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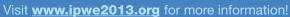






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# Modeling Rainwater Harvesting Potential and Supplemental Irrigation Requirement of Rainfed Crops

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#### Abstract

Rainfed agriculture substantially contributes to the total crop production of the world. Therefore, improving agricultural production in rainfed regions is crucially important to meet the world future food demand. This will require generating new water resources in areas, where limited water supply hinders crop production, i.e., in rainfed regions. A simple approach, such as rainwater harvesting during rainy season in a farm and applying stored rainwater to crops judicially, can be an option for enhancing the water availability in rainfed areas. Models capable of estimating rainwater harvesting potential can play a key role in designing suitable systems intended for rainwater conservation for agricultural purposes. To predict the rainwater harvesting potential for meeting the supplemental irrigation (SI) requirement of rainfed crops, we have developed a water balance model, which calculates the water availability in the on-farm reservoirs designed for rainwater harvesting. In addition the model estimates soil moisture in the cultivated field and the SI requirement of the crops. The tool developed here will be potentially useful in designing rainwater harvesting systems capable of improving crop production in rainfed regions.

Keywords: rainfed agriculture; water balance model; supplemental irrigation; crop productions

#### Introduction

Rainfed agriculture dominates the world's food supply. For example, rainfed crops contribute approximately 60-70% to the world crop production (FAO, 2002). About 80% of the world agricultural land is rainfed. In some regions, such as sub-Saharan Africa, even more than 95% land is rainfed. In Asia more than 65% land is rainfed (FAO STAT, 1999). In many countries, for instance, sub-Saharan Africa, more than 60% population depends on rainfed agriculture, where rainfed farming produces 30-40% of the countries' gross domestic product (GDP) (World Bank, 1997).

Despite significant contributions to the world food production, and considerable potential for agricultural growth, rainfed agriculture suffers mainly due to poor crop yields. Except for a few exceptions, for example rainfed regions in the United States, which are highly productive; many of the rainfed regions around the world have the lowest crop yields. The average crop yield in rainfed regions is reported to be 1 t/ha (Rockstro m, 2001); and improvement in rainfed crop yields is a key to enhance the food production as well as the economy of the rainfed areas, which critically depend on rainfall. Studies have shown that poverty and food are interlinked (Rockstr o m et al., 2009), for an example, a majority (75%) of 1.2 billion extremely poor people (i.e., daily earning less than \$1) live in rural areas, where the water availability is a serious issue.

Improving water resource management and rural development are important to alleviate poverty in many countries. Insufficient water resources for agricultural purposes are a stumbling block to development in many developing countries. Uncertainty in rainfall often hinders agricultural production. For example, previous studies have shown that the occurrence of dry spells (i.e., short periods of 2-4 weeks with no rainfall or the dry spells lasting 10-15 days) causes severe yield reductions (Steward, 1998; Sivakumar, 1992) in rainfed regions. Barron et al. (2003) assessed the probability of dry spells in semi-arid areas in Kenya and Tanzania, and reported minimum probability of 0.2-0.3 for a dry spell lasting more than 10 days for any time of the growing season of a crop; and 0.7 for a dry spell which occur during the sensitive flowering stage.

Mitigating the impacts of dry spell on agriculture will potentially improve crop production. Techniques, such as water harvesting and conservation tillage in semi-arid rainfed areas, have been found to be useful in controlling the impact of dry spells. Providing supplemental irrigation to crops during dry spells can lead to a considerable increase in water productivity (Rockstro m et al., 2009; 2003). In principle, adopting the strategies which allow rainwater conservation (i.e., improving water holding capacity of soil, increasing infiltration, and enhancing water uptake of plants) will be an alternative for meeting the growing food demand of the world.

For example, a simple approach, such as rainwater harvesting in farm-scale reservoirs, and recycling it for supplemental irrigation to crops, is a viable option. A relatively old study by Evanari et al. (1971) showed that constructing multiple small water-harvesting ponds for collecting local runoff can be more useful for agricultural production compared to designing a large reservoir downstream. Other studies, which are relatively new, such as van der Zaag and Gupta (2008) and Pandey et al. (2011) have shown the improved sustainable gross return while using decentralized small reservoirs compared to a large reservoir downstream. In addition, these decentralized reservoirs can promote participatory irrigation. Recently integrated water management approach, which encourages water use associations (i.e., participatory irrigation) [e.g., Gunnel and Anupama, 2003; Mialhe et al., 2008], has been encouraged in many parts of the world, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, to improve the water availability in rural areas.

