

**Identifying environmental and organizational issues  
that affect the promotion of rainwater harvesting by the  
Southern And Eastern Africa Rainwater Network (SEARNET)**

by

Peter C. Houston

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Department of Environmental and Geographical Science  
University of Cape Town

Supervisor: Kevin Winter

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## Abstract

The Southern And Eastern Africa Rainwater Network (SEARNET) seeks to promote rainwater harvesting as a risk reduction strategy and means to improve livelihoods through its member national rainwater harvesting associations. SEARNET is an important channel of international donor funding from the Swedish and Dutch governments, and exists to facilitate the sharing of knowledge and experiences of rainwater harvesting through networking. To identify the environmental and organisational issues affecting SEARNET, a questionnaire was sent to SEARNET members that asked open-ended questions about the value of rainwater harvesting to their country and the value of SEARNET to their association. Respondents raised issues that were pertinent to both their association and to SEARNET. Issues were also identified in a survey of Annual Country Status Reports (country reports) presented by national rainwater harvesting associations at the annual SEARNET conferences. Issues included water scarcity and sustainable water supplies; registration as a barrier to funding; a mismatch between donor funding and institutional requirements; and the need for better networking at the SEARNET conference. Several recommendations are made to improve both the promotion of rainwater harvesting by SEARNET members and the networking of SEARNET itself.

**Keywords:** *Rainwater Harvesting; Water Scarcity; Donor Funding; Networking*

## **Introduction**

The Regional Land Management Unit (RELMA), a unit within Sida's Department for Natural Resources and the Environment, has recognised the need to promote rainwater harvesting. Perhaps the most significant reason for the growing recognition of this simple, appropriate method of water supply is the increasing number of potential catchment surfaces available as a result of modern, impervious roofing materials and paved surfaces (Gould & Nissen-Peterson, 1999). However, a less welcome reason is the failure of conventional water supply systems, that is large dams or boreholes and large-scale reticulation schemes, to meet the growing water demand (Gould & Nissen-Peterson, 1999; Ndege, 1999; Gould, 1995). RELMA therefore began to facilitate as well as fund the development of the Southern And Eastern Africa Rainwater Network (SEARNET).

SEARNET was established in 1998 with the vision that people in the region improve their livelihoods through the contribution of sustainable management and utilization of rainwater. Its mission is to network among its members in the promotion of rainwater harvesting and utilization. SEARNET is comprised of the national rainwater associations of Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe with Eritrea and Botswana, and as of 2002, Malawi and Rwanda working towards membership of SEARNET.

SEARNET overlaps with other rainwater harvesting initiatives in the region. The USAID has been a source of funding in east Africa, through the Greater Horn of Africa Rainwater Partnership (GHARP) for national rainwater harvesting associations in Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. In southern Africa there has been the DFID funded, Periperi (Partners Enhancing Resilience for People Exposed to Risks), which initiated rainwater harvesting networks in Botswana, Mozambique, Zambia and Zimbabwe (Holloway and Prime, 2002). SEARNET initially funded the national rainwater harvesting associations in the eastern Africa countries, while Periperi funded the southern Africa countries. However, Periperi funding has since ceased and so the southern Africa national rainwater harvesting associations have turned to SEARNET for continued funding.

SEARNET is an important channel for international donor funding (the Dutch Government has joined RELMA in funding SEARNET), while existing explicitly to facilitate the sharing of knowledge and experiences of rainwater harvesting through networking.

However, the urgent need was discussed at the 6<sup>th</sup> SEARNET Conference (Bulawayo, 2002) to collate and synthesize the experiences of national rainwater associations in order to facilitate the sharing of knowledge through the network. The aim of this paper is to identify the environmental and organizational issues that affect the promotion of rainwater harvesting by SEARNET national rainwater harvesting associations and having identified these issues, to make recommendations on ways to improve the work of SEARNET.

## **Methodology**

### *Sources of Information*

The researcher has been an active participant at the 5<sup>th</sup> (2001) and 6<sup>th</sup> (2002) SEARNET Conferences in Zambia and Zimbabwe, respectively and was made aware of some of the environmental and organizational issues through field visits conducted during SEARNET conferences and dialogue with SEARNET members. The main source of qualitative data for this paper was from a questionnaire sent to SEARNET members that asked open-ended questions about the value of rainwater harvesting to their country and the value of SEARNET to their association (see Figure 1). Respondents thus raised issues that were pertinent to both their association and to SEARNET. Environmental and organizational issues were also identified in a survey of Annual Country Status Reports (country reports) presented by national rainwater harvesting associations at the annual SEARNET conference. Thus it was ascertained from two different sources of information what were the important environmental and organizational issues affecting SEARNET.

