

5 US engineers bring water closer to village homes

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Gurgaon: It wasn't long back that the women of Abhaypur village had to travel miles to fetch water for their daily use.

Like most villages around Gurgaon, Abhaypur had a number of defunct public taps and pipelines that would function only occasionally — sometimes just for an hour in a whole day — for a population of around 4,500 people.

However, five engineers from the Hartford chapter of Engineers Without Borders (EWB), USA — a group that partners with local communities in developing nations to perform sustainable engineering projects and solve their day-to-day problems — have now built storage tanks to store around 20,000 litres of water every day. They have also constructed a number of taps to meet Abhaypur's water woes.

Interestingly, the pumps used to

store water in the tanks run on solar panels set up by the group.

"We found out that one of the most crucial problems here was irregular and insufficient supply of water as well as a total lack of storage facility. Our group, therefore, began building four tanks of 2000 litres capacity each in the Government Primary Girls School in 2008. We then continued the work in different parts of the village since then," said Stanley Bonk, a retired mechanical engineer from Connecticut and the team mentor.

The basic model followed by the group was to extract water from wells and taps that are working, and turn it portable by storing the water in tanks of 2000 litres and 5000 litres capacity. The three major locations where the group installed the tanks were the girls' school, the harijans' temple, and the potters' colony.

Being a small group with limit-



DRINK ALL YOU WANT: The engineers have built tanks in Abhaypur to store about 20,000 litres of water daily

ed personal resources, EWB Hartford purchased the machines and started the work without hiring labourers. "Once we took up a project, the villagers voluntarily offered to help. They were surprised and happy about the fact that a group of foreigners were trying hard for something that would eventually benefit them," said Jonathan Mead, a geologist and project leader for Abhaypur.

The installation work for two tanks was completed in ten days. "When after days of hard work, the water actually gushed into the tanks, we were overjoyed," said Seth Lentz, a member of EWB Hartford.

Meanwhile, the maintenance of the project remains the biggest challenge for the group as it's imperative that the villagers as well as local NGOs chip in with repair work in case any of the machines stopped working.

The Navjyoti Foundation has

tied up with EWB Hartford and has employed one of their trained social workers to raise awareness about the importance of maintaining the tanks.

"I have been able to raise around Rs 12,000 in two days from the villagers, which is being deposited in a bank account and the money will be used for the maintenance work," said Somdutt Bhardwaj from Navjyoti Foundation.

Somdutt added that monetary contribution will make the people accountable for the project, as personal possessions are much more valued than something that comes free.

Rishibala, a teacher in the primary school, said, "Earlier, the girls used to stay in school just for the mid-day meal and then rush home to help in the household chores. Now that they don't have to fetch water from far away places, they have time for study."