



Note from the field

Water and women project: notes from the field

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ABSTRACT

A summary is provided of innovative technical approaches, which different organizations are using to strive to appropriately and efficiently intervene in areas of the world that struggle with access to the vital resource of water. In the face of widespread global problems related to water, food and energy, it is encouraging to learn that governmental, and non-governmental organizations, businesses and independent researchers are working creatively and diligently to implement solutions that are environmentally sustainable, equitable, and economically feasible for low income communities, globally. The scope and number of such initiatives are indicative of the substantial needs and of innovative and compassionate efforts to alleviate human suffering that are in process already. Many lessons can be learned from these organizations that can serve as the foundation for broad-scale replication in thousands of regions.

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1. Examples of water projects from the field

The following are a few examples of international, water-related interventions, which are successfully reversing the despair of lack of access to safe water and replacing it with hope and the realization that there are feasible approaches that can be and are being implemented in numerous locations, globally. This list is not intended to be complete, but illustrative of the range of creative approaches utilized in the projects designed to improve people's access to clean and safe water. These notes from the field provide insights into the range of groups, which is working throughout the world to catalyze and empower the innovative capacity of people to address the pressing concerns around water, and highlights the opportunities for all stakeholders to partner for vibrant and sustainable solutions to water quality and water quantity challenges.

2. Gram Vikas

Gram Vikas is an organization that assists in establishing sound practices and supplying marginalized rural communities with a socially equitable and sustainable way of life in Southern India (Gram Vikas, 2011). Gram Vikas works through community-based efforts, to focus upon establishing food, health services and

educational security while supporting the construction of an inclusive, self-governing population (Gram Vikas, 2011). Gram Vikas. (2013). Vision and Mission. Accessed June 25, 2013. Available: http://gramvikas.org/index.php?act_id=2&page_id=12#Mission

Gram Vikas and local women are bringing about a health revolution in southern India. When Kumari Sahu got married to an unemployed villager, she was tortured by her in-laws and husband to obtain a dowry from her parents. When she was thrown out of her home because they could not provide the dowry, she returned to her small village of Bahalpur, in the Ganjam district, where the primary occupation is agriculture. Water for cooking and drinking purposes was fetched from an open well in the village. Bathing and washing were carried out in open ponds. As a result of poor hygienic practices, most of the villagers suffered from skin infections and water-borne diseases, resulting in loss of workdays.

With the arrival of Gram Vikas, a civil society organization, to Bahalpur, they started organizing meetings regarding water and sanitation activities. Kumari promoted the Rural Health Education Program (RHEP) to unite people and to improve the health of her community. Kumari learned from other villages about the importance of engaging community members in the water and sanitation movement. She called a meeting of the women of Bahalpur and explained the importance of hygienic household practices and piped water supply systems. A series of meetings were subsequently held, during which rules were established, and a village executive body was implemented, which was designed to ensure equal participation of male and female members. During subsequent community meetings, they concluded that the executive

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members should attend the monthly meetings, and that one member from each family should participate in the village cleanliness activities. Kumari formed a self-help group with 12 other women and opened an account in the local bank, which recently awarded this group with some micro-financing. The group members utilized the funds to enhance different livelihood activities and also ensured that their water supply was safe and secure.

Bahalpur is now regarded as a model village for its cleanliness and hygienic practices. More importantly, villagers consider it their duty to keep the village clean. Every household has a toilet and bathroom with 24-h water supply. The streets are lit with energy-saving bulbs. A teacher has been employed by the villagers for the primary school. The water supplied to the households is regularly tested for microbial contamination. Visitors and development professionals from different regions come to learn about the transformation process in the village.

For more information access the following website: http://gramvikas.org/index.php?page=2&act_id=13.

3. Tides Global Learning

Tides Global Learning is a non-profit organization that supports education to increase awareness of and strengthen development education practice and policy. It provides tools for teaching and learning that inspire a global dimension and integrate a development perspective in individual learning and organizational culture.

