

# Ripples in the Water

## **The Ecumenical Water Network**



A project of the World Council of Churches

# Ripples in the Water

## Success Stories of Churches Striving for Water Justice

Edited by Susan Kim  
and Maike Gorsboth



World Council  
of Churches  
Publications

## RIPPLES IN THE WATER

Success Stories of Churches Striving for Water Justice

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# Foreword

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This short book tells the stories of people and churches who envision a world in which life-giving water is preserved and shared for the benefit of all people and the whole of God's creation. It is about how they pursue that common dream in practice – how they take action, both individually and together.

Participants and friends of the Ecumenical Water Network (EWN) offer a sample of how churches and their partners address water as part of our broader commitment to peace, justice, and the integrity of creation.

I hope you will feel as inspired as I did when you read these stories. You will find that there is no 'blueprint' – there are many different ways in which churches are addressing the water crisis locally and globally. Some do so with a lot of resources at their disposal, while some are based almost entirely on the energy and commitment of volunteers. Many start small and grow larger over time.

As different as the approaches and activities are, they all underline the fact that momentum grows from the bottom. The Ecumenical Water Network gets its power from what its participants and partners do. Our global network rests on the passion, experience, and expertise that flow from their work at the grassroots.

Thanks to our participants and their efforts, EWN can be a source of inspiration and learning, a platform for exchange and collaboration, an expression of solidarity and a global ecumenical voice in the debate on the ethical use of water and the implementation of the right to water and sanitation.

As coordinator of the network since its Secretariat was created as a project of the World Council of Churches (WCC), it has been an amazing and rewarding experience to have worked with people who are so passionate about water as a gift of God and a human right.

A special thank you has to go to those who have served in the International Reference Group of the network in the course of the past years, faithfully helping to keep EWN on course in waters that are not always easy to navigate.

While the time and energy so generously contributed by many individuals, groups, and organizations are the wind in our sails, the building and maintenance of our EWN boat would not have been possible without the financial support of our core funding partners, who have made it possible for the WCC to run the EWN Secretariat: Brot für die Welt (Germany), the Church of Sweden, Church World Service (USA), Norwegian Church Aid, and the United Church of Canada.

Many churches and others are already taking action, in many different ways. Obviously, this includes many who are not (yet) part of EWN! If you are one of them, I hope these stories may inspire you to add your voice, knowledge, and passion to this global and ecumenical endeavour.

I would like to close with a biblical quote that expresses (better than my own words could) my hopes and wishes for the future of the Ecumenical Water Network.

*Blessed are those who trust in the LORD,  
whose trust is the LORD.  
They shall be like a tree planted by water,  
sending out its roots by the stream.  
It shall not fear when heat comes,  
and its leaves shall stay green;  
in the year of drought it is not anxious,  
and it does not cease to bear fruit. (Jer 17:7-8)*

*Maike Gorsboth*

Coordinator of the Ecumenical Water Network, 2007–2012

# Preface

From Guatemala to Nigeria, and through many other countries, members of the Ecumenical Water Network (EWN) are not only striving to protect water as a precious resource but also to protect fair access to drinking water and sanitation.

For the Rev. José Pilar Álvarez Cabrera, a member of the Guatemalan Lutheran Church, being an EWN member means defending his homeland against national and transnational companies that plan to build hydroelectric mega-project and extract precious natural resources through mining.

For each of the stories told in this series, there are thousands more across the globe that are untold yet represent a clear threat to the life of present and future generations. The EWN members featured in these pages work in vastly different ways, but they have one commonality: they are personally carrying water justice into their local communities, through their churches and organizations.

Whether they're working to build coalitions, starting fundraising campaigns or offering educational materials about water, these EWN members exhibit a passion that shines in each of their stories. For many of them, the sharing of "good practices" helps them not only start water-related projects but also carry them through challenging times, strengthen their resolve for water justice and increase their visibility.

David Weaver, senior adviser for Global Advocacy for the U.S.-based Church World Service, points out that EWN is a resource for individuals as well as groups. "I recommend that individuals concerned on water justice issues, link their congregation, diocese, or other church body with EWN, since EWN is a network of organizations committed to protect, preserve and share water for all, equitably."

We hope that, by reading these stories, you too may be inspired to move forward toward facilitating equitable access to water and sanitation for all.

Susan Kim



# Introduction

## The Churches and Water Justice

*In baptism we use your gift of water,  
which you have made a rich symbol  
of the grace you give us in this sacrament.  
At the very dawn of creation  
your Spirit breathed on the waters,  
making them the wellspring of all holiness.*  
—Great Vigil of Easter

*In the beginning, the Spirit of God moved over the water, calling forth creation and life. Death came upon the earth in the form of a massive flood during Noah's time. Hagar found a well in the wilderness that became saving water for her and her child Ishmael. The Israelites passed through the waters of the Red Sea, and were nourished in the desert by the water flowing from the rock. Jesus invited the Samaritan woman and all of us to believe in him and quench our thirst eternally with the "living water" he offered.*



The biblical stories of water reflect our present-day reality and engagement with this basic element of life and death. From the moment our lives begin, water is key to our future. Without it, we will die. We drink it, cook with it, bathe in it, wash clothes and dishes and floors with it, nourish animals and plants with it, and use it in manufacturing of all kinds. As Christians, we are baptized in it.

Water is a primary force in our lives that is often beyond our control. When it unleashes its full strength through hurricanes or floods or blizzards, and when it dries up completely, we recognize its true power over us.

## **Water for Life, Peace, and Justice**

*A world where water is preserved and shared for the benefit of all people and the whole of God's Creation.*

—Vision statement of the Ecumenical Water Network

Billions of people all over the world today still have no or only insufficient access to clean water and safe sanitation. Pressure on the world's water resources is ever increasing as a result of unsustainable economic growth, population growth, changing life-styles, and urbanization. Climate change is aggravating the scarcity and unequal distribution of water. It has been estimated that by 2025, some 1.8 billion people will live in areas facing acute water scarcity.

This global water crisis is putting at risk lives and livelihoods. It is doing irreversible harm to the integrity of creation. It leads to conflicts over the distribution and use of water that threaten peace among nations and within communities. The crisis is both a reflection and a cause of unacceptable injustice and inequity. Those who suffer the brunt of the burden are the most vulnerable and poor.

The Ecumenical Water Network (EWN) was thus created to promote life, peace, and justice by working towards a world where water is preserved and shared for the benefit of all people and the whole of God's Creation.

Dr Asa Elfstrom, from the Church of Sweden, a founding member of EWN, underlines that lack of access to water is a key development issue of our time and at the same time "a deep concern for Christians because in the Bible we see water as the foundation for life and as a gift from God – and no living thing, human, animal, or plant, can survive without water."

The partners who formed EWN in 2005 included the World Council of Churches, member churches, global Christian world communions, regional ecumenical organizations, and ecumenical agencies. They were

and remain united by the conviction that the preservation, responsible management, and equitable distribution of water is one of the most urgent practical, as well as ethical, challenges of our times.

In Porto Alegre in 2006, the ninth assembly of the World Council of Churches confirmed the mandate of the Ecumenical Water Network with its statement on “Water for Life”:

Water is a symbol of life. The Bible affirms water as the cradle of life, an expression of God’s grace in perpetuity for the whole of creation (Gen 2:5ff). It is a basic condition for all life on Earth (Gen 1:2ff.) and is to be preserved and shared for the benefit of all creatures and the wider creation. Water is the source of health and well-being and requires responsible action from us human beings, as partners and priests of Creation (Rom 8:19 ff., Rev 22).

As churches, we are called to participate in the mission of God to bring about a new creation where life in abundance is assured to all (John 10:10; Amos 5:24). It is therefore right to speak out and to act when the life-giving water is pervasively and systematically under threat.

