Two young Moroccan volunteers use efficient technology to save water under the Community-Based Adaptation project implemented by the United Nations Development Programme with the technical assistance of UN Volunteers in Morocco. The Community-Based Adaptation project encompasses community engagement in water issues to promote conservation and better livelihoods. (Bruno Deceukelier/UNDP-GEF CBA, 2011)

Most of us take clean water for granted. At the same time, almost 780 million people do not have access to clean water and more than 3.4 million people die each year from water, sanitation, and hygiene-related causes. Nearly all deaths, 99 per cent, occur in the developing world [Source: World Health Organization]. Despite overall progress in the Millennium Development Goal to halve the number of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water by 2015, in sub-Saharan Africa only 60 per cent of the population currently enjoys such access [Source: 2011 State of the World’s Volunteerism Report].

The United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme provides front-line assistance to grassroots communities in getting access to clean water, a resource central to sustainable development and poverty reduction. UN Volunteers are active in many priority areas on which the International Year of Water Cooperation has been focusing the world’s attention. Furthermore, UNV engages in joint operations with UN agencies in order to meet challenges in providing drinking water and sanitation in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

“We live in an increasingly water insecure world where demand often outstrips supply and where quality often fails to meet minimum standards. Under current trends, future demands for water will not be met.”

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon on International Day for Biological Diversity 2013

In Georgia, UN Volunteers established community water reservoirs and facilitated equitable access to water services by promoting the communal use of water by communities. In Bolivia, they rehabilitate irrigation systems and build the capacity of youth volunteers in soil and water conservation to manage water resources in an effective and sustainable way. UN Volunteers also promote sanitation to enhance and sustain livelihoods in Timor-Leste, Zambia, Somalia and El Salvador, as well as assist in planning responses to clean water scarcity caused by climate change and natural disasters.
During a dusty field visit to Patrick Handia’s farm, national UN Volunteer Julie Simuchembu (right), Project Co-ordinator for UNV’s Youth Environmental Management and Education Project (YEMEP) in Zambia’s Choma District, makes use of his well while Tenson Meleya (standing), with the Zambian Department of Forestry, lends a hand. Mr. Handia takes full advantage of expertise UN Volunteer specialists offer farmers in his area to improve their use and supply of water. Julie mobilizes community volunteers to build water facilities close to home. This helps dramatically reduce women’s workload, increase education for children and enable mothers to pursue income-generating opportunities.

(Carol Atwell, UNV, 2011)

Through training and capacity building, volunteers raise awareness of the need to take care of water as a scarce resource. In addition, they provide technical assistance to implement institutional support projects for water conservation.

Although the challenges faced are still considerable, remarkable progress has been made. According to the United Nations’ 2012 Millennium Development Goals Report, so far 89 per cent of the world’s population has access to water supplies. This is an increase of over 10 per cent since 1990. This means that the 2015 target of halving the number of people without drinking water has already been achieved. However, with the world’s population growing annually by 80 million people, an additional 64 cubic meters of freshwater are needed every year. Water sharing and the assistance provided through UN Volunteers will become even more significant in the near future. National and international UN Volunteers will continue to contribute – through sound technical skills and a high level of motivation and commitment – to a positive collaboration among stakeholders, governments, NGOs and UN agencies.

UN VOLUNTEER STATISTICS IN WATER RELATED FIELDS

In 2012, 73 international and national UN Volunteers joined Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) projects carried out by the United Nations to set up water treatment facilities, and promote safe hygiene behaviours through the training of promoters within communities.
In Ecuador, UN Volunteers set up eight Ecological Youth Clubs in regions of the country with challenges in drinking water supply and sanitation. Around 400 youth learned how to take good care of water sources and the environment, and around 30,000 people were reached through awareness-raising workshops and campaigns.

WHO BENEFITED?

- 400 youth trained in source water protection
- 30,000 beneficiaries empowered in water sanitation and health prevention

With the help of technical assistance and recommendations on how to improve farmers’ use and supply of water, UN Volunteers were able to improve water availability in Zambia. To develop long term solutions for food security, community training courses were conducted, and inventive, community-centered and sustainable agricultural methods were promoted.