These small reservoir systems (i.e., decentralized distributed small reservoirs) have been prevalent for centuries in many rural communities around the world, and water stored in the reservoirs was often used for providing irrigation to crops as well as for domestic purposes. Studies have shown that irrigation from farm-scale reservoirs is profitable particularly to small farmers (Palanisami and Meinzen-Dick, 2001; Balasubramanian and Selvaran, 2003). These ponds have been found to be useful in bridging dry spells in tropical savannah farming systems (Barron et al., 2003; Palanisami and Meinzen-Dick, 2001; Balasubramanian and Selvaraj, 2003).

The importance of these reservoirs in agriculture production in southern India is reported elsewhere (Rao and Chakraborti, 2000; Prasad et al., 1993; Mialhe et al., 2008). Besides improving the water availability for agricultural production, rainwater harvesting can also support aquaculture in rainfed regions. For example, Mohanty et al. (2002) used rainwater conservation as a tool for enhancing fish farming. The authors proposed a method (i.e., optimizing the weir height) for conserving rainwater for rice crop as well as refuge size to harvest the runoff for fish culture. Pandey et al. (2006) proposed designing on-farm reservoirs in paddy field for storing rainwater, which can be used for fish farming in the reservoirs as well as stored water can be recycled to crops (i.e., supplemental irrigation).

Considering the importance of rainfed agriculture, which will remain the dominant source of food supply (Parr et al., 1990; Rockstro m, et al., 2003), managing water resources in rainfed regions for improving agricultural production is critical. Understanding water availability at the farm-scale catchment and developing techniques to capture rainwater for agricultural purposes can help find solutions for rainfed farming. Here we, therefore, have developed a modeling tool for improving our understanding of rainwater harvesting potential in rainfed regions. Many models have been developed in the past, which calculate runoff from rainfall (Roche, 1971; Chiew et al., 1994; Hughes, 1995); however, further studies are required to understand how this runoff can be captured in farm scale reservoirs and recycled it for agricultural production. The objective of this study is to develop a water balance model to calculate water storages in the on-farm reservoir (OFR) and supplemental irrigation requirement of crops. This study is important to improve the farm-scale rainwater harvesting systems and enhance the water availability in rainfed regions.

## **Material and Methods**

## Model

The conceptual model formulation used in this study is shown in Figure 1. Water storages in the OFR and soil moisture in the field were calculated. The OFR water storage was estimated using OFR water balance model, while soil moisture in the field was calculated by balancing the soil moisture in the field. Soil moistures were estimated under irrigated (i.e., with supplemental irrigation using the OFR storage) and rainfed conditions (no supplemental irrigation). Various components involved in simulation are described in detail elsewhere (Pandey et al., 2012).

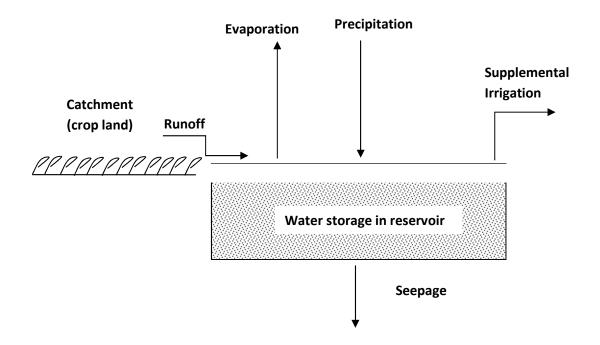


Figure 1. Conceptual water balance model used in simulation

The OFR water balance can be written as:

$$\frac{dW}{dt} = P - Q - E - S - SI \tag{1}$$

The change in soil water of irrigated conditions can be written as:

