



WATER FOR LIFE
2005-2015

Water for Life Voices

VOICES





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A Decade for action



*“Eradicating extreme poverty is our most **urgent** priority, sustainable development our guide.*

*Universal access to safe water, sanitation and energy will be **critical**.*

*In the **poorest** communities around the world, hundreds of millions of people –**especially women and children**– spend hours each day collecting firewood and water.*

*The health toll from unclean water and household air pollution is **immense**. Inadequate sanitation presents a further **threat to health, dignity and development**.*

Some 2.5 billion people lack access to adequate sanitation; some 1 billion people practice open defecation.

Access to safe drinking water, sanitation and hygiene must feature prominently in the post-2015 development agenda.

***We must improve** water quality and the management of water resources and wastewater. **This is a matter of justice and opportunity.**”*

Ban Ki-moon, Secretary General of the United Nations



“I actually had a dream that clean water came to our village...”

Munsie Tampo, Village Chief, Ngaliema, Democratic Republic of Congo



***“Water holds the key** to sustainable development, we must work together to protect and carefully manage this fragile, finite resource”*

Ban Ki-moon, Secretary General of the United Nations



***“If we get safe water, that’s the real medication for us. Water is life.
No one can live without safe water.”***

Citizen, Bangladesh

The 'Water for Life' Decade 2005-2015

Water literally permeates every aspect of human life: food, sanitation and health, economic development, women empowerment, energy needs, climate change, and more.

The United Nations system has worked hard during the Water Decade, not only to inform about water issues but also to develop and coordinate water programmes that have improved lives around the world.



"We have built this well by our own hands for the village."

Citizen, Palo de Lapa, State of León, Nicaragua

Water is vital, for food, for energy. For life

The UN launched the 'Water for Life' Decade 2005-2015 to raise the profile of the need for action on water and sanitation issues; to ensure implementation of life-changing work of water programmes and projects.

10 years have passed.

Life has changed for the better, for humans around the world. The world can take pride in these achievements.



"We used to rely on water from the stream. Our children used to get diarrhoea. Now we have clean, safe water so close by. It makes life so much better for us."

Jillo Fofanah, Sierra Leone

An exhibition of the voices of the 'Water for Life' Decade

To celebrate the conclusion of the UN-Water Decade for Action 'Water is Life' 2005-2015, this exhibition brings the voices of the beneficiaries of water projects and programmes to UN Headquarters.

The Decade has seen significant progress in all areas of the water sector – from hitting the Millennium Development Goal for access to an improved water source five years ahead of schedule to improved collaboration between private companies, governments and other water stakeholders – this has been a Decade of change.



"We joined the brigade because we really wanted to help promote health and hygiene in our school."

Seya, 8. Democratic Republic of Congo

The exhibit has four distinct sections

The first part, titled Voices of Progress, presents testimonies and stories from those who have witnessed firsthand the transformative power of access to clean water and improved sanitation.

The second, Voices of Pride, presents the testimonies of those whose communities have been empowered to become part of their own solutions, and have reaped social, economic, health and educational rewards from doing so.

Part three displays Voices of Hope, with testimonies from people on the improvements they will need for a sustainable future. The Decade may be ending, but the work is far from complete.

The final part of the exhibition gives voice to the planet, which is suffering from the impact of man-made changes. The new Sustainable Development Goals bring hope to many, to people and to the planet, from east to west and from north to south.

We invite you to add your voice to those in the exhibition. Humankind is notable for its rich diversity; yet we are all the same in our need for water and sanitation.

Go Deeper

'Go Deeper' into the work of these groups with your mobile device, via QR codes in the image-panels. These link to thematic information (such as 'Water and Energy'), project case studies and video.

Try out QR codes that link to our thematic areas throughout this book

Go deeper here



"We wanted drinking water, and that is why we had to build a village pond and a well ourselves."
Kakuben, India



*The **potential gap** between water demand and available supply of water resources in different countries **has opened a lot of eyes**"*

Anders Berntell, Executive Director at Water Resources Group

Voices of Progress

The world has made significant progress in providing people with access to safe water and adequate sanitation. We have learned **that providing these services** is one of the most efficient ways of improving human health.



"We want to see that there is no more open defecation."
Chief Richard Rangu, South Sudan

- Since 1990 more than 2.3 billion people have gained access to an improved source of drinking water.
- From 1990 to 2012, almost 2 billion people gained access to a latrine, flush toilet or other improved sanitation facilities, representing a staggering 64% of the global population.
- Despite the economic crisis, aid for sanitation and drinking-water continues to rise. The total amount of aid commitments for sanitation and water have increased 30% from USD 8.3 billion to USD 10.9 billion from 2010 to 2012.

Access to safe water and adequate sanitation has other important benefits – from costs avoided, time saved, well-being, dignity, privacy and safety.



"I remember how shocked the community was when we saw how easily kaka could be transferred to food by flies."

Iye Ramman, Sierra Leone

Over the Decade, our remit has taken us from improving access to sanitation, to recognizing the human right to water and sanitation, better understanding the water and energy nexus, facilitating women's involvement in water and sanitation issues, considering water and food linkages, highlighting water scarcity and better positioning water resources management and the importance of improving water cooperation.