### *Questionnaire Design, Administration and Response*

The questionnaire (see Figure 1) was emailed to twenty-one of the participants of the 6<sup>th</sup> (2002) SEARNET Conferences who belonged to a national rainwater harvesting association who had access to email. The sample excluded those who were at the conference but were not part of a national rainwater association such as representatives of Periperi and Afrinova (ten people); and excluded those who did not have email (three people; two of whom were also in the above category). Though unfortunate, this bias is not significant because the largest group of excluded people are not directly involved in national rainwater associations and the questions relate specifically to the context of national rainwater harvesting associations and SEARNET.

**Figure 1 SEARNET Questionnaire**

<p><b>QUESTION 1</b> About your national rainwater harvesting association:</p> <p>a) How is rainwater harvesting of value to your country?</p> <p>b) What are the biggest opportunities facing your association?</p> <p>c) What are the biggest constraints facing your association?</p> <p>d) How do you plan to exploit the opportunities and overcome the constraints?</p> <p><b>QUESTION 2</b> About SEARNET:</p> <p>a) How is SEARNET of value to your association?</p> <p>b) What is the value of the annual SEARNET conference to your association?</p> <p>c) How can the annual SEARNET conference be improved?</p>
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The questionnaire was presented in English, which may have posed a language barrier since many of the potential respondents were second or even third language English speakers. Ideally the questionnaire should have been translated into the respondent’s home language. It was also presumed, since the conference proceedings are conducted entirely in English, that having a questionnaire in English would not be seen unreasonable. Nevertheless the questionnaire was carefully phrased to minimize the potential of ambiguous interpretations.

The questionnaire was purposefully short in order to increase the response rate. From the twenty-one questionnaires sent, there were eleven responses while three were returned unopened to the sender. This therefore, excluding the three questionnaires that were not successfully sent, represents a 61% response rate. It is important to note the bias that the respondents have in favour of rainwater harvesting. They are all members of national rainwater harvesting associations that seek to promote rainwater harvesting as a risk reduction strategy. The voluntary involvement of the respondents lends a certain credibility and sincerity to their responses. The following SEARNET members responded to the questionnaire and have allowed their opinions to be used in this paper:

<b>Ephraim Alamerew</b>	<b>EHRA</b>	
<b>Jackson Aliwa</b>	<b>BORHUA</b>	Senior Civil Engineer, Botswana Technology Centre
<b>Habtamu Gessesse</b>	<b>ERHA</b>	Country Representative, WaterAid Ethiopia
<b>Glenda Kasuba</b>	<b>ZARHA</b>	Socio-economic and Gender Advisor, ORGUT
<b>Tina Lungu Jere</b>	<b>ZARHA</b>	Ministry of Agriculture
<b>Nicholas Kiggundu</b>	<b>URWA</b>	Department of Agricultural Engineering, Makerere University
<b>Gilbert Kimanzi</b>	<b>URWA</b>	
<b>Dr. Maurice Ndege</b>	<b>BORHUA</b>	Principal Engineer, Botswana Technology Centre
<b>Paito Obote</b>	<b>URWA</b>	Programme Engineer, WaterAid Uganda
<b>Elijah Rusike</b>	<b>RHAZ</b>	Intermediate Technology Development Group
<b>Meleko Thumpe</b>	<b>BORHUA</b>	Veld Product Research and Development

BORHUA = Botswana Rainwater Harvesting and Utilization Association

EHRA = Ethiopia Rainwater Harvesting Assoc.

URWA = Uganda Rainwater Harvesting Assoc.

RHAZ = Rainwater Harvesting Assoc. of Zimbabwe

ZARHA = Zambia Rainwater harvesting Assoc.

### *Coding and Analysis*

Key themes and patterns in the country reports and questionnaire responses were identified using coding. Coding links different segments or instances in the data, which when brought together create categories of data that have some common property or element (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996). Furthermore, with the application of the coding system it is possible to “notice relevant phenomena, collect examples of the phenomena, and analyze the phenomena in order to find commonalities, differences, patterns and structures” (Siedle and Kelle *in* Coffey and Atkinson, 1996).

