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Short communication

Water is key – photo essay

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ABSTRACT

Although deceptively beautiful, these images do not all tell a positive story. More than a billion people are without safe water. When safe water is available, entire village economies change and the lives of the inhabitants are transformed from disease and malnutrition to hope and success. In these images, so intimately composed, photo-journalist Gil Garcetti portrays life in West Africa and the consequences of living with and without safe water. Garcetti was deeply touched as he traveled throughout Niger, Ghana, Mali, and Burkina Faso, interviewed villagers and saw first-hand what water means to these elegant peoples. He was motivated to bring the story to a wider audience and to initiate, through his photographs, a call to action to the industrialized world to co-work in these and other countries to help to ensure improved water resource management for the short and long-term future of all societies. Please visit www.balconypress.com for more information about this book. Garcetti, G. 2007. *Water is Key*. Balcony Press, Glendale, CA. ISBN 978-1-890449-26-1.

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1. Introduction

This collection of photographs extends and expands upon the content of this Special Volume on Women and Water by including profound visual renderings of the artist and photo-journalist Gil Garcetti. Extracted from his book, *Water is Key: A Better Future for Africa*, these photographs prompt the empathetic viewer to more vividly see, understand and 'feel' the hardship faced by women and families without access to safe, clean water. These images engage the viewer in sensing the conditions where women are required to rise early and with their young children make one or more daily, lengthy treks to obtain water for their family's use. We can see and feel the pain of children and adults being plagued by infections from contaminated water. Also, in the voice of the people, children, women, and men living without access to safe water, quotes are inserted throughout this photo essay to underscore the challenges families face to help to ignite imaginations for desperately needed local solutions. Readers are encouraged to remain optimistic and to contribute to the formation of innovative strategies and remedies. Through Garcetti's photographs, viewers can experience the sensations of the first sprays of water in a community from a new bore well. They prompt us to share the sorrow and the joy and challenge

us to be creative in development of solutions and in supporting families in need of access to clean and affordable water. Water is indeed the 'key-for-life!'

2. Dedication

In his dedication to the book, *Water is Key: A Better Future for Africa*, Garcetti wrote this profound and provocative opening.

This is my fifth photography book. It is, however, different from my previous books. First, it tells the story of hope, of success, of the extraordinarily positive results investing in the future can have on the lives of so many. It is a call to action. Secondly, the book is dedicated to three people – three people who represent thousands and perhaps millions of others who share their view of and their passion for life.

The first representative, through leadership, vision, grit, determination, endless energy and perseverance, Dyanne Hayes-Nash, former Executive Vice President of the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation, devoted her extraordinary talents to the basic needs of rural villagers of West Africa. Her focus on borehole wells, latrines, health projects, microcredit programs, gender equality, education, and leveraging partnerships with numerous non-government organizations is a road map and an inspiration for others to follow.

The second representative is Mahamane Salissou Issoufou. When one looks into his eyes, one sees life, hope, thanks, and no evidence of the pain he lives with every minute of his life. As a baby and a young child in his village of Tibiri, Niger, Mahamane drank water that no one knew was contaminated with excessive amounts

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of natural occurring fluoride. The fluoride in the water greatly distorted the shape of his bones and caused severe and constant pain. But Mahamane lives. And he lives with spirit, with joy, and almost miraculously, with hope. Mahamane represents the millions of children who have died or who suffer as a result of the contaminated water they use. It is his spirit of optimism that motivates anyone who meets him.

My third representative is twelve-year old Zalifa Lamine, who would be a winner anywhere. She is a young girl who represents so many young West African girls. Before a borehole well was dug in her village of Kandine, Niger, everyday, two-three times a day, she would make the long trek to the traditional, hand dug well to bring water – invariably contaminated – to her family. It was not only backbreaking work, but also it kept her from attending school, regularly. She and other members of her family and village frequently became seriously ill from the dirty water. A bright, articulate, respectful, and confident girl, Zalifa now expresses hope for the future. Why? Because her village of about 2000 people now has a sustainable, nearby borehole well, which has completely changed her life and the life of her entire family and village. She eagerly attends school, everyday. She and her family and fellow villagers are much healthier. Zalifa and her mother work with other women in their village in a successful microcredit program, and she now has clear hope and plans for her future. She wants to be a teacher or a nurse in her village. She told me, “I want to help other girls and women in my village.” She made this statement looking directly at me, her eyes filled with determination, hope, and spirit.

