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Rainwater harvesting system as a strategy for adaptation on climate change: a review

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Rainwater harvesting system as a strategy for adaptation on climate change: A review

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Abstract. In the face of increasing water scarcity aggravated by climate change, the rainwater harvesting system is a technique that increases the water supply for various purposes. The objective of this research is to analyse the recent literature published on the rainwater collection system, for which the systematic review method was used. The main form of rainwater catchment are roofs, but the material used is important because it can affect the quality of the water. Some physicochemical parameters of rainwater may be within the standards for human consumption, but it is contaminated by pathogenic microorganisms, which represents a risk to public health if it is consumed without prior treatment, so it is mainly used for irrigation and flushing toilets. However, this system has been implemented mainly in rural areas to satisfy their basic needs, including human consumption, because these places do not have access to the central drinking water system. Given this scenario, treatment technologies are being developed that are easy to operate and maintain, such as solar disinfection and filtration for drinking water purposes. This study provides a global overview progress of research related to the rainwater harvesting system.

Keywors: Harvesting, quality, rainwater, treatment

1. Introduction

In the last hundred years, the demand for water has increased six times worldwide and has continued to increase by an estimated 1% each year since the 1980s, especially in emerging, middle- and lowincome countries, due to various factors such as economic development, population growth and changing consumption patterns [1, 2, 3]. Climate change exacerbates water stress, so that by 2050, more than 570 cities are expected to have 658 million people facing a 10% decrease in freshwater availability and the self-purification capacity of lentic and lotic water bodies will be lost due to the decrease of dissolved oxygen in the water due to the increase in temperature [2].

On the other hand, groundwater has been used in large quantities over the last few decades, especially in agriculture, which has resulted in the long-term depletion of groundwater sources, saline intrusion of coastal aquifers, and water pollution due to the excessive use of pesticides [4, 5]. In addition, severe droughts aggravated by climate change cause water deficits in agriculture, which translates into a risk mainly for the rural population by reducing agricultural yields [4, 6].

A study carried out in 4 countries of Southeast Asia (Cambodia, the Philippines, Indonesia, and Vietnam) showed that the deficiency of sanitary services, including hygiene, were the cause of millions of episodes of illness and premature deaths per year, which demonstrates the need for that the water meets the quality requirements and does not pose a risk to human health [7].

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In this scenario, it is necessary to look for other sources of water resources such as seawater desalination or reuse of treated water, but these require high energy consumption that could contribute to an increase in greenhouse gas emissions or, in other cases, the cost is so high that many countries (especially developing countries) cannot access these options. However, there are other alternatives such as rainwater harvesting (RWH) [3], so this work aimed to analyse the worldwide implementation of rainwater harvesting system, the uses of harvested rainwater, its physicochemical and microbiological quality and the treatment technologies being developed.

2. Methodology

The study was based on the systematic review (SR) method, which has developed into a well-known standard for accessing, evaluating, and synthesizing scientific information using the guidelines established by the Collaborative for Environmental Evidence (CEE) [8], which are specific for application to environmental management, and the University of Maryland Research Guide, which establishes the steps for conducting a systematic review [9].

Four international databases were used for the publication selection process: Proquest, Science Direct, Scopus and Springer. The search for articles was performed by using combinations of the keywords shown in Table 1, together with Boolean operators.

Table 1. List of search terms and Boolean operators used to identify scientific articles.

Search team	Boolean Operator	Search term	Year of publication
Rainwater	AND	Advantage	2016 - 2021
Rainwater harvesting	OR	Assessment	
Rainwater system	Harnessing		
		Quality	
		Recollection	
		Treatment	
		Use	

3. Studies around the world

The literature reports that rainwater harvesting system has been used for decades but has been gaining more importance due to the increasing global water scarcity and water stress faced by many of the countries. Various factors, such as population growth, urbanization, pollution of water resources, and changes in rainfall regime caused by climate change, aggravate this situation [10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17]. Few countries are conducting research on the rainwater harvesting system even though this system is used and known in almost every country in the world. Figure 1 shows the countries that have conducted research around the world and have been included in this study.

