

Small Reservoirs

Who should read this page?
Investors, NGO's, private companies interested in supporting small-scale agriculture.

In most of Sub-Saharan Africa, small reservoirs are earthen or cement dams that are less than 7.5 meters deep. They provide significant opportunities for soil and water conservation, drought proofing and for developing small-scale, community-based irrigation schemes.

A well-designed reservoir can support multiple water uses from livestock watering, fisheries, domestic and small business water use to brick making and handicraft activities.

In South Asia, small reservoirs or 'tanks' have traditionally been one of the most important sources of irrigation. They are mostly managed by communities and provide open bodies of standing water that can be used domestic needs, livestock and fish. However, despite an increase in investment in water development, tank irrigation is in decline across Indian states.

Small Reservoirs in SSA

Pirates or Pioneers

How to Support

For investors in small reservoirs, the challenge lies in coordinating and integrating multiple users and social groups around a common resource.

The investment costs for small reservoirs can be prevented from rising by improving procedures throughout the process. Accurate feasibility studies, proper preparation and stricter accountability to decision-makers, funders and local communities can all control costs and improve the outcome.

Small reservoirs also need an effective institutional component. Water user associations, for example, are not adequate as they ignore the multiple arrangements and scales. To be successful, the approach should provide multiple organizational options to communities, and promote coordination with traditional and other authorities.

Something to be aware of (and sensitive to) are the widespread practices of patronage and bribes. Governments tend to favor 'big-bang approaches' where the objective is to build or rehabilitate a large number of dams in a short period of time to secure political support. Donor agencies can even see corruption as having a functional role for the delivery of projects.

Uneven Relationships

Where to Invest

In Sub Saharan Africa, the potential for the expansion of small reservoirs is 27 million ha, potentially reaching a rural population of 437 million in the region. The potential for small reservoir expansion is highest in the Gulf of Guinea region with potential expansion of over 8.5 million ha reaching a rural population of 131 million, driven largely by the large potential in Nigeria alone.

Regional Analysis



Solution pathways to build smallholder farmers resilience through water storage

