

Letter to the Editor of Jordan Times

Today, Jordan faces a critical crisis of not enough water. In the face of this crisis, many Jordanians feel helpless. They think there is nothing that they can do as individuals and families. They think that it is only the government that has the means to do something about this situation.

Unfortunately, this is an attitude that people have adopted in part because of the tremendous strides which the government has made in bringing piped water to its citizens. The introduction of piped water throughout the country has caused people to shift the responsibility of providing for their water needs from themselves--as was necessary in the past--to the government and private water entrepreneurs.

This is a most unfortunate and unintended consequence of the government's initiative to provide water to its citizens. It has led to irresponsible negligence on the part of too many Jordanians when it comes to doing something as individual citizens about collecting and storing water.

Most older Jordanians remember well the days before the modern integrated water network was available. Back then, every household had to take responsibility for making sure that during the rainy season, water was collected and stored in cisterns and tanks. No one could afford to be negligent about saving rain water!

Jordanians can be proud of the resourcefulness of their ancestors in providing for their water security. For millennia earlier generations of Jordanians have been pioneers when it comes to collecting, storing and distributing rain water. Indeed, as the British archaeologist Sven Helms has demonstrated, the world's earliest experiments with hydrological engineering were carried out six thousand years ago at Jawa in northern Jordan.

Whether it was in the desert in places like Jawa or Umm el Jamal; or in mountainous regions like Ajlun or Petra; or on the fertile plains of Irbid or Madaba; or along the wadies of the Jordan Valley; ancient Jordanians have awed scientists with their sophisticated methods for collecting and utilizing rain water.

Modern citizens of Jordan have much to gain from taking note of the diverse accomplishments of their ancestors in providing for their water security. However, the single most important thing that the experience of earlier generations teaches is that people in every region of the country have been personally mindful of their responsibility to collect and store rain water.

Fortunately, there are thousands of households throughout Jordan that are mindful of this responsibility. They are faithfully doing their part to collect and store rain water. These families are carrying on the heritage of their past--a heritage of wealth and prosperity which was built on people being continually mindful of old and new ways to collect and utilize rainfall and runoff.

Modern Jordanians must capitalize on the experience and the technological heritage of their ancestors in dealing with the water crisis. While they must continue to explore high tech solutions to the water crisis, like their ancestors, they must do all they can to carry on with the sustainable methods of collecting and storing water developed in the past.

Surely, as sons and daughters of the world's leading rain water harvesting pioneers, Jordanians have a duty to continue to develop and advance this truly indigenous technology. They should learn all they can about the water harvesting technologies developed by their ancestors while at the same time seeking new ways to advance on their achievements.

The solution to Jordan's water crisis is not merely to be found in imported, modern technology; it exists rather in a creative blend of the old proven ways with the new!