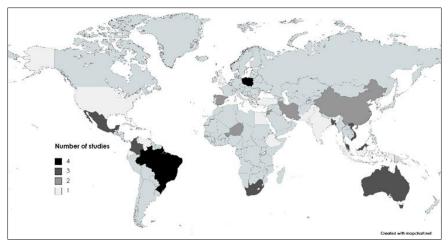


Figure 1. Countries included in the study

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Brazil and Poland are the countries with the highest amount of research worldwide. However, 46.2% of the countries conducting research are in the Asian continent, 23.1% in America, 15.4% in Africa, 11.5% in Europe and 3.8% in Oceania. These results can be related to the baseline analysis of water stress carried out by the UN [3], where almost all the countries in South Asia face limitations of water availability between high and extremely high.

4. Rainwater harvesting system

It is defined as a technique to collect and store water in a catchment area in which rain falls as roofs of buildings, which can also include the capture of land runoff [18], followed by a system that transports rainwater to a storage facility, which can be a tank, for later use using simple or complex equipment [12, 19]. It consists of several components, of which the main ones are catchment area, transport system, storage capacity and distribution network [3].

4.1. System reliability

The RWH system can reach a reliability close to 100%, meaning that it can meet the total water demand [13], which depends on the size of the area where rainwater is captured; the amount of annual precipitation, which is why data from multi-year weather stations of each study area are generally used before implementing the collection system [19, 20, 21, 22] and water demand to perform water balance and determine the reliability of a system [15].

During the health emergency caused by COVID-19, it was determined that rainwater could cover between 94.5% and 238.5% of the water demand for disinfection [23]. However, in areas with strong seasonal variations, it may not be possible to cover the demand for water throughout the year. [16, 24].

4.2. Economic viability

There are different results regarding whether the RWH system is economically viable. In some areas of Australia it is not feasible to implement this system with the current price of water [15], while in other places the RWH system is a cheaper source of water compared to national network water, bottled water or other water sources and that its implementation proves to be economically feasible in various scenarios [11, 25] such as in residential buildings by saving potable water [26]; in universities [10, 27, 28, 29]; in schools, where at the same time students are encouraged to become aware of sustainability [30]; in homes and residential buildings [20, 31, 32, 33]. In addition, it reduces greenhouse gas emissions by reducing energy consumption [31].

Within the components for the implementation of the system, the cost of the tank represents more than half [13], even up to 95%, of the total cost [22] and the replacement of materials 50% [15], so [12] recommend including recharge wells to increase groundwater as an economic solution.

4.3. Rainwater harvesting

The most common form of collection is on the surface of the roofs of houses, buildings, universities, schools, hospitals, etc. [34] as can be seen in figure 2, where the uptake in roofs represents 70%. However, attention has been paid to the type of roofing material such as clay tiles, wood, corrugated steel sheets, cement, galvanized iron, concrete, fiber cement, aluminum, asbestos or zinc [16, 22, 35, 36] due to the impact they have on water quality and the runoff coefficient of the material, which affects the amount of water that can be collected. Shaheed R. et al. [37] determined that the highest quality water is collected from a steel roof, followed by an asphalt tile roof, galvanized iron and, finally, a concrete tile roof. Galvanized iron is considered one of the ideal materials to collect rainwater with better quality, since the pollutants can be completely washed off in the first discharge. However, many of these materials are coated with heavy metals such as zinc, lead or aluminum [10, 38, 39] that can be leached with water and even more, if the rain has an acid pH. Tran S. H, et al. [17] concluded that the roofing material for the catchment notably influences the quality of rainwater, where the flat concrete roofs were dirtier than the sloped clay tiles.

