

Report From the Field

Crabgrass

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Checking in

In this issue, Crabgrass is excited to report back on the Africa Women and Water conference held in Kenya last summer. We hope that the stories and pictures herein will give you a sense of the excitement it generated. Our joint website, www.africanwomenand-water.org has bios of the participants, a slideshow detailing all the activities of the conference, and a "ASD in Africa Blog" that reports in pictures and words the ongoing support the women are getting as they launch their water projects. Even more exciting, Crabgrass has decided to help organize a second Africa conference – in Ghana this time in early 2010. And we will join again with A Single Drop and Women's Earth Alliance in forming a new partnership called the Global Women's Water Initiative (GWWI), out of which our future work and conferences will emerge.

Our Ganges article traces the history and slow but steady progress of Crabgrass efforts to work in India to clean the Ganges River. One of our Board members reports on a local World Water Day celebration held here in California. Fran reflects on the election of our new President, Barak Obama.

Please note our new mailing address, and website: www.crabgrassusa.org. This past year has been a challenging one for Fran, healthwise, which meant moving to a new home last Fall.

African Conference Report

Picture thirty plus women from eight African countries, circling in dance and song around their first handmade Solar CookKit that each woman would be able to take back home with her to pasteurize water. Or imagine the excitement when they learn whether or not the water sample they brought from home is contaminated with e-coli, after incubating a simple water test overnight on their bodies. Over three-quarters of the samples were contaminated, and the women left the conference with their own portable microbiology water testing kits to help their communities

The African woman is the family's primary collector, user and storer of water.

learn about the dangers lurking in their water. During the conference these women also discovered that they could build things – a biosand household water filter (BSF), a ferro cement water storage tank (FCT), and various types of rainwater harvesting systems (RWS). It was indeed a week of empowerment and education for everyone present.

At the African Women and Water conference, held in Nairobi, Kenya in June/July 2008, each day was filled with excitement as women learned both technical skills to take home and use to improve their access to safe water, and entrepreneurial skills to develop a water project and get it funded. Crabgrass, in partnership with two other American-based international NGOs, Women's Earth Alliance and A Single Drop, organized the con-

ference with a local African partner, GROOTS Kenya (GROOTS stands for Grassroots Organizations Operating Together in Sisterhood, a perfect partner for this venture). Our stated goal was to equip African women in local leadership positions with appropriate technologies, skills and support to create sustainable community solutions that would efficiently provide access to clean water. We also formed a bond with the Green Belt Movement, whose Training Center in Nairobi was the location of our conference.

Who was there?

Here are some statistics to tell you more about the women who attended the conference.: They ranged in age from 25-72; they had from 2-20 children and grandchildren; they care for the sick, elderly and orphans; coordinate grassroots women's collectives (working with 20-2000 families); run their own farms, and campaign on issues from land rights for women to HIV/AIDS prevention. Some of these women run indigenous networks, manage their own environmental organizations, fight political corruption as lawyers, and of course they all are working tirelessly to find solutions to the mounting water issues in their communities.

Conference design

This Africa-based conference grew out of the three earlier Women and Water conferences that Crabgrass has convened in India and Nepal. With our two US partner organizations, we made some very specific changes in confer-

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ence design this time around. We invited African organizations (primarily in East Africa,) to nominate two women to come as a team to the conference, so that they would have the support of each other and their nominating organization when they returned home. We had teams from Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Somalia, Nigeria, Ghana and South Africa. Our trainers were also African women, from Kenya, Uganda, and Zimbabwe.

Another innovation of this Kenya conference was the emphasis on teaching technical skills to the women, so that they got hands-on experience every afternoon of the conference, and gained the confidence to take these technologies home in order to teach others. In addition to the practical, hands-on components of the

Women transport an average of 45 pounds of water long distances, often facing the threat of violence and rape.

conference, our planning team organized important discussions on crucial issues impacting the lives of the program participants. Mornings were spent in a classroom format, learning and sharing about the broader issues of gender and water, how climate change impacts their lives, as well as specific training in project planning, business development skills and implementation ideas. These enlightening conversations provided context for the technology trainings that followed, and offered a daily forum for the pan-African network that was emerging.