$$\frac{ds}{dt} = P_{eff} - Q - ET_a - D + SI \tag{2}$$

where ds/dt is the change in soil water (mm/day); dw/dt is the change in OFR water (mm/day); and  $P_{eff}$ , Q,  $ET_a$ , E, D, SI, and S is the effective precipitation (daily rainfall minus 2 mm interception loss), runoff, actual evapotranspiration, evaporation, deep percolation, supplemental irrigation, and OFR seepage in (mm/day). Surface runoff was calculated for daily rainfall using the SCS curve number equation (USDA-SCS, 1972):

$$Q = \frac{(P_{eff} - 0.2s)^2}{P_{eff} + 0.8s} \qquad R > 0.2s \tag{3}$$

$$Q = 0 \qquad \qquad \mathbf{R} \le 0.2\mathbf{s} \tag{4}$$

$$s = 254 \left(\frac{100}{CN}\right) - 1\tag{5}$$

where Q is the daily surface runoff in mm,  $P_{eff}$  is the daily effective rainfall, s is retention parameter, and CN is the curve number. The s and CN values vary with soil, land use, slope, and management. Water losses as evaporation from OFR and evapotranspiration from field were estimated using the Penman method (1948, 1963). The formulation of evaporation was as (Singh and Xu, 1997; Shuttleworth, 1993):

$$E = ET_0 = \frac{\Delta}{\Delta + \gamma} \cdot \frac{R_n}{\lambda} \cdot \frac{\gamma}{\Delta + \gamma} \cdot \frac{6.43(f_u)D}{\lambda}$$
(6)

where *E* is the evaporation (mm/day);  $R_n$  is the net radiation at the surface of water (MJ/m<sup>2</sup>/d);  $\Delta$  is the slope of saturation vapor pressure curve (kPa/°C);  $\gamma$  the psychometric coefficient (kPa/°C);  $\lambda$  is the latent heat of vaporization (MJ/kg);  $f_u$  is the wind function; and *D* is the vapor pressure deficit (e<sub>s</sub> - e<sub>a</sub>) in (kPa). The wind function was estimated as in the original Penman (1948, 1963) equation using  $a_u = 1$ ,  $b_u = 0.536$ , and *u*, the wind speed, at a 2 m height (m/s). For open water surface, the reflection coefficient or albedo of 0.08 was used (Shuttleworth, 1993; Allen et al., 1998). Formulation for calculating evaporation from ponds is described by Pandey et al. (2011).

The actual evapotranspiration  $(ET_a)$ , the amount of water consumed by a crop (i.e., the amount the crop transpires through the leaves) and the amount of water the soil evaporates, was estimated from reference evapotranspiration  $(ET_0)$  using the FAO method (1977). Transpiration from leaves and evaporation from soil were lumped together to have simple simulations.  $ET_a$  is a function of crop characteristics, crop growth stages, climate conditions (i.e., length of day, temperature, wind, sunshine, cloudiness), and the available soil moisture in the field. It was estimated as:

$$ET_a = K_c \times ET_0 \tag{7}$$

where  $K_c$  is the crop coefficient. In the  $ET_a$  simulation, we used  $K_c$  of dry bean. Daily  $K_c$  was estimated from the values for different crop growth stages (FAO 1979) by fitting the polynomial line for two 100-day cropping seasons (20-119 and 165-264 Julian Days). The crop coefficient of the four growth stages: initial (25 days); crop development (25 days); midseason (30 days); and late seasons (20 days) were incorporated for daily  $K_c$  estimation. The  $K_c$  value for bean crop varied from 0.15 (initial stage) to 0.56 (late season) with a maximum of 1.19 during the midseason.

Soil was considered as a reservoir for water storage and that water can be used by plant roots (i.e., available moisture (AM)). The change in AM for plant growth was estimated as:

$$\frac{d(AM)}{dt} = RAM + NRAM \tag{8}$$

where d(AM)/dt is the change in AM (mm/day); RAM is the readily available moisture (mm/day), which is the portion of the available soil water that is relatively easily available for plant use. The remaining water (i.e., AM – RAM) was the non-readily available moisture (NRAM). The NRAM value (mm/day) can be used by plants; however, plants will suffer from yield reduction. Water in excess of field capacity drained from the root zone was considered as a water loss through deep percolation. The deep percolation was estimated using the method described elsewhere (Temeszen et al., 2007).