Galvanized iron roofs are even considered capable of reducing the number of microorganisms and inhibiting their growth due to the high temperature it can reach under sunlight and ultraviolet light [34, 40, 41] or that cement roofs can favour the pH by increasing its value owing to the alkaline nature of

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some materials such as concrete and limestone that contain calcium carbonate ($CaCO_3$) and Magnesium carbonate ($MgCO_3$) [19, 40].

Asphalt areas such as roads, parking lots and sidewalks are also evaluated for rainwater catchment, since they are considered impervious surfaces [42]. Awad A. et al. [43] proposed a design for streets and sidewalks that allow the flow of rainwater to be collected through openings on the side of the sidewalks, pass through a layer of gravel and reach reservoirs located under the street. A similar situation is already evident in Poland where rainwater is collected on a diversion road [44] and stored in a system of infiltration reservoirs which act as lagoons, as in the University of Islamabad. where three lakes act as a rainwater catchment system [45].

Green areas and uncovered soil are also part of the assessment of the amount that can be collected by surface runoff [42]. Awad A. et al. [43] evaluate in an agricultural area, the rainwater harvesting potential in a dam located between two gently sloping hills by surface runoff. Green roofs (vegetated roofs) can retain and store rainwater reducing runoff and flood risk [13].

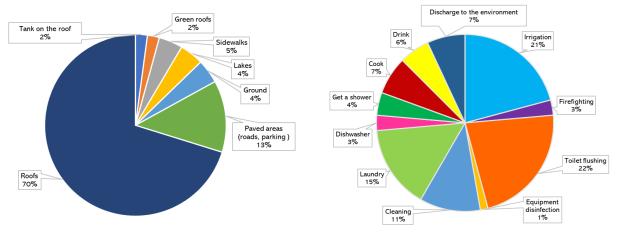


Figure 2. Ways of collecting

Figure 3. Uses of collected rainwater

5. Uses of rainwater

More than 60% of the investigations carry out studies, whether in terms of quantity, quality, or financial viability, based on rainwater being used as a source of drinking water. However, currently, within the main activities where the collected rainwater is used is for irrigation of plants and toilet flushing, representing 21% and 22%, respectively (See Figure 3). Tariqul Md. Et al. [46] conclude that the collection of rainwater increased the intensity of the crop up to 300%, mainly in vegetables compared to cereals and horticultural crops. On the contrary, Zdeb M. et al. [40] considers that rainwater is not a safe source to irrigate fruit crops or others that are going to be consumed directly due to the presence of bacteria that indicate faecal contamination.

Most research suggests that rainwater be used in household toilet flushing [15, 25, 26], but the collection system can also be implemented of rainwater in schools to reduce to reduce the amount of drinking water consumed (up to 57.97%) in cleaning activities and flushing toilets, and at the same time promoting environmental education using this system as a tool to sensitize students about rational use and aware of drinking water [30].

Washing clothes is one of the activities that consumes a large amount of water, which is why [26, 41, 47], evaluate replacing drinking water with water of rain specifically for this activity. After evaluating the quality of rainwater, the result was obtained that it is suitable to be used directly in washing clothes even up to 30 days after being stored, in addition, it has additional benefits, since having a low hardness reduces the amount of detergent used and prevents limescale build-up in washing machines [41].

In rural areas, mainly in developing countries, harvested rainwater is considered as one of the main sources of drinking water to meet basic needs, such as cooking, drinking, hand washing and showering [34, 35, 36, 48]. By contrast, in urban areas it is used as a complementary source to save drinking

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water in activities such as flushing toilets, watering, washing clothes, cleaning in general, etc. [26, 49, 50].

6. Physicochemical and microbiological quality of rainwater

To determine the use of collected rainwater, the physicochemical and microbiological parameters are evaluated, which must be within the range of national and international standards. The current trend seeks to compare the values of the parameters that indicate the quality of the collected rainwater with the quality values for irrigation and for human consumption. To this end, treatment technologies are being developed to ensure that rainwater meets quality parameters and is considered a safe source of drinking water.