## Churches for Water: Supporting and Accompanying Communities

*“The momentum arises from the bottom up.”*  
—David Weaver, Church World Service

*Around the world, churches and their partners are accompanying communities that are struggling for water and for their right to clean water and safe sanitation. They are involved in the funding and implementation of water-related projects. And they support and stand in solidarity with communities that are unjustly being deprived of their access to water or find themselves involved in conflicts over water and related natural resources.*

There are many different ways in which churches and related partners are addressing the water crisis locally and globally. Agencies like Norwegian Church Aid and Church World Service are implementing water and sanitation projects that aim at improving and protecting the health and livelihoods of communities in poor countries.

Many congregations contribute by giving regularly from their offerings to support such work, or even go a step further and, like the First Congregational United Church of Christ in Salem, Oregon, build partnerships with communities in need and plan and implement projects together with them. Such projects cover a broad range of activities, like constructing and managing water systems, building hygienic toilets, or helping small-scale farmers make more efficient and sustainable use of water for agriculture.

Besides the direct response to the needs of communities that lack access to clean water and safe sanitation, the diaconal practice of churches and other Christian organizations also includes empowering and accompanying communities as they struggle to claim or defend their rights to access and manage their sources of water. The Guatemalan Lutheran Church (ILUGUA), for example, helped form the Association for the Protection of Las Granadillas Mountain, where communities are struggling to protect the biodiversity and water sources.

Their peaceful protest is founded on the belief that equitable water distribution is possible and that by working together they can make a difference, despite the opposition of powerful landowners and corporations.

*“Across the world, communities are successfully engaging in peaceful protests and seeking water justice. (...) Find ways to share your experiences. Join in common prayer and accompany – in both a physical and spiritual sense – people who are unjustly attacked. EWN’s voice can help you publicly denounce – before the international community (...) instances of attacks and human rights violations.”*

—Rev. José Pilar Álvarez Cabrera, Guatemalan Lutheran Church (ILUGUA)

## Raising Water Consciousness

Churches are uniquely placed to raise awareness about the links between water and life, peace, justice, and the ethical and spiritual dimensions of the water crisis.

Public and expert debate often focuses on technological, financial, and economic issues, and on how to promote the efficient allocation and use of water – all key aspects of finding and implementing solutions to the global water crisis.

Churches are adding an important voice to this debate as they highlight the ethical imperative to protect and prioritize the rights and needs of the poor and vulnerable. From their own experience of accompanying communities, they draw attention to imbalances in political and economic power among the involved stakeholders and water users.

One important contribution of churches and their partners can be to underline ethical aspects and the spiritual, cultural, and social meaning of water, which goes beyond the understanding of water as a mere resource, a commodity, or a service.

“From a spiritual perspective, we try to encourage congregations to discuss how we, together with the world around us, can safely and joyfully use this wonderful gift of water that the Creator has provided,” says David Weaver from Church World Service, a member of EWN, about the organization’s work.

## Common Voice and Action: The Ecumenical Water Network

Building on the work of its participants, the Ecumenical Water Network increases the visibility of church-based efforts to promote the fair and sustainable use and sharing of water, aggregating and amplifying Christian voices at the global level. “Through EWN, small initiatives at a community level can resonate across the globe,” said Dinesh Suna from CASA in India, a member of the network. At the same time, EWN provides a platform through which its participants can share their experiences and good

practices, express solidarity, and build partnerships across denominations and regions.

An important objective of EWN is to promote reflection, discussion, and action on the human right to water and sanitation and on the more just and sustainable use of water by the global Christian community and other faith-based and secular partners.

The website, newsletter, and publications produced by the EWN Secretariat, in close collaboration with the members of the network, are one way of doing so. The Seven Weeks for Water are an example of how the resources EWN provides build on the experiences of churches and ecumenical partners worldwide. In this annual Lenten initiative, EWN publishes biblical reflections, liturgical materials, background resources, and ideas for what churches, congregations, and individuals can do in their respective contexts.

The links between water, justice, and peace were the theme of the 2011 Seven Weeks for Water, EWN's contribution to the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation (IEPC) in Jamaica, where water was one of the issues that emerged as a source of potential conflict in the world. Olav Fykse Tveit, General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, highlighted that the WCC was supporting the Ecumenical Water Network as one way of demonstrating "the link between peace with nature, and peace between peoples."

Informed and inspired by EWN's Summer School on Water in 2008, a young member of the Presbyterian Synod of the West in Nigeria was able to build the commitment in his church that led to the creation of its very own Preach Water Foundation.

Preach Water is based on the energy and time of volunteers from the church, who organize events on World Water Day, address water issues by giving interviews and public speeches, and engage in dialogue with public authorities. Its members also supported an international film crew in producing a documentary that featured, among other issues, the difficult situation of communities in the informal settlements of Lagos.

To inspire, enable, and connect the building of personal relationships is important. The regional consultations organized by the network in Africa, Latin America, and Asia over the past few years have been important opportunities for exchange and debate, for common strategy development, and for the creation of personal relationships that served as a base for future cooperation.

EWN puts special emphasis on involving and encouraging young people: for example, by organizing training like the Summer School on Water in 2008 and Youth for Eco-Justice in 2011 – the latter in cooperation with other WCC departments and the Lutheran World Federation.

EWN has also been highlighting water at key international church events, such as the All Africa Conference of Churches in 2008 and the Uniting General Council of the World Communion of Reformed Churches in 2010.

One way of increasing the visibility and voice of faith-based initiatives has been the facilitation of individual and joint activities of EWN participants at events like the international World Water Forum and the World Water Week. During the Rio+20 summit in Brazil, for example, EWN organized a side event on the spirituality of water with the United Religions Initiative.

*“I believe EWN offers Christians ways to live out their ethical position on the matter of water, and EWN also increases our collective strength and resolve to resist unjust solutions.”*

—Dr Asa Elfstrom, Church of Sweden

EWN also helps its members to stay informed about and contribute to other UN processes. Through a joint submission of good practices facilitated by EWN and the ACT Alliance, church-related organizations were able to contribute to a book on good practices in implementing the rights to water and sanitation that was published by Catarina de Albuquerque, the UN Special Rapporteur on the rights to drinking water and sanitation.

Assisting churches to advocate with public authorities for the recognition and implementation of the right to water has been another very important part of the work of EWN over the past few years. The WCC Central

Committee noted in 2011 that more needed to be done “to ensure that policies and other measures reach the poor and most vulnerable, as access to water and sanitation is still marked by discrimination, injustice and inequality.”

All of the above-mentioned activities of EWN and its members are gradually helping give shape to a common ecumenical voice on water issues at the global level. The “Statement on the Human Right to Water and Sanitation” by the WCC Central Committee is an expression of a growing common understanding and concern shared by the churches.

*“A lot of us have great potentials hidden inside us waiting to be energized. (...) It takes a little effort to create the needed critical mass of persons that can change the world for good. EWN should not relent in its efforts.”*

—Dr John O. Egbuta, currently chairman of Preach Water, Nigeria

## **An Invitation to Join the Ecumenical Water Network**

The water and sanitation crisis will continue to be a threat to justice, peace, and the integrity of creation. It is the poorest and most vulnerable – the widows, orphans, and oppressed of our times – whose lives and livelihoods are most at risk when their sources of water run dry, become polluted, or turn into sources of conflict and objects of competition.

Churches and their partners have an important and unique contribution to make in identifying and promoting solutions that are ethically sound and that help build peace among people as well as peace with the Earth.

Many churches and others are already taking action, in many different ways. EWN and its members will continue their work of raising awareness, advocating, and educating for a world where water is preserved and shared for the benefit of all people and the whole of God’s Creation.

We hope you may join us.

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# 1. Peacefully Defending Water in Guatemala

## The Guatemalan Lutheran Church

In northeastern Guatemala, the Las Granadillas Mountain region contains the precious main source of water for more than 200,000 people in Central America's driest area.