The researcher began by collating the responses to the questionnaire (eg. the eleven responses to Question 1a were grouped together). As a result of the questionnaire design the responses were already in two general categories, that is either about the value of rainwater harvesting to a particular country or the value of SEARNET to a national rainwater harvesting association. Environmental and organizational issues could then be identified in the process of coding the responses as they related to the general categories. It was also possible to ascertain how the more detailed, specific codes were embedded within the more general ones (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996). For example, the sustainability of rainwater harvesting was identified as an issue but the respondents differed on the extent to which they thought that rainwater harvesting was the panacea to the problem of water scarcity. A similar coding process was followed to identify important issues embedded in country reports. To clearly distinguish the information sourced from country reports from that of respondents or other literature, the standard reference in this paper has been prefaced with a CR to denote ‘Country Report’ (e.g. CR: Gessesse, 2001).

### **Environmental and Organisational Issues Affecting SEARNET**

The issues discussed below have been identified in country reports and the responses of SEARNET members to a questionnaire. The first four issues identified relate to the opportunities and constraints presently facing SEARNET national rainwater harvesting associations, while the last issue raised relates to the SEARNET conference and SEARNET’s mission to network among its members.

*Issue 1: Water Scarcity and a Sustainable Water Supply*

The first and most important issue shared by many SEARNET countries is the growing problem of water scarcity. This was the dominant issue raised by nine of the eleven respondents to the question "How is rainwater harvesting of value to your country?" Alamerew from the Ethiopia Rainwater Harvesting Association (ERHA; 2003) states that:

*"Many people in different places of Ethiopia suffer from shortage/scarcity of water for domestic supply and inadequate rainfall for their rain-fed agricultural production; and the problem is an ever-worsening type. The spatial and agro ecological distribution of natural water sources (surface & ground) have their limitation to contribute to match the settlement pattern and to serve the socio-economic needs of the people. On the other hand, Ethiopia has favourable climatic resources to get ample seasonal rainfall despite its erratic nature and unbalanced distribution in space and time. Consequently, rainwater harvesting holds a dependable long-term solution to address the domestic water supply and in providing supplemental irrigation to agricultural production."*

Thus rainwater harvesting activities, such as the construction of ponds, micro dams, terraces and planting trees, were started in Ethiopia by the government in response to the devastating drought of 1971-74 (CR: Gessesse, 2001). Similarly rainwater harvesting has come to the fore in Malawi because of recent droughts as well as the increasing problem of soil erosion as a result of uncontrolled rainfall runoff (CR: Munthali, 2002). In Kenya the available surface water resources are spatially dispersed and inadequate, which means that 'conventional' sources of borehole and surface water reticulation schemes are too expensive to exploit (CR: Mati, 2001). Where boreholes are being used, rainwater harvesting has the potential to recharge aquifers that are overexploited, since in many SEARNET countries there is a heavy reliance on groundwater abstraction (Aliwa, 2003; Ndege, 1999).

In Botswana any means of providing water receive attention because it is semi-arid and drought prone (CR: Aliwa, 2002). Furthermore the interbasin transfer schemes to serve villages and towns in the water scarce south of Botswana are particularly expensive (Aliwa, 2003). Aliwa (2003) comments that:

*"We therefore need to justify water demand increase by demonstrating water conservation/reuse" (i.e rainwater harvesting).*

Rapid urbanisation is also an important factor. Aliwa (2003) comments that there is a...

*“Large increase in the number of housing units and business malls/offices, with accompanying large parking spaces. Instead [of] being a headache for generating nuisance floods, this can be harvested for gardening and landscaping.”*

Gould & Nissen-Peterson (1999) suggest that this is the most significant reason for the rediscovery of rainwater harvesting.

There is a socio-economic dimension to the issue of water scarcity. For example, in Kenya there is a rapidly increasing demand for water for domestic and agricultural uses, while at the same time government spending on the water sector has been declining (CR: Mati, 2001). Compounding the water problem in Kenya has been the government's inadequate comprehension and response to the impending crisis (CR: Kariuki, 2002; CR: Mati, 2001). The combination of these socio-economic and environmental factors has provided the context in which rainwater harvesting is increasingly seen as a sustainable alternative to conventional water supply approaches.

