

## **Rainwater harvesting**

Rainwater harvesting is a simple and low cost technique that has been practiced for thousands of years. It requires low capital investment and operating costs compared to conventional systems. It has been used to:

- Improve access to water and sanitation ;
- Improve agricultural production and health care thus contributing to poverty alleviation;
- Reverse environmental degradation through reforestation and improved agriculture practice;
- Aid groundwater recharge;
- Empower women in the management of water and other natural resources; and
- Address floods and droughts by storing excess water.

### **Why rainwater harvesting?**

The low cost of rainwater harvesting, together with its decentralization aspects, enables people at individual and community level to manage their own water, thereby reducing reliance on central supply systems which are either absent, not reliable or too expensive.

Rainwater harvesting also yields numerous, social and economic benefits and contributes to poverty alleviation and sustainable development. For example, women and children usually suffer the most from the absence of safe water. In most rural areas obtaining water for domestic use is the responsibility of women and girls. They spend up to three to six hours per day fetching water, time could be used attending school or for economic activities.

### **A need for global mainstreaming**

There are numerous initiatives in the area of rainwater harvesting all over the globe, and in countries such as India, China, Ethiopia, Australia and Brazil rainwater harvesting is being implemented on a large scale through the active support of the governments. Despite these initiatives and the long tradition of rainwater harvesting, rainwater is still under-utilized as a most crucial water resource. Some national governments are reluctant to mainstream rainwater harvesting in their water policies and hesitate to invest in this technology to combat poverty. Reasons for this may be the lack of prestige and power that rainwater harvesting structures provide, due to the fact that it is low cost, decentralized and simple. Or the misconception that small scale, low cost technology cannot significantly contribute to poverty alleviation and sustainable development. Rainwater harvesting has proven to be a highly suitable method to increase access to water, to significantly contribute to poverty alleviation and to be most cost effective in areas where conventional systems cannot be applied. However, because rainwater, unlike ground and surface water, is not included in many water policies and strategies, its use is overlooked.

### **Rainwater Partnership <http://www.rainwaterpartnership.org/>**

To promote and mainstream rainwater harvesting activities, the Global Rainwater Partnership was established on October 14, 2004 in The Hague, The Netherlands. This Partnership includes leading organizations concerned with the promotion and implementation of rainwater harvesting. The Global Rainwater Partnership aims to have rainwater harvesting integrated into water resources management policies with the allocation of resources for its implementation.