For many years, water sources on the mountain have been increasingly threatened by invasive activities, including mining, cattle raising, and single-crop farming.

In 2003, seeking fair access to water, local people approached the Guatemalan Lutheran Church (ILUGUA) for support. ILUGUA helped form the Association for the Protection of Las Granadillas Mountain. Its mission is to protect and defend the biodiversity and water sources on the land.

In 2008, powerful landowners built a padlocked gateway around the Las Granadillas water sources to prevent local people from entering. Communities were thwarted in their attempt to talk with landowners and so, in 2009, the local people mounted a peaceful protest by blocking the landowners' access to the land.

Those advocating for water justice were threatened, defamed, and charged as criminals. The Rev. José Pilar Álvarez Cabrera, a member of ILUGUA, was one of the people who was detained.

Standing together in ecumenical prayer, members of ILUGUA and the association accompanied Cabrera and others who had been unfairly accused to their hearing. The case against them was dismissed.

## About ILUGUA

ILUGUA accompanies and supports rural and indigenous Mayan communities of ethnic Chortí in the mountainous region of Zacapa and Chiquimula, Guatemala, particularly in the Las Granadillas Mountain region.

For these communities, peaceful resistance has become a way of life.

“They are defending their homeland against national and transnational companies that plan to build hydroelectric mega-projects, mine metals, and extract other natural resources. This represents a clear threat to the life of present and future generations,” said Cabrera.

The peaceful protest is founded on the belief that equitable water distribution is possible in Guatemala. Working towards a solution involves supporting sustainable agriculture, explained Cabrera. “Environmentally friendly agriculture would strengthen food supplies for communities while at the same time ensuring a harmonious coexistence between humans and the environment.”

## Building a Coalition

The peaceful protest as an action has united communities, churches, social organizations, and human rights defenders. “As we have grown into an ecumenical movement, we have been able to overcome threats, criminal accusations, intimidation, and even attacks,” said Cabrera.

As the peaceful ecumenical water justice movement grew in Guatemala, the Las Granadillas Mountain story became a landmark case that was presented before international human rights organizations, including the Inter-American Human Rights Commission. Since then, the government of Guatemala has publicly committed to protect and conserve the Las Granadillas Mountain and establish a wellhead protection reserve. “This promise has not yet been fulfilled,” added Cabrera.

ILUGUA and the Association for the Protection of Las Granadillas Mountain continue to stay together despite constant pressure from some farmers and corporate managers in the area who seek to divide and disrupt the group.

In a decade-long struggle, there is quite a bit to admire about the spirit of the local community, reflected Cabrera.

Companies often use the corrupted mechanisms of the state military and police in an attempt to silence peaceful calls for just water. “They have even gone to the extent of hiring killers to eliminate the defenders of human rights in Guatemala,” said Cabrera.

But he believes, through all things, members of the local community will prevail.

“In their wisdom and experience, they have and they will manage to stay together until they are satisfied that water is being equitably distributed and the environment fairly protected,” he said.

## Tips from Rev. Cabrera

- *Use the Ecumenical Water Network (EWN) as a resource.* EWN can help you document and communicate specific cases of attacks on people who defend the human right to water. “EWN’s voice can help you publicly denounce – before the international community – these instances of attacks and human rights violations,” he said.
- *Share your experiences.* Start and continue dialogue through EWN as well as local and regional associations and ecumenical organizations. Find ways to share your experiences. Join in common prayer and accompany – in both a physical and spiritual sense – people who are unjustly attacked.
- *Seek knowledge of best practices.* “Across the world, communities are successfully engaging in peaceful protests and seeking water justice,” explains Cabrera. “You can learn from their feedback.”



## 2. Drink Water for Life Campaign Steadily Growing

### First Congregational United Church of Christ

Susan L. Smith issued a challenge to her home church in the United States: to make the Lenten season meaningful by “drinking water for life.”

In other words, she asked her fellow church members to drink tap water instead of expensive coffees, teas, liquor, sodas, or even bottled water. With the money they saved, the congregation pledged to finance a well in a village somewhere in the world. The Drink Water for Life campaign was born.

The church – First Congregational United Church of Christ (UCC) in Salem, Oregon – determined that they needed \$3,500 to sink a single well.

But it took longer to raise the money than Smith expected. “The congregation gave \$2,900,” she explained. “I gave a 10 percent match – in addition to my latte money – of \$300, and yet we didn’t have the \$3,500.”

The church decided to use \$300 from the children’s offering to make up the difference.

After researching villages in need of water, Smith narrowed the choice down to Narok, Kenya, or Chorreron, Honduras. She presented a poster portraying both villages to the children in the church to let them make the decision.

“And then the children spoke,” said Smith. “The children said ‘both,’ knowing that it would require lemonade stands, car washes, pledges from adults, and charging for coffee at fellowship. They decided to send the

money to Narok, but they decided that they want to raise more money to give Chorreron water.”

## **A Turn toward Haiti**

Following those two projects, Smith and her church began turning their attention to Haiti, the nation in the world with the least available clean water.

Smith began to form a relationship with the Peasant Movement of Papay (MPP), a local Haitian partner that was able to develop water projects but lacked the funds to carry them out.

“Our water funds and MPP’s technical expertise are a match made in heaven,” said Smith. After several trips to Haiti, and after exploring options with MPP’s experts, Smith began speaking to other congregations back in the US about developing water sources in a village called Zabriko, along with other locations in Haiti. Water is supplied to local people when springs are capped and the water is stored in a reservoir, then piped to community fountains.

“More than a dozen churches plus several schools now help fund the Zabriko project,” she said.

## **Water as a Matter of Justice**

Smith said her personal involvement in the Ecumenical Water Network (EWN) over many years has helped hone her thinking about water justice. At the first EWN participant forum, she said she was confronted by passionate human rights arguments of participants from Brazil and elsewhere.

“Those arguments addressed the issue as one of justice – the element of discourse so often absent in resource policy discussion. Even though I remained skeptical about the enforceability of international human rights law, I began to understand that one has to address these issues as issues of justice, ethics, and human rights,” she concluded.

Smith said she will never forget the first time she became passionate about international water development issues, which was when she was preparing to give a lecture. “As I read, I was captured not by legal questions, not by legal structures to create integrated water management, not even by the ‘legal’ question of whether there is a human right to water – but instead I was fascinated by the modest amount of money necessary to bring clean, safe drinking water to the world: \$15 billion a year for 10 years, a pittance, a few weeks of our war in Iraq.”

## Thinking of Starting a Water Justice Movement in Your Church?

Smith’s best practices included these three:

1. *Research first.* With the help of resources provided by EWN, Smith researched how much money the church needed to raise, which villages needed water, and the best-suited project for the local people. “I started by exploring how I could help bring clean, safe drinking water to the world,” explained Smith.
2. *Seek involvement from church members from all ages and stages.* During the very first Drink Water for Life effort, it was the children’s offering that helped Smith raise the amount needed to sink the very first well. “I decided that if the children’s money was making it happen, they should decide which village should get the well,” said Smith.
3. *Keep momentum going.* Smith, by passionately speaking about her project, continues to grow the campaign into other churches. “I served as a water justice intern assigned to staff the [UCC] Wider Church Ministries team and the Justice & Witness team. This allowed me to reach out to people all over the conference with the message about the Zabriko project and bringing clean water to Haiti.”



# 3. Preach Water Foundation: Do Not Relent

## Presbyterian Synod of the West, Nigeria

The first spark of awareness flickered in 2008, when Oji Chukwuemeka Roderick, a law student and Presbyterian youth leader, travelled from Nigeria to attend EWN's Summer School on Water.

Roderick and his Christian peers from around the globe pledged to return to their home countries and defend water as a precious resource.

In Nigeria, water is often a vehicle for corruption. Small plastic pouches of water are sold on the streets for less than a nickel. Though the pouches are called "pure water," this is a misnomer, said Roderick, since the water often comes from a suspect source with a fictional license number.