From both respondents and other literature it is evident that rainwater harvesting is seen as being sustainable and affordable. However, the extent to which rainwater harvesting is viewed as *the* answer varies. Gessesse (2003) thinks that rainwater harvesting is not a panacea and that it is but *one* way to combat drought. Alamerew (2003) is of the opinion that rainwater harvesting holds a dependable long-term solution to address the problem of domestic water supply. Obote (2003) views rainwater harvesting as a real, affordable option for bringing safe water to users, which is highly likely to be sustainable. Ngigi (2002) expresses the most optimistic view, “that the promotion and adoption of promising rainwater harvesting technologies could be the long awaited solution to food insecurity and water scarcity in marginal areas.” Thomas (1999) comments, “Saving 25 mm of rain *in situ* can make the difference between getting a crop and getting nothing.” And getting nothing can mean hunger and starvation.

Therefore in countries facing significant rainfall variability, particularly long dry spells, rainwater harvesting is an important risk reduction strategy (Ndege, 1999). Consequently, water scarcity – from cyclical drought, aridity (climate), inadequacy of surface water and groundwater sources and rapid urbanisation – is a fundamental issue used in the promotion of rainwater harvesting as a necessary, sustainable option to conventional water supply approaches.

*Issue 2: Registration as a Barrier to Funding*

There are an increasing number of donors who are interested in funding rainwater harvesting projects (Thumpe, 2003; Alamerew, 2003; Kimanzi, 2003). There is also growing recognition and support of the importance of rainwater harvesting from stakeholders such as governments, NGOs, business and communities (Thumpe, 2003; Aliwa, 2003; Gessesse, 2003; Obote, 2003; Kiggundu, 2003). The Botswana Rainwater Harvesting and Utilisation Association (BORHUA), for example, enjoys the support of a number of government ministries and departments as well as several learning institutions (see Table 1, CR: Aliwa, 2002). The registering of national rainwater harvesting associations in order to become a legal entity and officially recognized by both donors and stakeholders has been and presently is one of the biggest constraints being experienced by SEARNET associations. (Thumpe, 2003; Aliwa; 2003). Once registered an organisation can access funding and begin to promote and implement rainwater harvesting (Kasuba, 2003; Thumpe, 2003).

**Table 1 Stakeholder Interests in BORHUA (CR: Aliwa, 2002)**

<b>BORHUA Stakeholder</b>	<b>Interest in Rainwater Harvesting</b>
Ministry of Agriculture	In watering livestock using rainwater harvesting, as well as efficient methods of irrigating crops using collection and concentration of rainwater.
Ministry of Local Government	In the popularization and construction of rainwater collection systems in rural areas, especially in schools, clinics, administration centers and other institutions administered by local councils.
Ministry of Health	Issues related to the quality of the collected rainwater for human consumption.
Department of Water Affairs	Charged with the responsibility of formulating policies for water development. Interested in practices that would reduce the water demand from "traditional" sources.
Department of Agriculture	Involved in implementing and evaluating techniques of rainwater catchment for on-farm crop production trials.
Botswana College of Agriculture	Teaching students who will be involved in agricultural extension work. Staff and final year students undertake academic projects in rainwater harvesting for crop production.
University of Botswana	Research into the collection and utilisation of rainwater for domestic purposes (modelling and quality parameters).
Botswana Technology Centre	Research, design, construction, evaluation and promotion of rainwater harvesting systems.
Rural Industries Innovation Centre	Promotion, installation and training of artisans working on rainwater harvesting systems, especially for domestic use.
Veld Products Research and Development	Use of rainwater harvesting for growing trees in agroforestry activities.
Somarelang Tikologo	Community promotion of micro-projects related to rainwater harvesting, for landscaping in open urban areas as well as organic vegetable production in household backyards.
Permaculture Trust	Utilisation of rainwater for landscaping and indigenous crop and tree production in rural areas.

Despite the differing national contexts, the slowness of bureaucracies to process applications is universal. It took the Ethiopian Rainwater Harvesting Association (ERHA) four years to become an official entity (CR: Alamerew, 2002). An Ethiopian Rainwater Association Interim Committee (ERAIC) was formed in May 1998, following a regional workshop on "Household Rainwater Harvesting" in Arusha, Tanzania, in December 1997. The ERAIC then organised a national rainwater conference in Addis Ababa, in December 1999, which resulted in the founding of the Ethiopian Rainwater Harvesting Association (ERHA). ERHA applied for registration but could not operate as a national association until the ERHA finally registered as a national association with the Federal Ministry of Justice in December 2001. The ERHA Secretariat was then established and began operating in temporary offices from July 2002.

