



Rainwater Harvesting and Climate Changes: the African Experience

Today there is no doubt that the environmental health of the planet is in a critical state. The most vital resource, water, is becoming inaccessible for many people and it is obvious that old patterns of its management must be changed.

At the same time, many centuries ago, mankind's wisdom has foreseen how to go through critical situations. When dramatic climate change had transformed flourishing landscapes into deserts; man has started to collect the precious raindrops. Thanks to this, he made possible the existence of many permanent settlements in arid areas.

Today, in the new conditions of emergency, many good and willing people do not know where to start from to improve the water situation in the world. There is no single answer to this question, and here, we will summarize the most urgent measures which, according to us, should be taken.

1. As the IPCC recommended in its AR4 Synthesis Report, rainwater harvesting, water storage and conservation techniques should be expanded. They are considered as the most efficient tools for climate adaptation in the Water Sector. A large campaigning promotion among citizens should make this "old style" practice known and used by everyone.
2. A corresponding policy, institutional reforms and financial support should frame the return to the holistic way of treating the hydrologic resource, rain. In a few states and regions in the world, there are already existing regulations and a legislative basis facilitating the wide spreading of Rainwater Harvesting. The IRHA will address an appeal to political leaders to support the introduction of the necessary legislative and regulatory framework for sustaining rainwater harvesting practices in the water policy of their governments.
3. The most important work at grassroots level should be done in schools. On the one hand, we are aiming at forging the consciousness and habits of the future citizens. On the other hand, we wish to transform the project site, a school in a village or in a town, in a platform for work with the population. The successful implementation of rainwater harvesting and sanitation programme in a school will be the best way to access to people's consciousness and to mobilize them to start to work for themselves. Training local masons to build up simple rainwater harvesting systems for villagers will provide them with a job and will enhance the access to water for many.

We set as examples projects from the IRHA **Blue Schools** programme. The projects in schools in Mali and Ghana show that with little investment, we can give a clear example on how to adapt to climate changes, assuring at the same time the necessary conditions for the healthy and safe development of children. The building up of the infrastructure, the tree plantation (for improving the water retention and infiltration in soil and diminishing the problems of erosion), the organization of school vegetable /orchard gardens where it will be taught simple practices of soil and water conservation and the different training provided to children and representatives of the population will be the starting point of a new environmental behavior of children and their community.

Other projects in Nigeria, Ghana, Senegal, Togo, Benin and Mali are building on the achievements in these two pilot experiences for preparing better the population to adapt to the new climate reality. The climate changes adaptation should and can start in schools.