

# Watering a change

It's back to the grassroots for techies who are giving up their plum jobs for a noble cause — water conservation

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The story of a young engineer from NASA, who gave up his high profile job to change the lives of villagers in India in the Bollywood blockbuster 'Swades' was motivating. But it was on the silver screen after all. Bangalore techies are now taking this type of inspirational actions to a different level altogether.

These members of the IT community are showing that they are not enamoured with high-paying jobs, swanky offices and high-end gizmos. They are going down to grassroots and joining hands to save the city and teach Bangaloreans a thing or two about saving a precious resource like water.

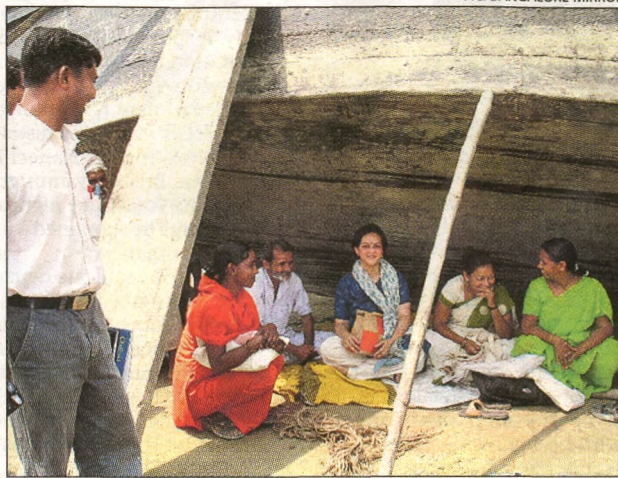
While some techies are gearing up to contest BBMP elections, a few have set out for rural areas to become harbingers of change. They have opted out of their jobs and turned social activists to develop the country's first water portal aimed at creating awareness among people about the conservation of

water and water bodies.

The India Water Portal ([www.indiawaterportal.org](http://www.indiawaterportal.org)) launched a few months ago is an open, inclusive, web-based platform for sharing water management knowledge amongst practitioners and the general public. It aims to draw on the rich experience of water-sector experts, package their knowledge and add value to it through technology, and disseminate it to a larger audience both online and offline, say its creators.

Sharada Prasad, a former employee of Infosys and now a project officer at the internet portal said, "The crisis in water is very real. At the Water Portal you can find various kinds of information related to water. There are slideshows on how to construct rainwater harvesting systems for your house or recharge groundwater. We have case studies of successes from around the country. You can see what minister has been asking what questions in the Parliament about water."

About his personal motivation, he says, "Interacting with



PIC: BANGALORE MIRROR

**Members and cluster coordinators briefing people on techniques of rainwater harvesting and groundwater enrichment**

local people, understanding their social and economic problems and working with them towards developing a sustainable solution excites me more than interacting with global people to understand their business problems and proposing a technology solution."

The portal is not an independent venture but an initia-

tive of 'Arghyam', a charitable trust founded by Rohini Nilekani in 2001. The Water Portal is a free, public website and is being run as service to the water community. Vijay Krishna, a former employee of Juniper Networks and product manager of the Water Portal said, "If we can apply the power of technology in an imagi-

native way to make things function better in our cities and villages, it is an achievement that would give me a lot of satisfaction. It has been fascinating for me to think and work on something basic and concrete yet complex like water."

The portal aims to bridge a gap between the governments and implementing agencies, envisages sharing information between government, working NGOs and academia. It uses latest technologies such as GIS and virtual community tools to project the required data bank for the field workers.

Sunita Nadhamuni, CEO of Arghyam, has been guiding the evolution of the portal from the early days. She says: "There is an asymmetry in knowledge and information where not everyone has access to what they need, to make sensible and informed decisions. We want the Portal to correct that."

Working far away from home, on IT projects which seemed disconnected from problems people faced on the ground, led her into volunteering. "Through that, I had the

opportunity to interact with many inspiring NGO and development sector leaders. Slowly, the urge to do something meaningful became too strong to ignore and I made the switch to the social sector."

## RADIO GAGA

The portal is now harnessing the medium to reach out to the public about their plans. IT has started a radio initiative covering Bangalore, Tumkur and Chitradurga.

Every Sunday night, between 8 pm and 8:30 pm, Bangalore AIR (MW 612kHz) broadcasts a 30 minute Kannada radio programme titled Jala Jaala (Catching Rain in a Net). Another 30 minute radio programme titled 'Mayadanta Male' (Magical Rain) is broadcast live every Thursday between 7:45am and 8:15am in Chitradurga district.

The programmes share experts views and suggestions on rainwater harvesting, recharging ground water sources and other water issues with the public. The station will also air film songs strongly related to the theme, called sweet pills.