UN Volunteer Koji Kumamaru took part in a safe water and cholera prevention project in Somalia. He helped to empower communities to work towards eliminating waterborne diseases. Thanks to his knowledge in hygiene promotion, 250 hygiene promoters were trained and around 80,000 internally displaced people benefited from his work. Furthermore, 9,328,000 liters of drinking water were provided for over 50,000 beneficiaries each month.

WHO BENEFITED?

- 50,787 beneficiaries provided with 9,328,000 liters of safe water per month through 13 water treatment facilities
- 250 hygiene promoters trained
- 80,000 internally displaced people benefited from house-to-house visits and community dialogues by hygiene promoters

UNV empowered over 30 students to participate in voluntary work in Timor-Leste. By enhancing their abilities to engage in rural communities, youth were inspired to tackle challenges such as water scarcity, lack of sanitation and hygiene. The students conducted presentations, directed sport activities, took part in field work and helped develop sustainable agricultural practices.

In Georgia, UN Volunteers worked in cooperation with the Abkhazia Livelihood Improvement and Recovery Programme (ALIR) in order to improve the water supply system. Through their actions, the rural population is now less vulnerable to water shortages and diseases. UN Volunteers enhanced information sharing, collaboration and planning to raise awareness of sanitation. Around 17,000 people have now been provided with access to drinking water. As a result, waterborne diseases decreased threefold.

“My role was to transfer skills and knowledge in water quality analysis and water treatment, while considering gender equality.”

During his assignment as a UNV Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Specialist in Somalia, Koji Kumamaru from Japan trained hygiene promoters who conducted house-to-house visits to internally displaced persons.

UN Volunteer Primitivo Tengco from the Philippines, Team Leader of the UNV Asia Youth Volunteer Exchange Programme (AYVEP) in Zambia:

“Zambia’s abundant wetlands remind me of the Philippines. I take every opportunity to share proven techniques we use in my homeland that can improve farms’ efficiency and increase food production. For example, I suggested rice, a viable crop for Zambia’s wetlands, to the youth group. By digging the irrigation canals deep enough between the crop beds, they can farm fish alongside the rice. Earth excavated from the canals is used to raise the level of other crop beds above water to grow different high value crops.”

(Carol Atwell, UNV, 2011)
Located in a region prone to natural disasters, UN Volunteers in El Salvador worked on disaster risk reduction to avoid clean water shortages caused by natural disasters. UN Volunteers conducted awareness-raising and capacity-building campaigns to inform the public about adequate prevention and effective response measures. UN Volunteers also helped train youth in communities and schools, enabling them to organize and hold their own training sessions. One of the many results was constructing shelter and providing food and water for more than 500 people.

Volunteerism is essential, even on a small scale. This was proven by the work of UN Volunteers in Bolivia. They helped build water and sanitation systems, with a tremendous impact on the everyday life of the Pucará community in Chuquisaca. The installation of pit latrines helped drastically reduce health issues, especially among children. Thanks to UN Volunteers, many communities can now call themselves open-defecation-free. On a governmental level, their work led to public policies being drafted in order to guarantee the right to clean water and sanitation.

During their mission in Chad and the Central African Republic, UNV Water and Sanitation Technicians helped communities with key tasks related to water supply and sewerage works. These tasks included installing, maintaining and servicing the equipment. With the new water supply system and sewerage works, international codes, regulations and safety standards were met. The livelihood of many communities improved drastically thanks to 24-hour emergency maintenance works by the UN Volunteers.

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The United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme is the UN organization that promotes volunteerism to support peace and development worldwide. Volunteerism can transform the pace and nature of development and it benefits both society at large and the individual volunteer. UNV contributes to peace and development by advocating for volunteerism globally, encouraging partners to integrate volunteerism into development programming, and mobilizing volunteers.

UNV is administered by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

For more information about UNV, please visit www.unv.org