

The Water Gazette

ISSUE ONE

Today, the 27th September 2008, marks exactly two months since all of us (except for Packiaraj, who was unfortunately stuck in an airport somewhere) came together at Bossey to begin the first ever Ecumenical Water Network Summer School on Water. I think that the feeling all round was that it was a terrific opportunity for discussions on the water crisis through out the world and possible answers to it.

This publication comes to you two months on to give you some motivation and a sense of support that you're not fighting this war on water by yourself but that there are 21 other participants, plus support crew, also working in their own part of the world towards the same overall goal which is to see clean potable water freely available to all people.

Thank you to all of those who contributed something and thank you to all of those who are now reading this. (My goal had been to keep this publication to two pages so sorry if your story got a bit cut.)

Dave

From Sheryl in Canada

I've had a number of opportunities to incorporate the issue of water and learnings from EWN in the past weeks (has it only been weeks?!) since we were together in Geneva. One big project was putting together a retreat on embodied activism which took place the weekend of Sept 19-21. It was a fabulous ecumenical gathering where we moved around a lot, putting together street theatre, writing letters, using dance, and creatively engaging the public on a number of issues, although the one that seemed to emerge as a common topic on people's minds was food security. Tied to that, of course, is water - both availability due to infrastructure as well as climactic conditions - as well as water used (and in many cases wasted) through secondary processing/transport. It was an exciting weekend, and great to engage people's bodies as well as minds on the issues.

Another particular area of concern continues to be the boil water advisories in place in over 90 aboriginal communities. I am working with another person to establish connections with one particular aboriginal community in the north western part of the province of Ontario to prepare for a solidarity summer in 2010, when young adults from various denominations will live in intentional, justice-focused community with each other and the aboriginal community. The purpose is for mutual sharing and to use greater awareness of the issues faced to lead to various forms of activism. With the issue of water in mind, we have begun to ask specific and holistic questions about water in this community, and have begun to learn about how the contamination from exposed pit mines and polluted runoff is affecting the emerging tourist industry they had put so much into.

Finally, I am working on the organizing committee once again for the Lost Rivers Walk I had spoken of during the EWN. This year we will trace the valleys of the rivers that once were the veins of the city on bicycle, as a way of highlighting the links between transportation and water, particularly the incredibly water-intensive practice involved with refining in oil sands. As fuel becomes in increasingly short supply, financially the expensive refining process of this low-quality oil is become "justifiable" - financially, but most certainly not ecologically. The market and technology cannot solve this issue of fuel shortage, it must be solved by creative alternatives not only in modes of transport but also in our connection to local community and the local land, which the bike demonstration will attempt to highlight.

Peace,
Sheryl

From Kim in Florida

I returned home and hit the ground running. One of the first tasks on my personal to-do list was to find a church that I could call home. On my very first visit to the church I was interested in, the entire service was about water! I met the pastor afterwards, and told him about our experiences at the EWN Water Program. He told me about a group he is involved in called FUSE (Faith United for Sustainable Energy) and invited me to a meeting he had scheduled for the following day with an upper level Congressman. I gladly attended, and was really excited for the opportunity to get involved so quickly.

One of the other projects I have been excited about is the Water Certification Program. I have done some research on how to begin to start to consider thinking about creating something of this size. A couple of friends have helped me with some organisational planning, and the good (and bad) news is that nothing like this exists for water. Which means that we won't be duplicating any efforts, but also that we have quite a lot of work to do. I think this is very important though, and entirely possible- so I will keep working on it.

I also have scheduled a talk at the college I attended to discuss the human right to water. It actually has been planned and postponed twice because of scheduling conflicts, but I'm hoping it will actually happen in the next couple weeks, and will be presented as part of a larger course called "Quest for Meaning" where senior students spend their last semester reflecting on their place in this world.

Until next time, may peace and health be with you all!
Much love, Kim

From Kelly in Massachusetts

I have been involved with "Dance for Change" which is a modern dance with theatrical, spiritual, and ballet elements advocating for change in water use. Ecumenical groups in Massachusetts, USA, are interested in sponsoring the dance in churches and an Earth Day festival. Local schools, my college and a middle school, have invited the group to perform. The dance shows water use in places of abundance and places of scarcity and then suggests ways to respond to how water is being used.

Many Americans are unaware of the water issues plaguing the world. Without a strong public awareness activists have weak leverage when advocating for change in water use in government and company policies. Moreover, Americans can be desensitized to major world problems. This dance is a creative way to engage people on issues of water. I hope audience members walk away with a sense of personal responsibility and passion for contributing to community-based development projects in places of scarcity and/or advocating for more sustainable water management in the United States.