Roderick decided to fan his spark of awareness into a small but intense flame of advocacy for clean water. He started in his own church, and began working to increase support in the Presbyterian Synod of the West.

Simply put, he refused to relent. "I continued doggedly, utilizing my positions as the youth president of both my church and the Christian council, and also as an ordained elder of The Presbyterian Church of Nigeria," he said. "The big break came finally by June 2009, as my church prepared for our annual assembly. I asked and was granted permission to present a paper."

Six months later, a non-governmental organization (NGO) – the Preach Water Foundation – was created.

## **Powered by Volunteers**

Today, the Preach Water Foundation is a thriving, volunteer-based NGO, powered by a collective enthusiasm and dedication that manages to stretch very limited resources.

The results of these highly engaged volunteers are concrete and increasingly visible.

Through Preach Water, the Presbyterian Church has provided three water points for a community in Lagos, Nigeria, and its nearby neighbourhoods. The foundation has also engaged in educational and awareness campaigns on water, hygiene, and sanitation. Most recently, in 2012, Preach Water further stepped up its efforts on World Water Day, publicly engaging with Lagos government officials in a discussion aired by the Nigerian Television Authority.

## **An Active Participant in EWN**

Preach Water has also taken a lead role in EWN's international forum. Oji participated, along with other EWN partners, in the World Communion of Reformed Churches, held in the US in 2010. He worked with others to develop and organize a joint workshop on water and raise awareness among the other delegates about the importance of including water on the agenda. The efforts came to fruition when the communion officially urged its churches to support and adopt a declaration on water as a human right and a public good.

Later that year, the secretary-general of Preach Water, the Rev. Davies T.O. Faleye, participated in EWN's Global Forum. He shared the accomplishments of the foundation and also noted that EWN's support was crucial in igniting that first spark of awareness about water justice.

## **“EWN Should Not Relent”**

Dr. John O. Egbuta, currently chairman of Preach Water, said that there are great possibilities surrounding people who get involved in EWN. Egbuta is known as a passionate speaker on water justice issues. Featured in an award-winning Swiss documentary produced by DocLab, Egbuta strongly believes that a small spark of awareness can develop into a wide-spread movement.

“A lot of us have great potentials hidden inside us waiting to be energized,” he said. “What EWN is doing globally has the potential for raising many people to the level of national heroes. It takes a little effort to create the needed critical mass of persons that can change the world for good. EWN should not relent in its efforts.”

## **The Goals of the Preach Water Foundation**

The Preach Water Foundation’s clearly defined goals, listed below, could be adapted by other organizations in other countries.

1. Mobilizing churches and church leaders on water rights issues.
2. Creating a functional secretariat.
3. Identifying and networking with allies, friends and other water-related NGOs.
4. Organizing data collection and monitoring.
5. Planning training and workshops to educate schools and civil society.
6. Providing access to water where it is most needed as an act of service and a way of witnessing to the gospel.
7. Maintaining very strong ties with EWN.



## 4. Water Justice Can Begin with Just One Person

### Church World Service, USA

*“Me? Help pursue clean water for the world? How?”*

For many people living in the US and other industrialized countries, global water shortages seem to be a faraway, unsolvable problem.

But if just one person takes one simple action, it is indeed a step on the road to global water justice, explained David Weaver, senior adviser for Global Advocacy for the US-based Church World Service (CWS).

Weaver, who helps oversee complex advocacy issues and projects related to water across the world, is also able to pare down his thoughts for people who want to take their first practical action in the movement towards water accessibility for all people.

He asks: “As an individual, why don’t you visit the Ecumenical Water Network (EWN) website and sign up for the newsletter?”

Getting educated about water issues is the first step towards becoming part of the solution, Weaver said.

### **Then... Tap Your Group**

After learning the basics about water justice, an individual can then communicate with his or her faith-based network, suggested Weaver. “For a

congregation just beginning its foray into water justice, a great program is the Seven Weeks for Water series,” he said.

Seven Weeks for Water is a resource found on the EWN website that offers facts, Bible reflections, and other materials for congregations.

“Use Seven Weeks for Water or other EWN resources to suggest ideas or actions for your congregation,” urged Weaver. “Then I recommend that individuals link their congregation, diocese, or other church body with EWN, since EWN is a network of organizations.”

## **“Very Different Concept in the US”**

In the US, people often have to be taught how water, for millions of people, is related to issues of wealth, property, and human dignity. “Water justice is a very different concept in the US,” Weaver said. “From a spiritual perspective, we try to encourage congregations to discuss how we, together with the world around us, can safely and joyfully use this wonderful gift of water that the Creator has provided.”

Though water is a cheap, accessible resource for the vast majority of people in the US, there are communities that do not have access to clean, safe water. “On Indian reservations, in inner-city neighborhoods, in poor communities in Appalachia – there, water becomes an issue of wealth and poverty in the US,” he said, “and only lately are people beginning to come into awareness that water is an abundant resource but not an infinite one.”

## **The CWS/EWN Partnership**

CWS is an official participant organization of EWN. In addition, Weaver serves on EWN’s International Reference Group.

Weaver believes that water is increasingly recognized as a human right by faith-based and secular groups worldwide.

“The question is, how do we keep that going and build momentum?” he reflected. “We are working very collaboratively with similar-minded organizations.”

In fact, CWS and EWN have collaborated for many years, first as they advocated for the recognition of the right to water and sanitation before the United Nations (UN). Then, more recently, CWS and EWN continued their joint advocacy with their presence at the UN Conference on Sustainable Development, also known as Rio+20.

## Implementation from the Bottom Up

For Weaver, effective advocacy is supported by increasing numbers of water projects across the world that are being developed by churches, community groups, and local governments. “You can frame these things in terms of universal human rights and develop global policy around them, but then comes the matter of how it gets implemented.”

That’s why, while Weaver carefully watches the trends and decisions taking place at international levels, he is most inspired by projects on the ground delivering water to people in need.

CWS supports many water-related projects, such as a shallow well pump in West Pokot, Kenya, that allows the community to access drinkable water being stored underground in a sand dam.

Weaver pointed out that a water project can range from building water catchment systems in arid areas, like the one in Kenya, to educating communities about soil and water conservation, to successfully lobbying local authorities for access to water.

All those projects started with a single act by a single person at some point, he said. “The momentum arises from the bottom up.”

## Tips for Getting Started

- *Get educated about water issues.* This is the first step towards becoming part of the solution. Find out if your church has produced any resources on water issues and sign up for the EWN newsletter.

- *Use EWN as a resource.* For example, the Seven Weeks for Water Lenten series offers facts, Bible reflections, and other materials for congregations.
- *Pick a project.* There are many ways – from fundraising to advocacy – to support people’s right to water and sanitation at international and local levels. After doing your research, you’ll find a project that’s the best fit for your church or organization.

## 5. Want Effective Advocacy? Tell Real Stories

### World Student Christian Federation

The World Student Christian Federation (WSCF), already known worldwide for its effective, often cutting-edge advocacy, is becoming more deliberate about practising an ancient art: storytelling.

When advocacy campaigns – even the most sophisticated, far-reaching ones – include real stories from real people, they're more apt to make a lasting impression, explained Christine Housel, WSCF general secretary.

“Telling stories is essential for issues of water justice and most other issues,” she said. “Our hearts are touched, the issue is highlighted, and the efforts amplified. We begin to believe we can make a difference when we hear the real stories of people.”

One of WSCF's unique approaches to advocacy tells the story of water justice work in a visual way. A photo exhibition in the Latin America and Caribbean region, called *Acion Creacion*, depicts an array of riveting scenes related to water justice.

The exhibition – which will be displayed in Argentina, Peru, Bolivia, Ecuador, Paraguay, Colombia, and Brazil – highlights local issues by telling the stories of people who live with the effects of water injustice every day.

