

Rainwater Harvesting: A Multi-Stakeholder Project in Cyclades Islands

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At a time of increasing water demand and the prospect of climate change, the problem of water scarcity in the Mediterranean region and in particular the Greek islands deepens and becomes more critical. Hence, there is an urgent need to enhance water efficiency and to explore further alternatives to ensure water availability using innovative approaches. The revival of traditional water harvesting and management techniques, which have been overlooked in favour of modern technologies, sometimes less sustainable, can be a move in this direction.

Rainwater harvesting is a technology used for collecting and storing rainwater from rooftops, the land surface or rock catchments using simple techniques such as jars and pots as well as more complex techniques such as cisterns and underground check dams. Rainwater harvesting appears to be one of the most promising alternatives for supplying freshwater in the face of increasing water scarcity and escalating demand.

In Greece, until the middle of the twentieth century, one third of the houses in villages and most of remote farmhouses were equipped with underground water storage tanks (cisterns). However, in recent decades the technique is gradually abandoned and it is replaced with connections to municipal water supply systems. A pilot project aiming to reintroduce rainwater harvesting techniques in Greek islands has been launched.

The project is conducted by the Global Water Partnership – Mediterranean (GWP-Med) in collaboration with Municipal Authorities in Cyclades islands as well as the Mediterranean Office for Environment Culture and Sustainable Development (MIO-ECSDE). The project runs in coordination and with the financial support of the "Mission Water" corporate responsibility program of Coca-Cola HBC Greece & Coca-Cola.

The project will:

- install water harvesting systems in selected public building of water-scarce insular communities,
- enhance related technical skills through training of local workers and technical services of local authorities, drawing on traditional know-how as well as on modern technologies, and revitalising and adapting wherever possible existing rainwater harvesting schemes (i.e. retrofitting and improving insulation of old cisterns, etc.),
- raise awareness of local communities on the importance of such alternative, traditional and low cost techniques,
- implement related education activities in selected schools in Cyclades, using adapted educational material.

Activities conducted in the framework of the project could constitute a model / best practice to be replicated in other local communities in Greece and other countries of the Mediterranean.