Similarly, the Kenya Rainwater Association (KRA) was established in 1991 during its first National Rainwater Conference held in Nakuru, but it was only finally registered as an official non-profit organization in December 1994. The Zambia Rainwater Harvesting Association (ZARHA) was started in 1997 but only registered in May 2002 (CR: Kasuba, 2002). The quickest registration process was experienced by the Rainwater Harvesting Association of Tanzania (RHAT), which was formed in Dodoma in July 2001 and registered in January 2002. However, frustration with the slow process can be sensed in Thumpe's (2003) comment that:

*"The biggest constraint now is the registration of the Association [BORHUA], which as you know is not registered, otherwise we could be far with development."*

The Rainwater Harvesting Association of Zimbabwe (RHAZ) and Malawi Rainwater Harvesting Association (MARHA) are also unregistered.

### *Issue 3: Mismatch Between Donor Funding and Institutional Requirements*

SEARNET is a valuable channel of funding from RELMA and the Dutch Government to specific projects administered by the national rainwater harvesting associations. Obote (2003) says that SEARNET is important because it...

*"Supports regional initiatives that have lots of benefits at national level; facilitates joint activities to avoid duplication; and is [part of] global collaboration for resource mobilization."*

Furthermore, Kiggundu (2003) notes that:

*“Some potential development partners of late prefer funding projects that are regional and not one country. So we believe [that] under SEARNET we have a bigger voice than under URWA.”*

However, an inadequate level of institutional support was identified as one of the most important constraints facing associations (Aliwa, 2003; Gessesse, 2003; Alamerew, 2003; Ndege, 2003; Obote, 2003; Kiggundu, 2003; Kimanzi, 2003; Kasuba, 2003; CR: Munthali, 2002; CR: Kariuki, 2002; CR: Ishengoma, 2002). Alamerew (2003) lists the major constraints to ERHA, which can be generalized to other associations, as being:

- *“The limited availability of resources (human, material and finance) to sustain and support ERHA's Secretariat Office and effectively work towards realising its intended objectives;*
- *The limited access/linkage with funding agencies;*
- *The reluctance of funding agencies to support such important elements of organisational capacity building aspects as salary of core staff and office rent, ... etc;*
- *Lack of its own office space, management system and weak resource position to solicit alternative solutions.”*

Consequently the SEARNET associations are utterly dependent on volunteerism, which is not institutionally sustainable in the long-term. Already associations have developed to a size and complexity that require there to be at least one full-time employee to manage the day-to-day activities. Added to this is what Aliwa (2003) says is a lack of scientific data to back-up proposals and a lack of serious policies on the practice of the technology. So ironically, despite the increased global awareness of the need for the enhanced management of water resources (Gessesse, 2003) and the subsequent interest of international donors to form partnerships at global, regional and country levels towards advancing rainwater harvesting (Gessesse, 2003; Thumpe, 2003), the funding is not given to where associations would seem to need it the most.

#### *Issue 4: Lack of Thinking in Terms of Strategic Planning*

One of the questions asked of the SEARNET members in the questionnaire was “How do you plan to exploit the opportunities and overcome the constraints?” Many of the respondents said that they plan to focus on:

- Advocacy, public awareness raising and promotion activities (Aliwa, 2003; Alamerew, 2003; Obote, 2003);

- Preparation of project proposals (Thumpe, 2003; Alamerew, 2003; Kiggundu, 2003; Rusike, 2003);
- Strengthen networking with others to share and gain experience (Aliwa, 2003; Alamerew, 2003; Kimanzi, 2003; Rusike, 2003).

Only Alamerew (2003) viewed the development of a Strategic Plan as being fundamental to exploit the opportunities and overcome the constraints facing ERHA. Strategic planning can be defined as the process of reconciling an organization's resources (internal environment) with threats and opportunities in the external environment (Smit and Cronjé, 2002). Strategic planning is an ongoing activity that is future orientated and focuses on opportunities that may be exploited through the application of an organization's resources (Smit and Cronjé, 2002). It is therefore concerned with an organization's vision, mission, and goals/objectives.

A survey of the country reports presented at the annual SEARNET conference shows that the development of strategic planning is indeed lacking (*vide infra*). For a start, the Botswana Rainwater Harvesting & Utilisation Association (BORHUA) and Zambia Rainwater Association (ZARHA) appear not to even express their purpose in terms of a vision, mission, goals or objectives. The best example of the strategic planning process is by the Kenya Rainwater Association (KRA).