Each woman brought a story of incredible trial, remarkable perseverance, and hope. We heard how water privatization is making water inaccessible or unaffordable. Male water vendors often dominate the communal water points, so women have to wait in long lines. Desper-



Biosand and solar

ate women are forced to exchange sex for water to avoid the wait. Animals often have priority for water before people. Every single woman agreed, and took for granted, that water is women's responsibility and that it is an enormous problem. Another aspect we learned about was the difficulties women face in sanitation and hygiene. Pastoral women reported having nowhere out of sight to urinate, and getting up at 4 a.m. to go collect water and relieve themselves. Young women often drop out of school because there are no toilet facilities or water for bathing. Mildred Mkandla (currently from Ethiopia) read us all a powerful poem about "the other side of water" which you can find on the back page of this newsletter.

We opened and closed the conference with water ceremonies. Everyone was asked to bring water from their home, and it was blended together in one vessel as a symbol of our unity and desire to work together. At the end of the conference we each held the vessel of water and spoke of what we would be taking home from the conference – how the effects of the conference will ripple out into many different communities.

Water, sanitation and hygiene education (wash)

A key component of the conference was the Water, Sanitation and

Over one billion people do not have access to safe water.

Hygiene (WASH) trainings, offered both in the morning sessions and in evening practice sessions, in order to build a strong foundation and more holistic picture of the relationship of these three issues. If you start out with clean water, but don't store it or handle it safely, what have you gained?? Women learned simple and cost-friendly technologies that promote hygiene in the community, including various steps to be followed while cleaning hands at home. Tippy taps were a favorite – hanging a plastic bottle upside down in a tree near a latrine so that hands could be washed easily without contaminating a water source.

Solar pasteurization and portable microbiology lab (pml)

Dr. Robert Metcalf, professor of Biological Sciences from California State Sacramento, introduced a groundbreaking methodology he has developed called the Portable Microbiology Lab (PML). This technology allows one to perform water testing in rural areas without the need for high tech equipment, running water, or electricity. The PML consists of two tests: one is a "presence/absence test" which merely reveals the presence or ab-

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I have been on both sides of water

I have been on both sides of water

I have been on both sides of water
I know what it is like to be without water

I know the smell of a body when there is no water

I know the smell of a woman when she has not bathed because there is no water

I know the sight of dirty dishes when there is no water

I have seen baby nappies

Almost putrefying when there is no water'

I know the look of those clothes when they have been washed in little water

And I know the smell of a newly delivered woman

or the school girl having her periods when there is no water

I have heard the privileged say

"How much these people smell"

When there is no water

I have seen many scrunch up their noses

As a woman who has not had a bath passes because there is no water

I have seen crops fail because there is no water

I have seen people starve because the crops failed

As there was no water

I have seen children die of hunger and malnutrition

Because there is no water

I have seen animals die because there is no water

I have seen the earth parch and crack because there is no water

And yet in half of my life

I have seen plenty of water

I have lived on the other side of water

I have seen the Zambezi River with its



very abundant water

Only a few hundred kilometers from my drying and dying hometown

I have crossed many seas be it with their salty but abundant water

I have lived on the other side of water

Where there is a lot of water

I have seen it rain year in and year out Sometimes erratically and scantily

But many time heavily

I have seen plenty of rainwater

On the other side of water

I have seen plenty of rainwater flow away in front of me never to return

I have seen some women try to collect rain water'

But the water runs too fast

And their containers too small to hold sufficient water

I have been on the other side of water.

I have seen so much water coming from water taps in my house

So much water that I never think that there may ever be a time

when I will never have water

I have paid very little attention to this water

Maybe because I pay so little for my water

I take this water for granted and do not value it the way I should.

I know though that not far from where I am

Are groups of women standing in queues trying to access water

They pay much more than I do for 20 litres of water

This may be all they have for the day with their entire families

They should really have 50 litres per person per day

I have been on both sides of water

I have lived with no water

I have lived with little water

I have lived with plenty of water

Why can't water be equitably and efficiently allocated?