“With the younger generations today, we can also see that we need to become more diverse and creative in the way in which we tell our stories, using images together with the written word to attract, inform, and motivate,” pointed out Housel.

## Casting Wide Nets Together

WSCF and the Ecumenical Water Network (EWN) have a unique partnership in that both organizations have “wide nets” of members and partners, and so combining efforts dramatically multiplies the reach of both.

“WSCF has a network in more than 90 countries, and hundreds of thousands of students and youth who are committed to justice issues. They can amplify EWN’s efforts,” said Housel.

In turn, she said, EWN can continue to involve WSCF’s constituencies in issues related to water justice.

EWN is also engaged in advocating the implementation of the right to water and sanitation through the United Nations (UN) mechanisms, Housel pointed out. “We at WSCF, having a consultative status with the UN, and EWN can mutually enrich each other with regard to the future advocacies pertaining to the UN,” she said.

Both EWN and WSCF actively seek new partners and supporters as well, constantly expanding the net of support. “I believe that today, more than ever, we need to work in all kinds of partnerships to tackle the complex problems and challenges that we wish to address,” she said.

## WSCF and EWN Create Reflective Dialogue

Working together with EWN Coordinator Maike Gorsboth, Housel co-authored “Word in Dialogue: Water and Just Peace” for the Universal Day of Prayer for Students and World Water Day 2011. The dialogue wove together water-related stories from real communities, reflective statements and questions, prayer, and biblical passages. “It was powerful,” Housel said, “because it was based on stories and because we worked collaboratively.”

Below is an excerpt from the dialogue.

*Water flows over the majority of the earth and makes up the majority of our bodies.*

*Hidden water is available even in the parched places and is an invitation to community sharing and human ingenuity.*

*We see from the time of Isaac until now that water is used as a weapon, a source of power and therefore a means of oppression. More often than not the problem is not scarcity. It is control. Water becomes scarce as we pollute and hoard it.*

*A United Nations report predicts that access to water may be the single biggest cause of conflict and war in Africa, and elsewhere, in the next 25 years.*

*We know it is true. We must ask, what will we do?*



## 6. Making a Visible Splash: Water-Related Communication Materials

### Church of Sweden

In a 30-second video ad spot, a Swedish mother is washing dishes in her scrupulously clean kitchen as her baby watches. The mother dips a bottle into dirty, nearly black dishwater, fills it up, and gives it to her baby, who drinks it.

No babies were harmed during the making of the film, but the image shocked many people. It also carried the impact needed to raise awareness about lack of clean water. Through the video, the Church of Sweden raised more than \$32,500 for its water and sanitation projects.

The video provoked many reactions, and the large majority of them were positive, said Asa Elfstrom, senior advisor on water and development for the Church of Sweden. “One person did say it was terrible to give Swedish children bad water,” she said. “The video changed people’s perspective and they understood the problem when it was presented in their own environment.”

The film, originally produced by Norwegian Church Aid, adapted well for the Church of Sweden’s water fundraising, she added. “We changed it to Swedish language and text,” she explained.

### Ways to Communicate

When trying to communicate with people about the importance of water as a human right, it helps to send a consistent message and adapt that

message to different audiences, advised Elfstrom. “We have an international paper that is distributed to our members. We also have a website on which I write about what is happening in the United Nations or within the Ecumenical Water Network (EWN).”

Elfstrom also travels to local churches to give talks on water. “We developed materials that churches can use for children and young adults,” she said.

## The Power of EWN

Elfstrom believes that lack of access to water is a key development issue of our time. “It is a deep concern for Christians because in the Bible we see water as the foundation for life and as a gift from God – and no living thing, human, animal, or plant, can survive without water,” she pointed out.

EWN helps Christians live out this theology by giving them opportunities to participate in public debate and action related to water. “I believe EWN offers Christians ways to live out their ethical position on the matter of water, and EWN also increases our collective strength and resolve to resist unjust solutions,” she said.

## Communication Ideas from the Church of Sweden

The following five communication tools could be adapted or replicated by churches or organizations interested in water justice issues. Some tools are more effective for use in local churches, while others are better for advocating before government officials. All have been used effectively by the Church of Sweden and EWN to strengthen global action and awareness on water justice.

- *“Bucket” fundraising website.* This interactive site was developed so it can be customized to raise money for a variety of water-related projects. The site features pictures of buckets so contributors can

readily see how much water has been poured into the buckets, and how much money has been donated. Site visitors can also see how many buckets are left to fill. To visit the site, click here: <http://erik.arvedson.se/2009/02/fundraiser-for-church-of-sweden.html?m=1>.

- *“Water, Food and Hunger” booklet.* This booklet, which is appropriate for international audiences, not only describes the relationship between access to water and hunger, but also presents steps towards solutions.
- *High-impact video.* The fundraising video ad (described in more detail above), was short in length but long on impact. Sometimes, images say more than words.
- *Open letter.* In partnership with a fellow EWN member, Church’s Auxiliary for Social Action in India, the Church of Sweden wrote an open letter for Sweden’s World Water Week in 2009. The article mentioned, among other concerns, that major enterprises siphon large amounts of water away from vulnerable communities. The letter describes: “In Kerala, for example, water being tapped off for Coca Cola’s production resulted in wells drying up....” The letter, when coupled with other advocacy efforts, helped draw international attention to the issue.
- *Petition with 20,000 signatures.* In 2008, the Church of Sweden presented a petition with 20,000 signatures to the Swedish government demanding that Sweden clearly confirm water as a human right. A little later, Sweden co-sponsored a resolution on the right to water and sanitation at the UN’s Human Rights Council.



## 7. Follow the Money: Tracking Water Expenditures in Tanzania

### Norwegian Church Aid

Communities in Tanzania are able to determine whether funds allocated for water and sanitation are actually being spent as planned, thanks to a tracking system developed by Norwegian Church Aid (NCA).

The Public Expenditure Tracking System (PETS) helps local people “follow the money” through an accountable governance of water services.

PETS empowers local people to track whether funds allocated for vital public services – such as water and sanitation, education, and health – are actually spent as planned and on behalf of the intended beneficiaries.

“PETS is a tool for civil society organizations, creating transparency and accountability by enabling local communities to track public resources and challenge their misuse,” explained Susanne Hyllestad, special adviser on water in NCA’s Department for International Programs. “Essentially, it is the process of tracking public resources from the source to the point of service.”

People participating in PETS committees are trained to read and analyze public budgets and accounts, and to monitor how financial plans are implemented. If realities on site differ from the budget and the reported expenditures, the committees have been trained on how to file complaints

and secure interventions by both local and higher-level government officials against misuse and corruption.

In some communities, PETS receives support from the local government because, ultimately, the system helps ensure people receive one of the core components of public service – water. In Tanzania, for example, the PETS committee actions are acceptable by law under the constitution.

Yet PETS can also serve as an “alarm” to a local authority, because local officials know that their actions are being closely monitored by the committees, which represent the local people.

## **Sharing the Practice of PETS**

The Ecumenical Water Network (EWN) worked closely with NCA colleagues in both Tanzania and Norway to present a description and case study of PETS to the United Nations (UN). As a result, staff from Tanzania were invited by the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to water and sanitation to a UN good practices consultation in Geneva, Switzerland, where they shared their experiences.

“I continue to highlight the concept and practice of PETS on international, regional, and local levels,” said Hyllestad. “PETS started off as a successful local project, and then the collaboration with EWN has helped communicate the success of PETS and has enabled other communities worldwide to begin replicating the practice.”

The relationships formed under the EWN umbrella also help support PETS projects from a global perspective. PETS committees are formed under an interfaith umbrella, meaning they are operated through a local interfaith or interreligious coalition. “EWN helps link these local and regional coalitions to an international body,” said Hyllestad.