The vision of the KRA is that "all people have access to a safe and reliable water supply for domestic, livestock, agricultural and commercial use (CR: Mati, 2001)." Its mission is "to improve and promote rainwater harvesting technologies, utilisation and management (CR: Mati, 2001)." Furthermore the KRA has five goals (CR: Kariuki, 2002):

- (i.) "To optimise rainwater harvesting;
- (ii.) To build capacity between professionals, technicians, artisans and communities;
- (iii.) To collaborate, network and exchange information at all levels;
- (iv.) Policy advocacy and good governance in rainwater harvesting; and
- (v.) To maximise member benefits."

The goals of the KRA flow directly from the mission statement and enable the KRA to move in the desired direction of their vision and are congruent with one another. However, their goals do not indicate the time frame for accomplishing them or the practical steps required to achieve the goals. Relative to the KRA, it would seem that the Uganda Rainwater Association (URWA) has inverted the concepts of 'vision' and 'mission'.

The vision of URWA is “to improve the quality of life of people in Uganda through the effective management and utilisation of rainwater (CR: Kimanzi, 2002).” Its mission is “to promote sustainable rainwater management as an option for water supply for domestic, production and environmental conservation as a means of improving the quality of the beneficiaries in Uganda (CR: Kimanzi, 2002).” The URWA has no explicit goals or objectives. However, the URWA and KRA are the only two rainwater associations to attempt to frame their purpose in terms of a vision and mission.

The Rainwater Harvesting Association of Tanzania (RHAT), Malawi Rainwater Harvesting Association (MRHA) and the Ethiopia Rainwater Harvesting Association (ERHA) describe their purpose in terms of objectives. RHAT simply has four objectives, which are (CR: Ishengoma, 2002):

- (i.) “To strengthen the rainwater harvesting component of the National Water Policy;
- (ii.) To build the capacity of the rainwater harvesting stakeholders;
- (iii.) To disseminate rainwater harvesting technologies; and
- (iv.) To encourage private sector involvement.”

The Malawi Rainwater Harvesting Association (MRHA) has only three objectives, which are (CR: Munthali, 2002):

- (i.) “To mainstream rainwater harvesting technology;
- (ii.) To promote networking among members; and
- (iii.) To facilitate the strengthening of research-extension-farmer linkages in rainwater harvesting.”

For RHAT and MRHA there seems to be no overarching statement that expresses their organisation’s special identity, character and reason for existence. The terminology used by the ERHA is more confusing. What is described as an “objective” by the ERHA is more like the vision of the KRA and URWA, which is “To contribute towards enhanced and sustainable food security status in Ethiopia through promoting feasible rainwater harvesting technologies for sustainable development and conservation of natural resources (CR: Alamerew, 2002).” Furthermore, it states that its ‘function’ is “to facilitate and provide the professional inputs needed to use rainwater for domestic supply and food production; studies and promotes different rainwater harvesting techniques; and provides advisory and technical support to NGOs and government organisations to enhance their effort towards developing, adapting and disseminating the various rainwater harvesting technologies (CR: Alamerew, 2002).” The function of the ERHA could be its mission statement.

The Rainwater Harvesting Association of Zimbabwe (RHAZ) defines itself in its goal, accompanied by five objectives that are similar to what has been expressed above. Its goal is “Thriving communities in southern Africa benefiting from rainwater harvesting for their domestic and productive needs (CR: Guzha, 2002).” Besides being difficult to make sense of, its goal is actually its vision. There is then no mission statement to explain ‘who RHAZ is, what they do, and where they are heading’. The objectives of RHAZ could therefore be its goals (CR: Guzha, 2002):

- “To create awareness and generate knowledge in rainwater harvesting;
- To strengthen the capacity of member organisations in promoting rainwater harvesting initiatives;
- To identify opportunities and constraints currently limiting or promoting the adoption of rainwater harvesting initiatives through applied, adaptive and collaborative research.;
- To identify constraints and lobby for shifts in government water policy for a better and sustainable water supply in Zimbabwe; and
- To disseminate information on rainwater harvesting and intensify linkages with other African and Global rainwater harvesting networks.”