It is reported that rainwater quality parameter values hang on several factors, such as the number of dry days before precipitation [17, 35, 42, 51, 52], quality of the air and materials of the catchment system [31, 37], but it is one of the alternatives that does not contain high levels of pollutants, so it does not need large treatment units [22, 37, 51]. According to the microbiological quality of rainwater, direct human consumption is not one of the recommended activities unless purifications are carried out [42]. Despite this, some of the physicochemical parameters that are evaluated may be within the standards for water for human consumption [22, 41, 48].

6.1. Physicochemical quality of rainwater

In general, rainwater is considered to have a good physicochemical quality [19, 34]. However, industrial areas can contain organic compounds [19, 34] and inorganic compounds in higher amounts and other pollutants compared to urban areas [37].

It is also reported that when rainwater is analysed before it meets the catchment surface, it has a low concentration of metals, but the first millilitres of precipitation have a high number of pollutants [49]. The main metals that have been found are Ca, K and Na in higher concentrations, which can be suspended in the form of fine particulate material and in the form of aerosols. In addition, Cu, Zn, Fe [49], sulphates [14], and phenols [17], were detected in rainwater that may be related to emissions of the automotive fleet by the combustion process in vehicles [39].

6.2. Microbiological quality of rainwater

Microbiological contamination is the main factor that affects the quality of rainwater, since high values of pathogenic microorganisms are reported [19, 35] which represents a risk for the public health if it is used without prior treatment [34].

Animals' droppings and dust are the main cause of microbiological contamination [17, 34, 39, 48, 53]. The leaves of trees and shrubs that accumulate on the roof can produce organic materials which can provide nutrients to microorganisms [30, 34, 53].

The main microorganisms found in rainwater are faecal coliforms, total coliforms, *Escherichia coli* [16, 34]. *Pseudomonas spp.*, [17, 54, 55], *Legionella spp.* considered as a "new or emerging pathogen in drinking water" [53] and *Salmonella spp.* [41]. So, its presence makes it essential to use a disinfection method before use.

7. Treatment technologies applied to rainwater

This section shows the various technologies that are being developed for the treatment of rainwater. Many of these technologies seek to be as simplified as possible, easy to operate and maintain [36], because the rainwater collection system has been implemented mainly in rural areas to meet basic demands, including human consumption [11, 34, 35, 45, 49, 56].

 Table 2. Rainwater treatment technologies.