## **NCA’s “Water Work”**

In addition to PETS, NCA has many projects that focus on delivering water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) assistance: providing clean

drinking water, building and maintaining latrines, and assisting with disease-prevention measures.

NCA's WASH work is an important component in the organization's fight against poverty. "Water accessibility is necessary for sustainable development and for conflict prevention," said Hyllestad. "This is why we work to secure the rights of the poor to clean water and good sanitation. Many countries are experiencing rising demand for water despite only having limited and polluted water sources."

## **PETS in Action: How It Works**

After a community has been given the knowledge of public expenditures, there are several steps they can take on a local level.

- 1. Form small committees of seven to 10 people.* "There can be many committees, depending on the issues or sectors they choose to follow," explained Dennis Allan Eliashifie, an NCA field expert who has worked closely with a PETS project in Tanzania. "One could be a committee on water, the other on school and educational facilities, another on health, and so on."
- 2. Identify discrepancies.* The committees begin their work by comparing discrepancies between what was budgeted and what was actually used, based on receipts and real prices.
- 3. Report back.* The committee will share its finding in village or council meetings. "If the council or the majority of the community members feel that there is a need for further investigation, that same committee will be responsible for a more in-depth investigation on the use of resources," he said.



## 8. From Drops to Mighty River: Water in India

### Church's Auxiliary for Social Action, India

When a dam was constructed nearly 40 years ago on the Mahi River in Rajasthan, India, some 300 villages, home to many tribal and Dalit communities, lost their main water supply.

The dam diverted water to the neighbouring state, leaving villagers to rely on a few wells and ponds.

Church's Auxiliary for Social Action (CASA), working with local people, created a campaign, "From Drops to Mighty River," to help the communities assert their right to water. For more than a decade, the campaign has helped create more awareness about the issue from government officials and, ultimately, from the United Nations (UN) and other international bodies.

CASA's technical and financial assistance led to the formation of a people's forum called Mahi Jal Sangharsh Samiti, or the Mahi Water Struggle Forum, which later evolved into the Mahi Jal Failao Manch, or the Mahi Water Expansion Forum.

Rallies and demonstrations were organized to put pressure on the local administration and to make decision makers aware of the issue. The campaign started getting support from across the political spectrum, and also received wide media coverage. On one occasion, the matter was discussed at the state assembly. Though no decision could be reached, the Chief Minister later met with the activists and received a memorandum from the people.

“The Ecumenical Water Network (EWN) was able to amplify CASA’s voice even more at the international level,” said Dinesh Suna, the policy officer of CASA as well as a member of EWN’s International Reference Group. “The process of securing ‘access to water’ for the Rajasthan communities is ongoing and, with the continued support of EWN and other international partners, CASA and the local activists are determined to keep the pressure on local officials until water justice is finally achieved,” he said.

## Most Vulnerable People

Water injustice often affects the most vulnerable people, explained Suna. People labelled as “lower caste,” or Dalits are among those who are the most severely affected by the lack of clean and affordable water.

The caste system in India, based on a person’s occupation and descent, may at first seem to be a form of racism, he said. “But it is even more exploitative and derogatory. A person born into a so-called lower caste family will remain a lower caste for generations to come.”

For Suna, pursuing water justice in the Banswara region is a small piece of his work related to the goal of ending generations of injustice against the Dalit population. “I belong to the Dalit community and so do most of the members of my church,” he said. “Since I had an opportunity to study and work in a better environment, I feel it’s my moral obligation to raise my voice against the exploitation of Dalits.”

CASA often helps empower local communities by providing the resources and expertise that lead to “people’s forums” that can then move forward on a local level.

“I identify myself with the hundreds of thousands of Dalits in India because of my own background,” said Suna. “Therefore, in all my life and in my work, I have always stood beside the Dalits for their rights and will continue to do so through my work.”

## About CASA

CASA is a major relief and development organization in India. In addition to the efforts highlighted in this story, CASA funds and supports many projects that improve access to water through repairing and developing infrastructure in local communities. With a mission of improving the humanitarian situation for the most vulnerable people in India, CASA also offers integrated relief assistance in times of disaster and hardship.

## How to Amplify Your Voice through EWN

Suna said he has learned many lessons through his participation in EWN. He encourages communities across the globe, particularly faith communities, to make their voice heard in the water justice arena. He considers EWN an appropriate global platform. “Through EWN, small initiatives at a community level can resonate across the globe,” he said.

- *Share good practices with EWN and other organizations.* EWN facilitates the sharing and exchange of good practices between CASA and other members of EWN. “We are able to share the situation in the Banswara region with the world and, in turn, we learned many good practices on water and sanitation from across the world,” said Suna.
- *Contribute to EWN’s global voice.* By helping build coalitions between countries and organizations, EWN can serve as a voice before the UN and other organizations. “Several community interventions from all over the world got attention from the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Water and Sanitation through the collective submissions of the good practices through EWN,” said Suna.



## 9. Standing with the People of the West Bank

### Near East Council of Churches – International Christian Committee

A few years ago, in the West Bank area of Beit Ummar, the network of water pipes was so old that half the flowing water was simply being lost.

Working closely with the local people, the Near East Council of Churches – International Christian Committee (NECC-ICC) focused on renewing and improving the distribution infrastructure.

First, NECC-ICC worked in coordination with the West Bank Water Department to establish a mutual work plan. Then, NECC-ICC supplied 3.5 kilometres of 3-inch pipes with valves and fittings, and the municipality installed the new equipment.

The resulting water network not only dramatically reduced water loss, it now also reaches communities that had no previous access to a water network at all. Average water consumption was boosted from 37 litres per capita per day to at least 75 litres per capita per day.

### Empowering the Stakeholders

What's behind NECC-ICC's success with water projects in Beit Ummar and other communities? The key has been to empower stakeholders to act and speak for themselves about their own issues, said Ramzi Zananiri, NECC-ICC executive director.

“In our experience, we have come across a serious issue with people advocating for issues on behalf of stakeholders – without even consulting them or including them in any part of the process,” he said.

NECC-ICC simply doesn’t work that way, he explained. “We accompany local communities throughout the whole process, and they are actively engaged in all steps. This adds legitimacy, credibility, and transparency to our approach.”

In the case of Beit Ummar, because the municipality supplied the machinery and workforce to install the pipes, the local economy was stimulated.

## **Water Shortages in Occupied Palestine**

The occupied Palestinian territories are among the countries with the scarcest renewable water resources, due to both natural and artificial constraints.

The water problem there reflects the larger conflict between Israel and Palestine. Since Palestinian water resources are largely controlled by Israel, the dominance over natural resources adds to the occupation and control over the people and their land. Within local communities, there is a lack of just and equitable allocation of shared water resources.

Israeli area commanders are given complete authority over all water resources in the West Bank, and Palestinians are prohibited from developing water resources – drilling wells, as well as maintaining springs, cisterns, and reservoirs – without an Israeli permit. Paradoxically, Israeli settlers within the West Bank have free access, with no constraints, to the same water resources, and consume six times more water than Palestinians.

NECC-ICC leaders believe in tackling such injustices head on, and therefore have adopted advocacy as an integral strategic component. For example, NECC-ICC is striving to bring more attention to water injustice in occupied Palestine by presenting information, personal stories, and reflections in materials such as the Ecumenical Water Network (EWN)’s *Seven Weeks for Water*, a Lenten series that has been distributed worldwide.

Zananiri said he sees tremendous potential with the NECC-ICC's partnership with EWN. "Through this global forum, we have more exposure for our national campaigns and strategies," he explained.

Like other EWN members, NECC-ICC takes what Zananiri calls "a rights-based approach" to water justice. "Higher visibility results in awareness, which then sparks active engagement to change public opinion. Ultimately, that's what drives policy change."

NECC-ICC is also a member of the Emergency Water and Sanitation-Hygiene (EWASH) group, a coordinating body with the aim of building collective response capacities and ensuring a coherent and predictable response among national and international NGOs in the occupied Palestinian territories.

