

Share and Advocate: July 2012

In almost all towns and cities in Australia, tap water is processed to a very high standard, with lots of fail-safe measures in place to ensure that it is safe to drink. (An exception is some remote Indigenous settlements.) In fact, the legislation governing the quality of tap water is far more stringent than that which protects consumers of bottled water!

Why buy bottled water, when...

- It costs more. Tap water in Melbourne or Sydney costs \$1.20 a tonne. Australian bottled water costs around \$3000 a tonne, and Australians spend about \$385M each year on bottled water.
- It consumes much more energy to produce. Australia's consumption of bottled water costs the planet about 314,000 barrels of oil per year.
- It's not as good for you. Bottled water regulations are not as strict as regulations for tap water; bottled water does not contain chlorine to kill bacteria, and fluoride to promote healthy teeth.
- Most people can't tell the difference in taste!¹

The United Nations has explicitly recognised the human right to water and sanitation and acknowledged that clean drinking water and sanitation are essential to the realisation of all human rights. Did you know that:

- In rural Sub-Saharan Africa, millions of people share their domestic water sources with animals or rely on unprotected wells that are breeding grounds for pathogens.
- The average distance that women in Africa and Asia walk to collect water is six kilometres.
- Average water use ranges from 200-300 litres per person per day in most countries in Europe, to less than 10 litres in countries such as Mozambique. People lacking access to improved water in developing countries consume far less, partly because they have to carry it over long distances and water is heavy. For the 884 million or so people in the world who live more than one kilometre from a water source, water use is often less than five litres a day of unsafe water.
- Together, unclean water and poor sanitation are the world's second biggest killer of children. It has been calculated that 443 million school days are lost each year to water-related illness.
- People living in the slums of Jakarta, Manila and Nairobi pay 5 to 10 times more for water than those living in high-income areas in those same cities and more than consumers in London or New York. In Manila, the cost of connecting to the utility represents about three months' income for the poorest 20% of households, rising to six months' in urban Kenya².

One of the aims of Millennium Development Goal 7 is to reduce by half the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation³.

Water

- In 2010, 89% of the world's population, or 6.1 billion people, used improved drinking water sources, exceeding the MDG target (88%)
- Between 1990 and 2010, two billion people gained access to improved drinking water sources
- 884 million people do not have access to safe drinking water

Sanitation

- 63% of the global population use toilets and other improved sanitation facilities
- By 2015, 67% will have access to improved sanitation facilities (the MDG target is 75%)
- Since 1990, 1.8 billion people gained access to improved sanitation.
- 2.5 billion people lack improved sanitation, projected be 2.4 billion by 2015.

Story: Working in Water – a personal reflection of a WASH (Water Sanitation and Hygiene) worker – Darryl Jackson



Who I am

I'm originally a civil engineer, then morphed into a water engineer and more recently morphed into a WASH engineer. In Australia, I've worked mostly in municipal water engineering - working in water supply and wastewater systems. Over several years, I've complemented my traditional engineering training and skills with specific knowledge, skills, study and experience in water and sanitation in developing countries.

What I do

Nowadays I'm a TEAR fieldworker, and together with my wife, am seconded to one of TEAR's partners in Nepal – United Mission to Nepal (UMN). I do several types of work in the WASH sector:

1. WASH technical adviser with UMN. I help implement UMN's Health Strategy by providing expertise in relation to WASH, supporting the capacity building of UMN staff and partner organisations so that they effectively implement WASH interventions primarily through community health programs. Although the focus is mainly in the

Health Team, I also support other teams that do some WASH (the Peacebuilding, Sustainable Livelihoods and Education teams).

2. Technical support to UNICEF Nepal in national policy development.
3. Occasional local urban infrastructure technical planning and design for international banks. This work tends to be more closely aligned to my traditional civil engineering background.
4. Occasional technical support for international development agencies like AusAID and World Health Organisation, the former as an independent development WASH advisor and the latter in the special area of drinking-water quality. This often involves travel to other countries in the region, and beyond.

Levels of work in WASH

Like many development sectors, effective water and sanitation and hygiene (WASH) development projects involve working with and for the poor at several different levels. At a local/regional level, we work with the poor, understanding their context and standing alongside them in their struggles. At other levels, we may work for the poor, advocating pro-poor policies, helping to put in place infrastructure and governance that will benefit them directly or indirectly.

The grassroots work focuses on small scale WASH projects at a local level, and are usually carried out by non-government organisations (NGOs). Although the things built (e.g. toilets, small drinking water systems) may be individually small, these projects often impact scores or even hundreds or thousands of people. This is necessary as, typically, these people are not being reached by government services. TEAR's partners (like UMN) mostly work at this level. The work consists of hardware (the physical things) and software – e.g. hygiene behavior changes. The software usually is more time consuming.

Why I do it

The statistics you read about are true. They have a human face, and WASH work does make a real difference at the individual, family and community level. Lives can be saved, life can be made easier and safer and people can live with more dignity.

My current role is a good match between my professional skills and interests, and my understanding of my responsibilities as a follower of Jesus. I see it as a natural outworking of my faith to use my God-given training, skills and interests to play my part in doing justice and helping to address the inequalities in water and sanitation in the world. It's also enjoyable and in many senses, despite frequent setbacks, is professionally challenging.

Advocacy Action

Water Aid is running a major campaign on the need for safe water and adequate sanitation. They have a BRILLIANT video clip which you can view at www.waterworks.me

Watch it with friends, and then:

- Send a collective message to your local Federal representative. Trace around your hand and cut out the shape from a piece of coloured paper or card. On one side of the card, write a "horror fact" about water and sanitation – the Water Aid website is a great source of information. On the other, write your name, address and electorate. Write a covering letter stating your concern, and urging the Federal Government to take action. Use the Water Aid website to help you with the letter. Get your friends or church family involved too!
- Send individual cakes of soap to your Federal representative. Wrap your cake of soap in a letter outlining your concern, and what you want them to do. Use the Water Aid website to help with the letter. Even better, try to get lots of people in your church or home fellowship group to send cakes of soap too. The more the soapier! You could take up a collection of cakes of soap, make an appointment with your representative, and deliver them by hand.
- Make the message go viral (in a nice way). Send the videoclip link to a whole lot of your friends, and suggest that they take action too. Wouldn't it be great if our politicians were swamped by cakes of soap? Yes, I know they're a slippery bunch already, but...
- Instead of spending money on bottled water, use a re-usable drinking bottle, and donate what you save to a water and sanitation project overseas!

Notes

- 1) Statistics mainly from "The real cost of bottled water", in The Age, 19 August 2007
- 2) United Nations: www.un.org/waterforlifedecade/human_right_to_water.shtml
- 3) WHO: www.who.int/water_sanitation_health/monitoring/jmp2012/fast_facts/en/index.html