

WaterBytes – The Organization WaterAidAmerica

*Recorded by Abbey Dufoe
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ABBEY: WaterAidAmerica is known as an international non-profit organization dedicated to helping the world's poorest people gain access to safe water and sanitation. Their vision and mission statement is as follows:

DAN: “Our vision is of a world where everyone has access to safe water and sanitation. We transform lives by improving access to safe water, hygiene and sanitation in the world's poorest communities. We work with partners and influence decision-makers to maximize our impact.”

CHARLOTTE: Working with urban and rural areas in sub-Saharan Africa, south Asia, and the Pacific region, the WaterAidAmerica group greatly impacts water accessibility across the world. Throughout their 26 countries, this group creates an infrastructure through sanitation and sustainable technologies to show the leaders of their communities how to more effectively provide water to their citizens.

ABBEY: Because the areas in which WaterAidAmerica works do not have access to clean water, this charity focuses heavily on sanitation and hygiene education. Teaching the communities about the simple act of washing their hands can reduce the risk of diarrheal diseases by a third. This is significant because these diseases kill 4,000 children in the world each day. Children are also more at risk for diseases and in turn cannot go to school because they are too sick. When these communities receive help from WaterAid in the form of latrines, wells, and pumps, the children spend less time retrieving water and being sick, and have more time to go to school. Also, the people of WaterAid take time to teach the children about well and latrine construction, as well as how to help fix the pumps if they happen to break.

CHARLOTTE: Bhushan Tuladhar, leader of WaterAid's partner organization in Nepal discusses the problems caused by bad hygiene and how his organization is working toward sanitation.

CLIP (Bhushan Tuladhar): In the water sector, a lot has been done, but sanitation has been ignored over the years. And over the past ten years if you say that yes, a lot has been done, a lot has been achieved and the number of toilets has gone up significantly but as I said, we still have a long way to go.

CHARLOTTE: Next, Tuladhar speaks about how he promotes sanitation throughout his country.

CLIP (Bhushan Tuladhar): Promoting sanitation is a) a little more difficult [and] b) is not as sexy. Now water: all politicians will promise you that oh, we'll bring water to the village. And it might be easy. There's a source, you put a pipe, you bring the water. Sanitation: you have to go to each and every household, make changes in each and every household, and each and every individual.

CHARLOTTE: Lastly, he speaks about ecological sanitation toilets and how this technology can utilize waste materials and get people excited about using the toilet.

CLIP (Bhushan Tuladhar): Eco-san, or ecological sanitation, is the concept of utilizing waste materials and what we say "closing the loop": closing the loop between waste and agriculture, waste and resource. So what we do is we look at human excreta, both urine and feces, as a valuable resource rather than something that needs to be disposed of. That is a principle difference between ordinary sanitation and ecological sanitation. Ordinary sanitation is treating human excreta as something that is dirty, something that needs to be done away with. So, you get rid of it. Here, we look at it as a resource. Then, a couple of things happen. As soon as you look at it as a resource, a) you can get something back out of it. Okay: so there's a product. Urine is a very good organic fertilizer, so is feces: it's a good soil stabilizer. So once you get a product out of it, the people benefit from it; then, there is actually incentive to use the toilets.

ABBEY: Another problem WaterAidAmerica addresses with their mission is the problems that women have in these communities. Women in places like rural Africa need to collect all the water for the needs of their family. Once these women walk about five miles on average to find a water source, they then have to carry the heavy water jugs back to the village, causing severe health implications like back, neck, and head injuries. If this wasn't enough, usually the source of water they use is polluted or full of disease. Women in more urban areas face the same difficulties. However, sometimes, because they need water to survive, they are forced to buy it from vendors who charge way too much. When WaterAid steps in to help these communities, they make sure that the women are consulted for the placement of latrines and wells, as well as the planning, constructing, and decision making stages. After the wells are built, women are taught how to bank funds and teach others about sanitation and cleanliness. Having the women involved improves community morale. Also, when these women have a higher role in society such as a treasurer or educator, her own status is enhanced.

CHARLOTTE: For more information on how YOU can get involved, visit www.wateraidamerica.org, and follow them on twitter @wateraidamerica.

*WaterAidAmerica.org has asked to be credited in writing wherever the podcast is posted (tumblr).

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