***“Give me a buried pipe distribution network, reaching 300 feet in each direction;
our solar pump can irrigate at least 100 bigha.”***

Rural Farmer, India

We have a lot of numbers. Some of them are overwhelming. For example, 748 million people still lack access to safe water – more than the combined populations of the USA, Brazil and Russia.

Our efforts are making a difference. To one person at a time.

Listen to their voices.



“When you empower women they can turn this world upside down.”
Rehema Bavuma, Katosi Women’s Development Trust, Uganda



*“One of the differences is that **things that were crazy ideas** 10 years ago **are now** being discussed as **quite sensible solutions**”*

Clarissa Brocklehurst, Independent Consultant in Water and Sanitation

Voices of Pride



Ten years! Water has proved to be a more complicated issue than most of us thought.

But now, we understand better just how it connects every facet of our lives.

We know improving access to drinking water and basic sanitation means better

health, so people can work, children can grow.

Economies can flourish.

“Before children were sick, vomiting, but now children are not falling sick. The flies that used to go around here are no more. The smell that was everywhere is no more.”

Martin Dewaun Ayoo, Carpenter, Nigeria

We have identified the yawning gap between access in cities and rural areas and tried to close it. As more people move to urban areas, we have tried to ensure infrastructure can support them.



"I started to organise activities, such as a mass water filtration exercise, to spread this water message across the community."

Terence Kam, Secretary, T-net Club@Taman Jurong, Singapore

Our insatiable desire for energy has led to concern about the availability of fossil fuels, but we have recognised that water is just as necessary to keep our lights shining, our cars rolling.



"With the glacier in Bhutan we hope for the best and prepare for the worst."
Dasho Dzungda, Bhutan

And we have learned that women – who often bear the burden of water management in the home – when empowered, can transform communities and take control of their futures.



“Baa baa Bengaluru, have you any lakes?”

No sir, no sir, we gave them all away. Some for shopping malls, some for hotels, and the rest to the landsharks who laughed all day.”

Citizen, Bangalore

We have learned to listen, as well as to talk. To people on both sides where water bodies cross national boundaries. And to the private sector, who have proved to be willing partners once they too recognised that water is a finite resource.



"We have to think about those people. We have to use just enough water to farm our land."
Traipob Sae Yang, Thailand

Today there are an increasing number of people, groups, engaging to resolve the issues that really affect them. These initiatives deserve recognition and can serve as an example for the next generation, as well as this one.



"We wash our hands to eat, and when we go to the toilet. Because there can be 'bichos' [bugs]."
Citizens, Education unit of Sallani, Bolivia

We are proud of those who made a difference.

We are not finished yet.



*“I’m optimistic about it because **history shows humanity has a formidable capacity to resolve issues** and three thirds of the surface of the globe is water. It’s really a question of preserving the quality of the water we have”*

Flemming Winther Olsen, Senior Technical Advisor, Department for Environment,
Energy and Climate, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark

Voices of Hope

The ideal of a better water and sanitation situation has not come true for everyone.

- 748 million people still do not have access to an improved source of drinking-water.
- 2.5 billion lack access to improved sanitation.
- Over 1 billion people still practice open defecation.
- Almost 1 billion people were chronically undernourished in 2010-2012, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa (239 million) and Asia (563 million).
- Half the world's wetlands were lost during the last century.
- Human activities are significantly altering the basic chemical cycles upon which all ecosystems depend.



"It was a great surprise to hear the birdsong in the mornings."

Citizen, Qunli New Town, People's Republic of China

Tomorrow must provide an even more enabling environment for cooperation, for clean energy, for sustainable development, for the planet, for women's engagement.

It is in everyone's interest that we make this happen.



“Thank you for coming and helping us as the municipal garden was often my family’s only source of vegetables, but it inevitably fails because there is no water.”

Alexandra Ding, Pays Bassari, Senegal

We have to keep working. Talking about progress and citing figures is meaningless to a human who still lacks access to safe drinking water or to basic sanitation.



“We had many problems with the water. Cholera was hitting the area, and we were drinking any type of water without treating it. People were getting sick.”

Celianne Jean, Village of Petit Bourg du Borgne, Haiti

The Decade is drawing to a close, but the work goes on. The post-2015 development agenda –negotiated right now in the framework of the UN General Assembly– is on the horizon.



“For us, the water is very sacred. Because we take care of the water, we have five hundred trees when before we had only one.”

Sofia, Chitejé Community, Garabato, Amealco Querétaro, Mexico

And we are not finished yet.

We implore you to keep working, negotiating, thinking, researching, sharing ideas that can make the world a more sustainable place, and thus a better place to live in.

We still have room for hope. But the only future we have is one we will build together.



“The Water Decade made a significant change in the public debate. Before there was no clear understanding of how water is interlinked and interdependent with other sectors. The Water Decade has created more understanding not only on the human dimension of water, but also on the political dimension of the water and its role to improve livelihoods of people.”

Fritz Holzwarth, Former Water and Marine Director, Government of Germany



“When I grow up, I hope my children will be able to have enough clean and safe water so we can live happily.”

Citizen, Africa



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