Reference Country Type of treatment	Main parameters evaluated	Efficiency obtained	Purpose of use
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Teixeira and Ghisi, 2019 [57]	Brazil	Granular filter / Membrane filter	Turbidity, ammonia (NH3), nitrate (NO3).	Granular filter: Removal 13% turbidity, 34% NH ₃ y 10% NO ₃ . Membrane filter: 11%, 32.1% y 13.6%	Non-potable uses (flushing toilets, watering gardens and cleaning sidewalks) and direct contact activities (bathing and hand washing)
Du et al., 2022 [58]	China	Gravity-driven membrane bioreactor + electrochemical oxidation disinfection (GDMBR-EO)	Total phosphorus Turbidity, COD, Total number of bacteria	Reduction up to 41.9%, slight increase, 38.9%, complete disinfection of bacteria	-
Quintero et al., 2017 [38]	Colombia	Sand filter + Heterogeneous photocatalysis + Pasteurization	Turbidity, coliforms	Removal: 60%, 100% respectively	Complementary activities except human consumption
Pineda et al., 2021 [36]	Ecuador	Three-stage biofiltration: 1) crushed gravel, 2) ceramic spheres 3) silica sand or natural zeolite + ultraviolet disinfection (UVD)	Fe ²⁺ , Mn ²⁺ , E. coli, TC, FC	Better efficiency using zeolite, Eliminates even 87%, 82%, 100%, 70%, 100% during the first 90 days.	Rural communities without access to drinking water
Martínez- García et al., 2020 [59]	Spain	V-trough reactor / Compound Parabolic Collector (CPC)	Escherichia coli, Salmonella enteritidis Enterococcus faecalis and Pseudomonas aeruginosa.	Similar efficiency to eliminate pathogens	Drinking water
Khayan et al., 2019 [39]	Indonesia	Filtration tube with gravel mollusk + Activated carbon	Pb, Turbidity, pH	Reduction up to 94.47%, 72%, increase from 4.2 to 7	It is being used as drinking water in tropical communities.
Shaheed et al., 2017 [37]	Malaysia	Combined activated carbon and sand filtration (CACSF)	BOD5, TSS, NH3, <i>E. coli</i>	Reduction up to: 59%, 100%, 93%, 100% de <i>E. coli</i> in tributaries with less 30 UFC/mL.	High potential for drinking water
Nawaz and Baig, 2018 [45]	Pakistan	SwissPak three-stage portable water filter: silica sand, granulated chlorine and carbon block	Turbidity, TDS, alkalinity, hardness, chloride, nitrate, phosphorus, total coliforms	Removal up to 94%, 37%, 32%, 43%, 34%, 97%, 64%, 100% respectively	Domestic use, drinking water
Fitobór and Quant, 2021 [52]	Poland	Microfiltration	Turbidity	Reduction up to 99% only with adequate pretreatment	Drinking water
McMichael et al., 2021 [55]	South Africa	Electrochemically assisted photocatalytic (EAP)	Escherichia coli and Pseudomonas aeruginosa	Average logarithmic reduction: 5.5 for <i>E. coli</i> and 5,8 for <i>P. aeruginosa.</i>	-
Strauss et al., 2016 [54]	South Africa	Solar pasteurization (SOPAS)/ Solar disinfection (SODIS	Escherichia coli, Legionella, Pseudomonas spp.	reduction of more than 99% of <i>E.</i> <i>coli</i> in both. SODIS: 75.22% <i>Legionella</i> , 58.31 <i>Pseudomonas.</i> SOPAS: 94.7% <i>Legionella</i> , 99.61 <i>Pseudomonas.</i>	Irrigation, domestic purposes (cooking, washing clothes)

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Köse- Mutlu, 2021 [14]	Turkey	Nanofiltration	Organic matter and sulfates	Elimination of more than 99% for both	Drinking water	

Solar disinfection treatments have a high possibility of supplying safe drinking water to populations living in places with high solar irradiance, in addition, it represents a low cost, high performance, long useful life and low maintenance [38, 59], however, caution should be exercised regarding microorganisms that may remain in a viable but non-culturable (VBNC) state if only treated by solar photoinactivation [36, 55] such as *Legionella spp*. and *Acanthamoeba spp*. [53].

Another of the most common treatments carried out is filtration due to its easy conditioning, but it seeks to combine it with other processes to increase the efficiency of pollutant removal and thus increase the quality of the treated water (See Table 2).

Regardless of the treatments that are developed, the use of a first discharge during each rain event that allows the removal of the first millimeters of water before reaching the storage facility represents one of the best ways to eliminate impurities that come from both the atmosphere and accumulation in the catchment areas [11, 17, 19, 22, 25, 26, 31, 35, 49, 50, 51, 52, 55, 57].

8. Conclusions

The rainwater harvesting system has been investigated in areas with severe water limitations such as South Asian countries and is considered an option water supply for non-drinking and drinking purposes. The main form of rainwater catchment are roofs, followed by roads, parking lots and sidewalks that are considered impervious areas. In addition, a special interest should be taken in the type of material that is used for the collection of rainwater, since it can alter its quality.

Mainly in rural areas, the rainwater harvesting system has been implemented and is considered a source of drinking water that seeks to satisfy the demand for water in basic needs, including activities such as direct consumption, for which treatment technologies that are easy to operate are being developed. and maintain as solar disinfection and filtration.

However, worldwide the main activities where rainwater is used are the irrigation of crops and gardens and in the discharge of toilets, although it is also becoming important for the use in washing clothes, since it is an activity domestic that consumes a lot of water.

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