#### **Model Input**

Catchment area, reservoir area, curve number, depth of reservoir ground water depth, saturated hydraulic conductivity, RAM, NRAM, minimum supplemental irrigation requirement (SI), and irrigation efficiency were the major input parameters required for simulation. Model inputs are described in detail by Pandey et al. (2012). Here we have used a catchment area of 10 ha, and the reservoir area (i.e., % of catchment area) was 10%. The curve number (CN) was 88, and depth of reservoir was 2.5 m. The ground water depth was set at 6 m, and the saturated hydraulic conductivity was 0.33 cm/hr. The initial RAM and NRAM values were 48 mm and 72 mm, respectively. The SI value was 24 mm, and irrigation efficiency was 67%.

# **Model application**

The model was applied to a rainfed location (experimental study at Agricultural and Food Engineering Department, Indian Institute of Technology, Kharagpur) in India shown in Figure 2. The study area has a sub-humid and tropical savannah climate. The mean minimum and maximum air temperatures are 12 °C and 40 °C in January and May, respectively. The annual average total rainfall is approximately 1500 mm, 75% of which occurs during the rainy season (June to September). Rainfed crops, such as rice, wheat, and mustard, are the major crops in the study area. Commonly, rice crop is grown in the monsoon season. Rice crop is grown in approximately 90% of the total cultivated area. Crops which require low levels of water, such as mustard, are grown after rice crop harvesting, depending on the soil moisture conditions in the field. The climate data (i.e., rainfall, temperature, wind speed, and humidity etc.) were obtained from Department of Physics and Meteorology, Indian Institute of Technology, Kharagpur. Global solar radiation data were obtained from Solar Radiation Handbook (2008), Solar Energy Center, MNRE, Indian Meteorological Department. Details of climate data used in this study are described elsewhere (Pandey et al., 2011).

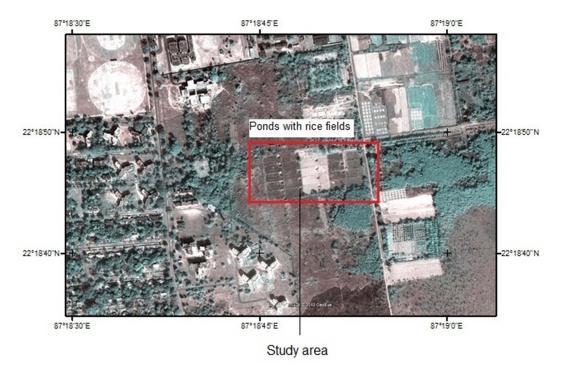


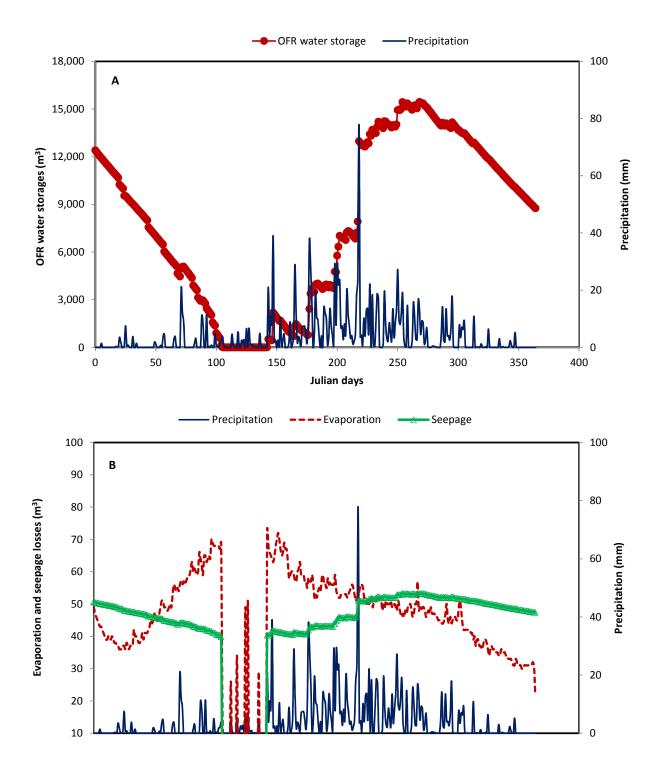
Figure 2. Map shows the location of the study area used for water balance simulation