It could be said that the criticism of these organizations is merely about the semantic differences in their use of vision, mission and goals. Furthermore, there may not even be consensus on the definitions and importance of the strategic planning process as described by Smit and Cronjé, 2002. However, there is a danger that, for lack of clearly defined strategies, national rainwater harvesting associations may not effectively or significantly promote rainwater harvesting. This is also where SEARNET has an essential role to play in sharing knowledge (of how to plan strategically), expertise (of those who can strategize) and experience (of strategies that have been effective). In fact this is the purpose of SEARNET, its reason for being, that is to facilitate the promotion of rainwater harvesting through networking.

#### *Issue 5: Effective Networking and the Role of the SEARNET Conference*

Networking is the core function of SEARNET, according to its own mission statement. Jere (2003) comments that:

*“SEARNET provides a regional and international forum for the exchange of experiences, technologies and strategies for the implementation of rainwater harvesting methods.”*

In this regard, the annual SEARNET conference is a major focal point for the network. It serves as a forum to exchange ideas, information and experience on the latest developments and lessons learnt in the respective member countries; to design collective strategies for

resource mobilisation, advocacy and awareness raising in the member countries; and to mobilise or share resources that are accessible through collective channels (Alamerew, 2003). It is concerning then that the critical issue raised by the respondents is the value of the conference proceedings.

Despite the intention to network, the conference proceedings constitute only country reports from each association rather than presentations that further the intended conference theme. Thus Aliwa (2003) thinks that it is time to...

*“move out of the usual and monotonous ‘Country Reports’ format of presentation only, and encourage research-oriented presentations: Divide the conference into theme areas for proper discussions in plenary sessions.”*

But Kimanzi (2003) suggests that, if the country reports are kept, then there must be...

*“general agreement on the progress reporting formats by each country so as to improve comparisons between associations.”*

Furthermore and somewhat fundamentally, Kimanzi (2003) comments that SEARNET must...

*“Agree on themes for the conference and ensure that the presentations at the conference are in line with the agreed theme.”*

This is to prevent what occurred in the 2001 conference where the theme was *Promoting Networking Among Member Countries* but country reports and the development of a SEARNET vision and mission statement dominated the proceedings. Similarly, the theme of the 2002 conference was *Mainstreaming Rainwater Harvesting Through Institutional Adoption* but again country reports were given that did not specifically address the topic. In this regard, the prior, timely announcement of the conference theme would allow participants time to make meaningful preparations (Alamerew, 2003).

## **Conclusion**

The vision of SEARNET is that people in the region improve their livelihoods through the contribution of the sustainable management and utilisation of rainwater. It is admirable that SEARNET hopes to contribute to the sustainable development of Africa. How it intends to achieve this is stated in its mission, to network among its members in the promotion of rainwater harvesting and utilisation. Thus networking is the core purpose of SEARNET.

The annual SEARNET conference provides the largest forum for national rainwater harvesting associations to network with each other. These associations have many issues in common. They share a common motivation to promote rainwater harvesting because of the critical issue of water scarcity in their own countries. They have or are encountering a common problem in trying to become officially registered, which has funding ramifications. Also an increasing number of international donors are interested in funding rainwater harvesting. However, the associations collectively recognise that their dependency on donor funding is unsustainable in the long term and must therefore seek other means to finance their work. Even in the short-term, donor funding does not entirely match their needs, which is for institutional support and so the associations are completely dependent on volunteerism. Nevertheless members, for now, are prepared to give their time to promote rainwater harvesting because it is seen as an important risk reduction strategy and has the potential to alleviate poverty, reduce the exploitation of groundwater resources, etc.

In closing, based on the issues identified in this paper, the researcher would make the following recommendations to benefit SEARNET and its promotion of rainwater harvesting:

- Identifying the issues in this paper is only the first step; further research should be done to gain a deeper understanding of the issues in order to guide and optimise the promotion and implementation of rainwater harvesting technologies;
- The development of strategic planning by the SEARNET national rainwater harvesting associations should be facilitated in order to make good intentions, like financial sustainability, a reality;
- The international donors should be lobbied, through SEARNET, to provide funds not only for rainwater harvesting projects but also for the institutional requirements of the SEARNET national rainwater harvesting associations;
- The SEARNET conference needs to mature to the stage where country reports are standardised for the sake of comparison and where papers are presented that address the designated theme of the conference, and thus contribute meaningfully to the sharing of knowledge on rainwater harvesting. The SEARNET Secretariat acting as a panel of reference could facilitate this.

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