With the assistance of a long-standing collaborative relationship, Tides and the Gambias National Environmental Agency (NEA) have developed a post-graduate level course, which is a study visit based course, made available through the University of Worcester (Tides, 2011). This course is designed to provide educators and teachers from a variety of experiences and backgrounds, the opportunity to engage in cooperative learning in relation to environmental sustainability and education, work with Gambian teachers, and to engage with citizens on the forefront of environmental protection and sustainability initiatives (Tides, 2011). In addition to visiting Gambia, participants engage in curriculum development, evaluate teaching strategies, explore and interpret global perspectives on sustainability and global development, and compose reflections of their experiences throughout the course. By incorporating evolving teaching strategies and diverse experiences, the Tides and NEA course empowers teachers and educators to expand their knowledge base and to adopt interdisciplinary approaches for sustainability and global development education (Tides, 2011).

For more information, please access the following websites: Tides (2011). Information for applicants: Global perspectives on sustainable development.

Study visit course to The Gambia 2012–2013. Accessed June 25, 2013. Available: <http://www.tidegloballearning.net/sites/default/files/Global%20perspectives%20on%20sustainable%20development.pdf>, www.tidegloballearning.net.

4. KickStart

KickStart is a non-profit organization that develops and markets new technologies that are bought by local entrepreneurs and used to establish new small businesses. KickStart's mission is to lift millions of people in Africa out of poverty, quickly, cost-effectively and sustainably. They have established a five step model to develop, launch and promote simple money-making tools that poor entrepreneurs can use to create their own profitable businesses.

Among many of the innovations in which KickStart has developed, one is their irrigation system that makes it possible for farmers to extract water, through a pressurized hose to irrigate

small farm operations. The pumps design enables farmers to direct water where it is needed. It helps with increasing efficient water use of water, without salt build up as occurs with flood irrigation. With irrigation, farmers can grow crops year-round. They can grow higher value crops like fruits and vegetables, get higher yields. KickStart (2013). About KickStart. Accessed June 29, 2013. Available: <http://www.kickstart.org/about-us/>.

5. The Acumen Fund

The Acumen Fund supports investments in innovative companies, leaders and ideas for ending poverty around the world. It is the vision and work of Jacqueline Novogratz. Through the acquisition of charitable donations and employment of strategic investment, this charitable organization, Acumen aims to launch and support small companies that provide vital services to impoverished communities (Acumen, 2013). This organization seeks to support entrepreneurial endeavors that supply affordable, sustainable and equitable health services, education, clean drinking water and housing solutions to citizens of low socioeconomic status (Acumen, 2013). Acumen pursues their dedication to compassion, innovation and global responsibility through interdisciplinary collaboration and cultivation of strong inter-organizational partnerships (Acumen, 2013).

Through investing in a partnership with Global Easy Water Products (GEWP) in twelve countries in Africa, Middle East and South Asia, Acumen increased choice for small landholder farmers which improved livelihoods for some to \$5–6 a day, from a starting point of \$1–2 a day. GEWP has seen sales of its irrigation systems and supplies – ranging from drip tube systems and sprinklers, to water storage bags and pond linings – triple, and is operating profitably. Through support for their for-profit system of drip irrigation and with other collaborators in the area, these groups have served more than 330,000 farmers. They have succeeded in reducing water use, lowering electricity costs to the farmer, and increasing land productivity. Acumen. (2013). Who We Are. Accessed June 26, 2013. Available: <http://acumen.org/about/>.

Acumen invests in several innovations like a commercial cotton ginnery in Uganda. Another of their funded projects is a Nairobi-based social enterprise that calls itself Ecotact. This company provides quality sanitation facilities for the urban poor in Kenya. Its mission is to improve the urban landscape for low-income communities through environmentally responsible projects in sanitation and housing. Under the Ikotoilet project, Ecotact builds and operates high-quality, public pay-per-use toilet and shower facilities. Through a Build-Operate-Transfer model of public-private partnership, Ecotact enters into long-term contracts with municipalities to use public land. In return the company bears all construction costs and operates the facilities for five years. But it relinquishes ultimate ownership of the facilities to the municipalities, which can decide whether to extend their contracts with Ecotact. For more information, please access the following website: <http://acumen.org/our-investments?sector=water>.

6. Mary A. Tidlund Charitable Foundation

The Mary A. Tidlund Charitable Foundation (MATCF) is a Canadian public foundation that designs and funds sustainable development projects around the world. The founder, Mary Tidlund, is a dynamic woman who grew up in Alberta, Canada, and became involved in extraction businesses during her twenty years in the oil and gas industry in rural Saskatchewan. After many years of successful revenue, their company was forced to close, bringing about the realization that she needed to change her path and add greater value to communities and thereby prompted her to establish

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