#### **Results and Discussion**

Water balance in OFR (i.e., water storages) and field (i.e., available soil moisture) was simulated. Figure 3A shows precipitation (secondary y-axis) and the OFR water storage (primary y-axis). The OFR size was 10% of the catchment area of 10 ha. The length and width of OFR was 100 m  $\times$  100 m (total area of 100, 00 m<sup>2</sup>). The depth of OFR was 2.5 m. The total annual rainfall in the study area was 1460 mm and the effective rainfall was 1128 mm. The maximum daily effective precipitation was 75.7 mm. The change in water storage shown in Figure 1 was estimated using equation 1. The OFR water volume varied from 0 to 15,440 m<sup>3</sup>. The water depth in OFR varied from 0 – 1.5 m with an average depth of 0.8 m. The daily average water volume in OFR was 7,868 m<sup>3</sup>. The water storage in OFR followed the pattern of rainfall variation (i.e., water availability in the OFR was greater during the monsoon season).

The total runoff from the field (i.e. catchment) was 234 mm (16% of precipitation). Approximately 11,282 m<sup>3</sup> of water in OFR was received as direct precipitation on OFR, while 21,044 m<sup>3</sup> of water in OFR was received as runoff from the field (i.e., 1.9 times the water received as direct precipitation in OFR). The total water of 32,327 m<sup>3</sup> was conserved (i.e., harvested) in OFR, which was potentially lost from the farm without OFR. Figure 3B shows evaporation and seepage losses from OFR. About 16,199 m<sup>3</sup> of water was lost as evaporation from the OFR water surface, and 15,557 m<sup>3</sup> was lost as seepage from OFR. The maximum daily seepage was 53.3 m<sup>3</sup>, while the maximum evaporation loss was 73.3 m<sup>3</sup>. The water loss from seepage was 96% of the water loss from evaporation. Considering the large amount of water losses through seepage, a provision, such as OFR lining (i.e., to reduce the seepage loss), may potentially improve the water availability in an OFR. Previous studies (Panigrahi et al., 2001; Pandey et al., 2006) have reported relatively greater water availability in OFRs when OFRs were lined compared to unlined OFRs.

Figure 4A shows actual evapotranspiration  $(ET_a)$  from the cultivated land (total area under cultivation was 1ha).  $ET_a$  was simulated for the whole year, which includes two cropping



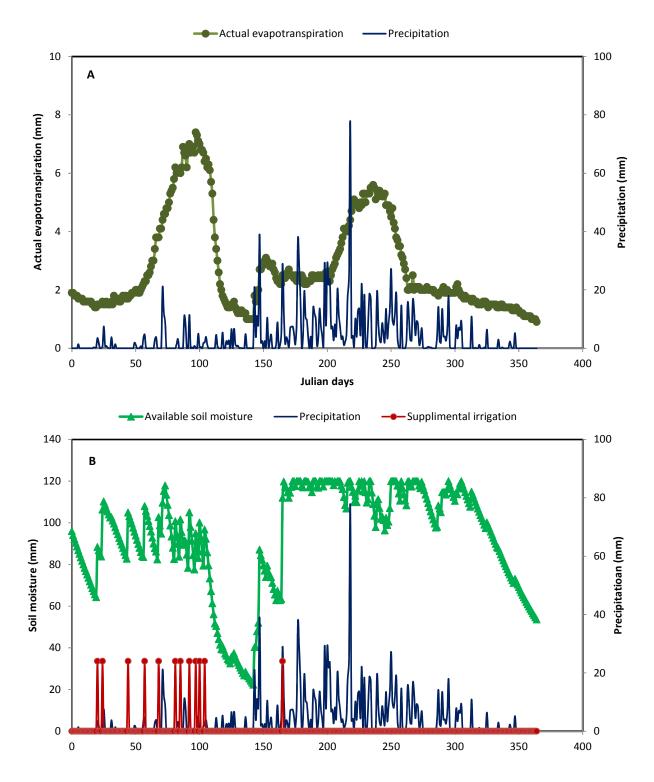
**Figure 3**. Water balance in OFR. 3A) red line with red markers indicates water storages in OFR, and blue line indicates precipitation; 3B) green line with triangle markers indicates seepage, and dotted red line indicates evaporation from OFR. Blue line indicates precipitation.