I have lived on both sides of water

Many in my part of the world – Africa

Have only lived on one side of water

-The other side of water-

-The side with little or no water

They can and must experience the other side of water too

If we work hard enough to make sure it happen s

I have lived on both sides of water

And I know what it is like on both

Mildred Mkandla

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

04/06/07

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sence of contaminants, while the other test quantifies approximately how much e-coli is in their water sample. Disease-causing organisms in water can be killed by exposure to heat in a process called Pasteurization. Water heated to 150degrees Fahrenheit (less than boiling temperature) for a short period of time is free from microbes like e-coli. The women learned they could pasteurize their water using the Cookits they made. Each day we sampled delicious food that "MaMa Solar" and her staff prepared using the sun.

Biosand household water filter (bsf)

Teams of women worked together to learn this technology – a lot of work sieving and preparing the sand, in addition to constructing the concrete structure itself. This modified slow sand water filter can remove 90-100% of biological contaminants. It can filter up to 150 litres of water/day, and is simple and easy to use. It puts the responsibility of clean water at the point of use – the household level.

Rainwater harvesting (rwh) and safe storage (fct)

Teams that chose to learn more about this technology divided up with one team member attending the Water Catchment workshop while the other attended the Safe Storage workshop. The result was knowledge on how to construct a complete rainwater system. The women also learned how to clean and maintain the technologies to ensure sustainability. The women practiced hanging gutters as well as built a large ferro-cement storage tank on the Green Belt Center's grounds.

Peer water exchange

Peer Water Exchange (PWX) was another dimension of the learning process offered at our conference. The purpose of PWX is for participants to learn, give feedback and offer insights into working solutions via a web-based communication tool. Another key benefit is that there is potential funding available for water projects submitted through PWX. Our conference participants were encouraged to submit their seed grant

proposals through this PWX network by the end of 2008 as a way of helping them understand the process, stay connected to their fellow participants and strengthen their proposal writing and review skills. This was a big challenge to many who have limited access to internet, or even computers. We are excited to report that seven of our fifteen teams did submit their proposals online this year. Five more are participating in round two.

Wangari's presence an inspiration

A reception was held on the last night, attended by Green Belt Movement staff, other development organizations, U.N. representatives and members of the public. Dr. Wangari Maathai, the former Member of Parliament, Founder of the Green Belt

In rural areas the average African woman walks up to four miles to collect water.

Movement and Nobel Peace Laureate, gave a closing speech to the group which was both informative and inspiring. She also introduced us to the concept of a sand dam which the whole group visited the next day our last day together. Women from Machakos shared their experiences of water constraints before the sand dam, impact of the dam built with support from GBM, and its effect on issues of food security and tree planting in the region as well as access to drinking water. The visit informed the participants on some of the challenges they should expect as they prepare for implementing water projects in their own communities. Not every project works out the way you might hope it would.

Ongoing support

Since the conference, A Single Drop staff person, Mariah Kling-smith, assisted by staff from GROOTS Kenya, has visited the women in their home communities to offer support as they determine what is the best way to apply what they have learned. You can read about the conference in general, all the participant bios, and Mariah's follow-up work at www.africanwomenandwater.org.

World Water Day 2009 "Honoring Precious Water"

By Lyn Fine

"Nature has an amazing capacity to respond if we create conditions for it to survive," said Rod Fujita, presenter at "Honoring Precious Water," an East Bay gathering on March 20-21 for World Water Day 2009. "As humans, we need to see ourselves as part of a whole-- the need for balance. We can't be so greedy that it brings the whole system into jeopardy."

The gathering, inspired by Crabgrass' water projects in India, Nepal, and Kenya, and the teachings of Thich Nhat Hanh, was sponsored by the Mindful Peacebuilding Institute-East Bay.

Our purpose was to learn more about and open our hearts to the challenging local, state, and global concerns related to water, and to nourish our commitment to engage in mindful and compassionate sustainable action through bringing together information-sharing, inspiration, inquiry, and deep connection. We grounded ourselves in the deep history of our local watershed before humans came to the land, practiced silent walking and sitting meditation, and shared songs and readings related to water from various traditions.

We learned from volunteer local community presenters about water-related concerns and action in Kenya, El Salvador, the Philippines, California, and the East Bay. Jan Hartsough of Crabgrass and Gemma Bulos of A Single Drop shared a video of the remarkable Women and Water Conference which they helped organize in Kenya in June 2008.

Standing in silence around a large handmade circular floor map of the North American continent, we contemplated in gratitude and joy the beauty of the land and its many waterways and connected with the wish that everyone have access to clean water, as a right.