Some of the same vagaries and challenges that plague the women and families in Western Africa, as presented in these photographs, are also identified in the papers in this collection. These images and community stories are not duplicative but complementary messages. Like the women and girls in these photographs, the amount of time and effort that are invested daily are also identified in the articles in the first section of this Special Volume of the Journal of Cleaner Production on water and women. Authors in this section provide scientific data, which reveals the costs of and some creative solutions for time required for fetching and managing water. The second section on water and waste of the Special Volume is also vividly depicted in these photographs where water is collected from contaminated sites. Water holes, used by humans and animals, are sources of harmful water-borne bacteria unless effectively filtered and cleaned. Issues of arsenic, chromium, and other pollutants affect the health and well-being of people of all ages. Families and communities need to be properly equipped with water safety practices. Water security remains a concern of such magnitude and of such importance; it is a matter of life or death. Solutions for preventing, mitigating and cleaning water of contaminants are well described in this second section of papers of this Special Volume. For example, in the section on water and wisdom, the strategies proposed cover a range of issues and include compelling arguments for conservation strategies in rural and urban water systems. The need remains for increasing consciousness about the value of water and the importance of its protection and prudent use. This collection of articles, complimented by Garcetti's vivid photographs provides insight into current, state-of-the-art strategies to guide resource management and community planners and practitioners. The final section of papers of this Special Issue highlights challenges and solutions for water and wealth and strategies to ensure fairer access to water in rural communities. The political, social, cultural and increasingly serious environmental concerns with water delivery and distribution need to be considered to make the viability of businesses possible. Garcetti's photos and the papers underscore the struggles and opportunities for innovating and collaborating on decisions and strategies for healthy water infrastructures.

To communicate with the photographer or to become involved in facilitating water access, please contact: Gil Garcetti at gsquared@garcetti.com or by post at Gil Garcetti Photography, 12021 Wilshire Blvd. #505, Los Angeles, CA 90025. Through his work with **Wells Bring Hope**, Gil is helping to save lives with safe water in West Africa. You can contribute to life changing work by visiting and supporting these significant interventions: <http://wellsbringhope.org/gil.php>.

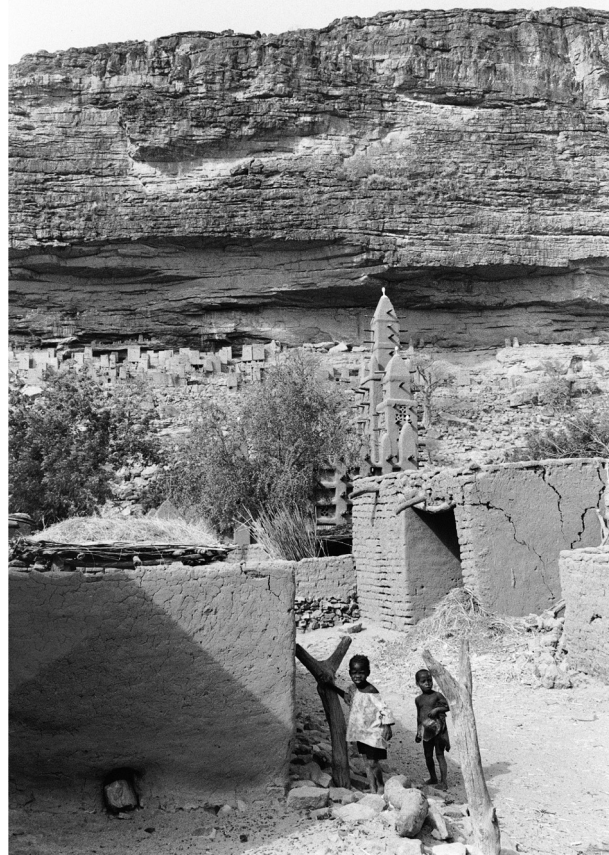


Photo 1. Mali – A Dogon village. Note the cliff-hanging structures in the background.



Photo 2. The lands and villages depicted in these photos are typical of the rural landscape of Niger, Mali, Ghana, and Burkina Faso. During the dry season or in times of drought, the land is rock hard. Unless the village has a nearby well or stream, family vegetable garden plots are unsustainable.

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