EWASH is currently organizing a "Thirsting for Justice" campaign that will run through the end of 2012. The campaign mobilizes European citizens to demand that their governments pressure Israel to change its policies and practices in order to comply with international law and respect Palestinians' human rights. Among other actions, Europeans are challenged to live on 24 litres of water for 24 hours in solidarity with Palestinians living under occupation.

## Did You Know?

- According to NECC-ICC's 2011 annual report, 69% of Palestinian communities are connected to water networks, while 31% – representing 250 Palestinian communities – are left without water linkages and must rely upon rainfall harvesting, springs, wells, and water purchased by private suppliers.
- The World Health Organization estimates that about 100 litres per capita per day are required to minimize health concerns within a general population. If supply drops to less than 50 litres, health concerns increase dramatically. The average water supply to 57% of

Palestinian communities is about 63 litres per capita per day. In 36% of the communities, it is between 30 and 50 litres per capita per day, and in 7% of the communities, the per capita supply is less than or equal to 30 litres per capita per day.

- Since the existing water networks are very old and not well maintained, there is an increasing water loss that reaches more than 35%.

# 10. A Creative Splash on Water Justice

## Brot für die Welt / Bread for the World

An educational sailing tour. A virtual “water cube.” When it comes to water justice, the regional office of Brot für die Welt (Bread for the World) at the Diakonisches Werk of Schleswig-Holstein in Germany has made a creative – and effective – splash.

The regional office is part of the larger Brot für die Welt, the Protestant Agency for Diakonia and Development in Germany.

In 2009, the regional team of Brot für die Welt in Schleswig-Holstein organized a sailing tour in northern Germany on the traditional two-masted sailing ship *Confidence*. In a journey along the North and Baltic seas, participants explored the theme “There’s enough for everyone! Climate change, water change, lifestyle change.”

While sailing, they drew participants’ and the public’s attention to the links between global patterns of production and the quality of life for all people. Visiting different harbours along the coast, Brot für die Welt partnered with local church congregations and authorities in organizing talks, movie screenings, and worship services.

“Our aim was to make people aware that our life-style and consumption here in Germany are related to climate change and resource scarcity affecting communities around the globe,” said Christel Kohnert, who is in charge of Brot für die Welt in the region. “When people realize that our water footprint is too big and that we are living at the expense of the other people in the world, they start thinking about what they could change in their life-styles.”

The sailing tour generated a huge media splash, Kohnert noted. “The local press covered the visit of the schooner and our program, and more than 5,000 people participated in the activities on shore. Therefore, we decided to offer these tours again to highlight the importance of how we use our limited resources.”

Kohnert and her team have expanded the sailing tour concept, now offering seven-day tours called “ClimateSail.” Sixteen young people learn how to live sustainably as well as manage the small living space, the limited amount of fresh water supplies, and a limited amount of food on the ship,” Kohnert explained. “At the same time, they explore the sea as a habitat, conducting marine biological surveys, and they calculate their daily CO<sub>2</sub> use, including their meals.”

In addition to sailing tours, Brot für die Welt created a “virtual water cube” travelling exhibit that helped draw many eyes to the water that is needed to produce the goods and services many people use every day. Following suggestions on the Ecumenical Water Network (EWN)’s website, they constructed the 1 x 1 x 1-metre cube, which represents 1,000 litres of water, and within the cube displayed some of the food and other goods that could be produced with this amount of water, together with explanations on our water footprint.

In an interactive way, the cube illustrates how the living and eating habits of people in industrialized countries are often adopted at the expense of water resources and the quality of life of people in the less developed countries.

Regional offices of Brot für die Welt like the one in Schleswig-Holstein work closely with the central office, which develops the general framework of the campaigns but leaves it to the regions to implement them in their contexts, with a lot of enthusiasm and creativity. From 2003 to 2006, Brot für die Welt ran a Human Right to Water campaign in Germany. The advocacy efforts focused on upholding water as a human right, protecting it as a public good, and applying pressure to politicians to improve the water supply for people living in poverty.

The campaign, which promoted ecumenical networking and coordination, became the heart of what is today’s EWN. The relations Brot für die Welt fostered among international ecumenical partners around the

water issue became the basis for the work of EWN, which is now coordinated by the World Council of Churches.

“Everyone wanting to engage in water issues can profit from the rich experience of EWN and its materials,” said Carolin Callenius, senior adviser for the Right to Food and the Right to Water at Brot für die Welt.

## Water Relates to Other Issues

Even when not focusing directly on water, Brot für die Welt and its regional offices and partners have a history of linking water issues to global food consumption patterns, clearly showing people how those patterns affect the availability and quality of water in the countries where food is produced.

In a food campaign that began in 2007 – a campaign with a theme that translates roughly to “No One Eats Alone” – Brot für die Welt has kept water justice issues at the forefront. Water justice is intricately woven into many other related issues, such as these:

- *Food shortages.* Brot für die Welt educates people about how food shortages are often accompanied by lack of water, since an adequate water supply is necessary for food production.
- *Climate change.* Global warming is contributing to water shortages and, in some countries, a rising sea level that is reducing drinkable water supplies. Human-caused climate change is above all hitting the poorest in developing countries. Conflicts over the distribution of land, water, and food, as well as the migration of people from drought and poverty regions, continue to increase.
- *Poverty.* Impoverished people are vulnerable to water injustice, as their right to water supplies may be unfairly denied. According to Brot für die Welt, about 6,000 people die every day from diseases caused by contaminated water. Water change instead of water scarcity requires fair political, economic, and social decisions to enforce internationally applicable law on water.



# 11. NCCP Works against the Tide of Unsafe Water in the Philippines

## National Council of Churches in Philippines

Many rivers in the Philippines are biologically dead. Mining, pollution from industrial and domestic waste, and erosion have all contributed to a precarious drinking water situation for millions of people.

A phrase used all too often in the Philippines is “drinking water by faith.” This means that people who live in poverty drink water they know is unsafe, but they have no choice.

The National Council of Churches of the Philippines (NCCP) is focusing on the Christian faith as it relates to water justice in the Philippines. NCCP is committed to advancing the idea of the stewardship of God’s creation through work on issues such as ecological justice, resources extraction, water, land use conversion, emergency response, disaster preparedness, climate change adaptation, and more.

NCCP, as a member of the ACT Alliance, has been working with other civil society organizations and initiatives such as the “Water for the People Network.” NCCP helps local congregations and communities addressing controversial issues such as the construction of dams and the privatization of urban water supply systems in the Philippines.

In the Philippines, water services are privatized, and consumers are sometimes charged high rates for what they believe is a natural resource

that should be harnessed by the government and distributed to the people as a form of service.

Being involved in the Ecumenical Water Network (EWN) has helped boost NCCP's visibility for its water justice work. NCCP hosted EWN's regional meeting in Asia in 2010. Rommel Linatoc, NCCP's program head of Christian unity and ecumenical relations, has been appointed representative of the Christian Conference in Asia in EWN's International Reference Group.

While NCCP is making a difference, there is still much work to do. NCCP reports that there is a proliferation of water bottling companies, especially in urban areas. People are afraid to drink water from a faucet, largely due to possible contamination. An urban poor community in Tondo, Manila, experienced an outbreak of cholera due to the contamination of a supposedly safe water distribution system of a private company.

Sometimes advocating for water justice is dangerous work in the Philippines. There is a strong link between water and environmental issues and NCCP's work for the protection of human rights defenders and environmental activists, who often face harassment, criminalization, and worse.

NCCP is concerned that the privatization of water is an additional burden to Filipino people. NCCP leaders worry that privatizing the water service will only lead to denial of basic social services. Public places, government universities, schools, hospitals, municipal halls, and even private establishments have little or no water in their toilets. For some people, "water is like pure gold, so hard to get."