I am currently envisioning the project with three parts:

1. The dance itself
2. Members of the hosting congregation or students from the school will have the option of participating in the dance by coming a couple hours early for a rehearsal.
3. Discussion about the dance, water issues, and actions audience members can take following the performance

I currently have six dancers and our first rehearsal is this Saturday. I am so excited!

Peace,
Kelly

From Taneal in Malawi

The knowledge and experience that I have gathered during the Summer School has greatly increased my ambition and passion to make a lasting contribution towards the marginalised communities of Southern Africa, in the area of sustainable water management .

I have observed that a large population of rural dwellers is living under abject poverty and deplorable hygienic conditions and the situation can be easily corrected if proper water management systems are put in place and implemented vigorously.

Rural folk survive mainly on subsistence farming i.e farming for personal consumption. In a typical scenario a family produces food for the whole year during one rainy season. In Southern Africa water is abundant during the rainy season only which usually occurs between November and March. It is during the rainy season only that families can cultivate their pieces of land and produce food to cater for them for the next 11 months which is the period up until the next harvest. During the dry seasons there is no agricultural activity whatsoever a situation which subjects the people to a state of idleness.

In my view, if the water that falls during the rainy season is harnessed and conserved in dams and reservoirs, it can then be used through irrigation networks for agricultural activities long after the rainy season is gone. This will allow families to produce other cash crops which are not necessarily for their personal consumption but for sale to the national or international market. This will go a long way in improving rural families' income levels thereby contributing towards poverty alleviation.

In addition to the above, once water has been harnessed in its reservoirs, it becomes very easy to treat the water and pump it into households for domestic use . This will provide rural folk with access to safe drinking water thereby eradicating cases of unnecessary deaths that are caused by preventable waterborne diseases.

Southern Africa is also prone to periodic droughts and whenever droughts occur the people have no alternative water sources and immediately hunger and famine sets upon them. With a proper water management system in place the people are guaranteed of an alternative source of water during drought periods and they can therefore continue to produce food for themselves despite the poor rainfalls.

In short, the biggest problems that affect rural dwellers in Southern Africa are erratic water supplies due to periodic droughts, short rainy seasons which means short productive periods, zero access to clean drinking water and zero access to water for agricultural activity after the rainy season .

These problems can be eliminated through the aggressive implementation of a proper water management system.

It is my ambition and goal therefore, to set up an organisation that can identify areas that need this water management system, identify the technological requirements of the system to be set up, mobilise relevant resources (both human and technical) required to set up the system, embark on the identified project to set up the water management system and train the local folk on how to maintain and run the water management system on their own once it has been successfully implemented. The organisation would tap into the experiences of developed nations on sustainable water management, and use that experience for the betterment of the people of the 3rd World countries. I

believe my organisation can bridge the technological and informational gap between my people in the remote rural areas of Southern Africa and the people in the developed world.

To achieve the above I would therefore need support from well wishers in the form of Financial Support, Technological Support, Information and Training Support etc

With adequate support I am very confident that we can make a great difference in the lives of millions of people and our success will also make a great difference in our inner selves.

God Bless

From Packiaraj in India

Greetings from India. It's been a long gap since we attended summer school on water. With regard to water initiative, we will have an advocacy session with our diocesan youth this weekend. This is one of the biggest annual youth camp of my diocese and nearly 3000-4000 youth, both boys and girls will gather in a mountain retreat centre and meditate on God's word and refresh their spiritual life. In this camp we are going to launch a general campaign on "Save water and Share water" and hope that it will reach nearly 4000 youth. Keep in touch and make a difference.

Love and blessings
Packia

From Walter in New York City

At the moment, I am in the beginning stages of starting a "Water" department, which would branch off of our Environmental department at Youth Ministries for Peace and Justice. This, of course, would focus on the water issues in New York City. I am also in the middle of trying to incorporate a water segment into our upcoming 2009 Youth Immersion Conference held in New York City. Last year we focused on the poverty issue, this year we want to have a water theme.

Best Regards,
Walter Hidalgo

Angelious in India

(Unfortunately, because of the attacks on Christians in his local area which have continued for a month now, Angelious was unable to contribute but I'd ask that you all continue praying for him and his community, particularly the Christians around him, at this time. – Dave)

Dave from Australia

I have been busy preparing and giving presentations on the topic of the water crisis and various aspects of it. So far they have gone well and I've done well in the ones which I have presented as assignments for subjects. I have a few more in the coming weeks which will hopefully go well too.

So, until next time good luck, have fun and seek to change the world one drop of water at a time, we're all standing together and working with you towards the same overall goal.

Dave