH integration in new developments and encourages retrofitting in existing buildings through incentives, regulations, and technical guidance,
- Mainstream to all relevant institutions and authorities involved in planning and water resource management,
 - Strengthens the in-situ soil and water conservation and implementation of groundwater recharge/managed aquifer recharge (MAR),
 - Promotes the use of both traditional and innovative approaches to enhance water-use efficiency, climate resilience, and overall sustainability across sectors, and
 - Promotes a paradigm shift from rapid disposal to retention and sustainable management of rainwater.

04. Strategies for Implementation

- Monitor Performance on objectives of Rain water harvesting policy by Ministry incharge of water supply with coordinating the stakeholders.
- Strengthen governance by integrating RWH into policies, regulations, and building codes, mandating inclusion in new developments and promoting retrofitting of existing structures.

- Integrate RWH into water supply, urban planning, and infrastructure development while rehabilitating existing and abandoned systems.
- Develop incentives, financing mechanisms, and robust monitoring and evaluation systems, including water quality surveillance, supported by effective institutional coordination.
- Build technical capacity through education, training, research, and certification, by upgrading using the available TOTs and Training Materials, establishing district trainer pools; including integration into academic and vocational curricula.
- Ensure proper design, installation, and maintenance of RWH systems, including catchment, conveyance, filtration, treatment, and storage components.
- Establish technical support systems, information centers, and dissemination of guidelines, manuals and best practices. Publish a design handbook with details of RWH structure designs, suitability, and SOPs. Foster partnerships with the private sector, developers, and industries to scale up adoption and improve water-use efficiency.
- Develop the capacity of local masons, artisans, and rural youth on the design and construction of RWH structures with relevant NVQ certifications and publish ~~their directory~~ the established district-wise resource pools
- Promote innovation, standardization, and development of user-friendly RWH technologies and systems for diverse user groups.
- Support research and surveys to better determine and publicize the economic and social benefits of various rainwater harvesting measures.
- Enhance public awareness and community participation through advocacy, outreach programs, and engagement with local institutions and civil society.
- Promote integrated RWH approaches combining traditional systems (e.g., *wewa*, *kulam*, *pathaha*, *cascades*, dug wells) and modern techniques (e.g., rain water harvesting pits, bioswales, swales, contour drains, perforated drains) to enhance water availability and groundwater recharge.
- Ensure the control of vector and breeding by the addressing water stagnation and proper sealing to prevent vector access.

05. **Stakeholders**

Lanka Rainwater Harvesting Forum (LRWHF), relevant line Ministries, Government agencies, Local Authorities, Private sector entities, Academic and Research institutions, INGO and NGOs, International forums, Development partners, Community Based Organizations, Industrial and Agricultural establishments, and all Households/Institutions, including public, private, and religious establishments, shall be stakeholders, making rainwater harvesting a shared national responsibility.

06. Legislative Support

- Amendments to Municipal Council / Urban Development Authority (UDA) by-laws on drainage, to accommodate Rainwater Harvesting as a strategy for localized flood mitigation, infiltration facilitation, and improved sanitation, in both existing and future construction.
- Amendment to include as a requirement in the Building application and link the ‘Certificate of conformity’ of future new buildings to incorporate rainwater harvesting facilities, along with the provision of discounts in the annual rates for such.
- Amendments to the Road Development Authority (RDA) by-laws on drainage in the construction of roads, to allow for soft paving, and the construction of swales/bioswales and porous drains to increase ground infiltration.
- Amendments to the National Water Supply and Drainage Board (NWSDB) by-laws to incorporate harvesting rainwater as a source of domestic water with equal status to that of other traditional sources.
- Amendments to the Apartment Ownership Act for provisions on rainwater, over and above that would be required by the amended Municipal Council /Urban Development Authority (UDA) by-laws.
- The Gazette No. 2235/54 (2021) of the UDA requires Green Building Certification for buildings over 1,000 m² (excluding industrial structures), of which water conservation, green innovation, and rainwater harvesting are evaluated.
- The climate policies, including the third Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC 3.0) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and water sector National Adaptation Plan (NAP), promote rainwater harvesting as a climate-resilient solution.