seasons (i.e., first cropping season between 20 and 119 Julian days, and the second cropping season between 165 and 264 Julian days).  $ET_a$  varied from 0 - 7.4 mm/day with an average of 1.2 mm/day. The total  $ET_a$  was 1020 mm, which includes the  $ET_a$  loss from RAM (readily available moisture) and NRAM (non-readily available moisture).  $ET_a$  from RAM and NRAM was 888 and 132 mm (estimated using equation 8), respectively. The variation in the available soil moisture is shown in Figure 4B. To increase the available soil moisture, the OFR water was recycled as supplemental irrigation (SI) to the cultivated area. The SI application is shown in Figure 4B.

The soil moisture of cultivated area varied from 0 - 120 mm. The average soil moisture over the year was 2.4 mm. The soil moisture in the first cropping season (i.e., from 20 to 119 Julian days) was lower than that of the second cropping season (i.e., from 165 to 264 Julian days) (Figure 4B). The elevated soil moisture in the second season was primarily caused by precipitation. In the second season, relatively large precipitation alleviated the need for SI. The water volume of 4,320 m<sup>3</sup> was applied to the field as SI. In the first season a total of 3,960 m<sup>3</sup> was used as SI, while in the second season 360 m<sup>3</sup>. In the second cropping season usually monsoon rainfall can provide potentially enough water to grow crops (except a few dry spells), while in the first cropping season the SI role was critical in maintaining the moisture content of the soil. For example, 92% of the total SI was used in the first season, while only 8% in the second season. The impact of SI in increasing the soil moisture is shown in Figure 4B.

This simple model provided important information on the soil moisture variation in the cultivated land (Fig 4B), supplemental irrigation requirement (Fig 4B), and water storages in OFR (Fig 3A). In addition, the model also produced other water balance parameters, such as evaporation from OFR, seepage loss from OFR (Fig 3B), and  $ET_a$  from the cultivated area (Fig 4A). Results of the model can be useful in managing water resources (i.e., rainwater) in rainfed areas and recycling it to the cultivated area for irrigation purposes. The model can also calculate the timing when supplemental irrigation is required. This information is crucial for deriving the approaches useful for improving crop production in areas where rainfall is the primary source of water for agriculture. Results presented here are produced from the model simulation; additional work, such as validating the prediction, is needed. Although the fundamentals used in the simulation are sound, verifying predictions using experimental data will help improve the model's capability.

In summary, the model presented here has capability of simulating the rainwater harvesting potential in rainfed regions, i.e., it can predict the impact of rainwater harvesting in rainfed agriculture. The model predicts water storages in OFR, potentially recharged water (i.e., ground water recharge through seepage), and evaporation from the OFR water surface areas. The model also predicts actual evapotranspiration from cultivated land, soil moisture in the field, and the supplemental irrigation requirement. Currently this model was formulated for small landholdings; however, it can be applied at watershed scale with modification.



**Figure 4.** Water balance in the cultivated area. 4A) dark green line with green markers indicates the actual evapotranspiration in the cultivated area, and blue line indicates precipitations; 4B) green line with triangle markers indicates available soil moisture in cultivated field, and red line with red markers indicated supplemental irrigation (SI). Blue line indicates precipitations.

#### Conclusions

Here we have developed a water balance model to understand the rainwater harvesting potential for meeting the supplemental irrigation requirement in rainfed regions. The model estimates the water storage in the rainwater harvesting ponds (i.e., on-farm reservoirs (OFR)), available soil moisture in the cultivated field, and supplemental irrigation requirement of crops. Results show that the model will be applicable in designing OFR and harvesting rainwater in rainfed regions. Predictions of available soil moisture in the cultivated field can be applicable in making the decision when supplemental irrigation is needed. The model also estimates if the water storages in OFR are sufficient or not for meeting the crop SI requirement. The model developed here will be applicable in designing the rainwater harvesting systems for conserving rainwater, which can be recycled to croplands as SI for improving agricultural production in rainfed regions.

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