In fact, water is on the mind of Linatoc on any given day. In 2012, as NCCP helped organize the meeting of the World Council of Churches Commission on World Mission and Evangelism, the participants were set to examine "mission and evangelism in a changing global landscape." Each day, the meeting had a theme, and one day water was the theme's symbol.

"For me, the use of water is not only as a symbol, but also as an expression of the church's practical commitment to advocating for the just and responsible use of water," he said.

## Disasters Exacerbate Water Shortages

In the Philippines, frequent flooding causes many communities to face extreme water shortages that become an emergency situation. NCCP, working through the ACT Alliance, has worked to help people in the Philippines become less vulnerable in the event of disaster. Among many other measures, NCCP has encouraged people to do the following:

- Understand the geological and weather-related dangers they face;
- Develop early warning systems and create evacuation plans that empower local communities; and
- Help communities survey the amount and type of materials they need to rebuild homes.



## 12. Drop by Drop, Youth Build Wave of Eco-justice

### Lutheran World Federation

“Guerrilla gardens” flourishing amid urban concrete. Water and sanitation projects in urban areas of Nigeria. Newly planted trees in Myanmar. An emissions-free Lent in Sweden.

Drop by drop, the results of the 2011 program Youth for Eco-Justice (Y4EJ) are forming a wave of eco-justice around the world.

Planned jointly by the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and the World Council of Churches (WCC), Y4EJ offered two weeks of training on the theology and politics of ecological justice. The youth participants then pledged to start, in their own contexts, initiatives to promote the new understandings they acquired.

The training involved an immersion in the context of the international climate change negotiations (COP 17) in Durban, South Africa. In the months following the seminar, participants initiated and implemented projects in their home context on a volunteer basis.

For Suwi Siwila in South Africa, that meant organizing a campaign in which high school students pretended they were living in the future. They wrote a description of their environment to their grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

As part of that campaign, a student named Est wrote: *“Dear Great-Grandson, A tree is an object with green leaves, and some trees provide fruit. I doubt you can even go outside because of global warming. I hope that is not the case.”*

Suwila and his peers believe that their Y4EJ training was a landmark experience that both educated and inspired them.

In urban Lagos, Nigeria, Njideka Onwunyi has been planning workshops and actively communicating with her peers on improving sanitation and water. Little by little, her effort is a growing positive force within the city.

Onwunyi recalls her Y4EJ training as changing her world perspective. “I got to see and understand in a broader view the eco-justice concept, and the best part was getting to see how active the faith community is in advocating for justice,” she said. “This experience sparked off my desire to do more back home.”

For Joakim Book Jonnson, a Y4EJ participant and a member of the Church of Sweden, carrying the fruits of his training led to his decision to leave, at least temporarily, no ecological footprint.

He gave up emissions for Lent, managing to live for 46 days with 80 to 90% reduced emissions.

But the road to eco-justice has not been without its obstacles for these young people. In June 2012, many of them were disappointed by the outcomes of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, or Rio+20.

Environmental and social justice advocates worldwide agreed that the outcomes of Rio+20 lacked detail and ambition. But young people like Raquel Kleber, an international affairs student, have used their experience at Rio+20 as fuel for turning political inaction into local action.

Kleber is a member of the Evangelical Church of the Lutheran Confession in Brazil. She founded Criatidade, a national educational project that encourages Lutheran Christians and others to use “creative attitudes” in promoting sustainability and eco-justice.

Kleber has become an eco-justice leader among her peers, and constantly works to expand her knowledge. Before attending Rio+20, she participated in an event called “LWF Virtual Conference green&just.” The virtual conference presented speakers in real time on the Internet. In turn, participants could ask questions in real time using text chat.

“Yes, Rio+20 disappointed us,” she said. “But the youth of Criatidade hold in their hands the hope and the power to make a difference and truly

shape the future we want. The 40 young people of Criatitudo are truly inspired to implement local eco-justice projects.”

## A Glance at the Y4EJ Program

Youth for Eco-justice is only one of a multitude of water-related programs offered by LWF. Water justice is an important component of Y4EJ, a program that aims to equip young Christians as “multipliers” for eco-justice. Y4EJ training included various approaches:

- *Theological and biblical studies.* Young people attended workshops and meetings with experts, and also received training sessions on communication.
- *Tips on campaigning and project management.* Participants learned how to develop resources and activities for promoting eco-justice at local, national, and international levels.
- *Cultural and artistic activities.* Young people were drawn together in common prayer and in active participation in ecumenical and civil society activities.



## 13. African Communities Open Doors to Water Access

### All Africa Conference of Churches

When Tushabomwe Plassy, a resident of southwest Uganda, describes the past water challenges in her community, the situation seems overwhelming.

“We live on the slopes of hills that surround the valley,” she said. “Most of the people in my village are very poor and earn less than a dollar a day. More than 58% of the people living in my village and in the surrounding area have no access to clean and safe water and proper sanitation facilities. Most of them – about 75% – are women and children.”

Plassy and her neighbours could not get water from springs or boreholes, and the little underground water available was unsuitable for human consumption because of its high mineral content.

“People fetch water from open runoff ponds,” she said. “As a result, women and children have to walk about 5 kilometres to collect water from contaminated ground runoff ponds and valley tanks. Incidences of water-borne disease, accidents, and forms of abuse abound in my community.”

But Plassy – chairperson of the Katereera Primary School Mothers Forum – refused to be overwhelmed.

Working with the local nongovernmental organization ACORD, and partially funded by Brot fur die Welt, Plassy and other women in the community embarked on a Rainwater Harvesting and Sanitation Project.

They contacted water experts to learn how to construct tanks. Then they saved money and began constructing tanks for group members. “We could do this by combining our savings and constructing a tank for a single member, then continuing on a rotational basis,” she said.

Now, with the tanks in place, water access has vastly improved – and so have many other facets of life, Plassy said. “Gender relations have

improved in the families due to a reduction in violence related to water fetching, the cleanliness of the houses, and a better standard of living, leading to peace of mind.”

Women are able to grow vegetables and fruit trees in their yards, improving family nutrition. “In general, our household incomes and our standard of living have improved,” concluded Plassy.

## **Just One Story of Many**

Plassy’s firsthand account is just one story among thousands of examples of water justice across Africa. There is still a long way to go for millions of people on the continent who lack access to clean water.

Since the landmark 2007 conference Churches for Water in Africa, the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) continues to keep water justice and climate change at the forefront of the collective spiritual minds of its members.

In addition to the 2007 gathering, AACC has also been instrumental in organizing a series of EWN consultations on the water situation in Africa, and the churches’ role in addressing the crisis.

Bridget Eli Adzo Ben-Naimah, a minister in Evangelical Presbyterian Church in Ghana and representative of the AACC on the international reference group of EWN, believes ongoing forums and consultations help bring about change – dramatic in some communities, gradual in others.

“One important step is to prioritize the just and sustainable provision of water to the poor and the most excluded, and to make water and sanitation a strong component of national budgets and other financial allocations, including development aid,” she said.

She has observed that the intertwined issues of water, sanitation, climate change, and poverty have taken on a more visible and prominent role in the churches throughout Africa.

“The many conferences and consultations held have made the churches aware of the water issues,” she said. “Unequal access to water causes conflicts between and among people, communities, regions, and nations. It is

therefore right for the church to speak out and to act when the life-giving water is pervasively and systematically under threat.”

## Did You Know?

- In many resource-based conflicts in Africa, water and fertile land are the major bones of contention in rural communities. Thousands of lives have been lost in these conflicts.
- The destruction of forests that act as water catchments has exacerbated the depletion of African wells, rivers, and even lakes.
- More than 300 million people in Sub-Saharan Africa lack access to clean water – the vast majority of them in rural areas. (*Source: 2007 Conference Report: Churches for Water in Africa*)