Lyn Fine is a Crabgrass Board Member. LynFine@gmail.com

It's been a momentous time for Ganges work

by Catherine Porter, Executive Director of Friends of the Ganges, US

In February 2008 and again in November 2008, with support from the Wallace Genetic Foundation, I returned to India to support the Swacha Ganga Campaign – the campaign to clean the Ganges River in Varanasi. This is an effort started 25 years ago by the Sankat Mochan Foundation (SMF) in India and Friends of the Ganges (FOG/US,) begun by Crabgrass. SMF is the major player, FOG is its support network.

Background: In 25 years we've seen plenty of change: the inauguration of the Ganges Action Plan in 1984, the building of a sewage treatment system in Varanasi in 1988, followed by a 5-year campaign to raise awareness that the sewage system was NOT working, then 5 more years to develop an alternative plan... and lately, years in the high courts of India fighting a corrupt state government that again wants to install a sewage plan that is an exact copy of the old dysfunctional one.

The focus of work this past year was to convene authoritative figures who would insist that the Government of India pay attention and do the right thing: choose a good sewage treatment system for Varanasi. I stayed all of February 2008 to begin that work. While our SMF team worked diligently to create a media buzz around World Water Day last March, I met with experts in Delhi, and got pro bono PR support from the ad-firm Ogilvie and Mather who created fabulous billboards to get the Prime Minister's attention.

They said things like: "Ganga has many names in Benares. One of them is Sewer." Or "Your stairway to heaven passes through hell." (since dying near the Ganges assures

passage to heaven)

Astonishingly, months after our activities began, the Prime Minister announced his intention to do right by Varanasi! In June 2008 the PM's office issued the official decree giving our beloved Sankat Mochan Foundation/SMF friends the authority to oversee and begin plans for a system that is basically what we proposed back in 1993. What big news!! A victory even for SMF and FOG – and an immense challenge. While we don't imagine our efforts were the only cause of his decision, we could not have been more astonished, and hopeful.

But it is no longer 1993. The city is different now. It has sprawled up stream and down, so the project now needs to be much bigger. The state government is still corrupt and is illegally disbursing funds on their non-approved project – and the Ganges flows uncleaned through India.

On the second trip in November 2008 our goal was to try again to find a team of authoritative voices to support SMF's actions, and to identify expertise that the small NGO lacks:

1. Re-frame the Government of India's mandate so that it conforms to 2009 reality.
2. Identify experts to prepare design documents (DPRs) needed to move forward.

My partner in crime this time, invaluable in his understanding of the ways of Indian bureaucracies and Indian culture, was Earl Kessler, known to us from the days he supported this campaign from his post at US/AID in Delhi. Earl and I met up in Delhi for a series of meetings with top-flight minds and well-placed people. Our goal was to tell the story and invite their support. Earl had made so many great contacts over the years and we called on all of them.

After our meetings, SMF's founder Mahantji went to Delhi with Bailey Green (designer of the sewage system we have chosen) to secure the commitment of these very-busy people. They got only modest response but they did get the Minister of Environment to promise attention to the Ganges. Once again, plans are good, but progress is elusive.

Ongoing work: We still need to secure that Advisory Board and get Project Management expertise. We need to get the government to start releasing funds so Mahantji and Bailey can get to work. We are hopeful that FOG/US (Earl, Catherine, Fran and others) can strengthen political will at the national level, while our SMF team does the real work on the ground: nurturing relationships at the state and municipal levels, and engaging contractors to write the Detailed Project Reports/DPRs so the work can begin.

Our FOG/Australia colleagues are in India for March 2009, to support another big World Water Day event along the river, and to help envision a 3-year strategy for Mahantji and his SMF team. Together, with our friends from across the globe, we hold the hope that Ganga may be clean in our lifetimes.

Reflections on the Obama era

by Fran Peavey

On January 20, 2009 Fran Macy, Soviet expert, Buddhist teacher, citizen diplomat and long-time Crabgrass supporter, watched the inauguration of President Barak Obama. It made him deeply happy, as he had been an early Obama enthusiast. He, as did many others, drew deep hope for a more humane and intelligent future for America under our new President. After the satisfying ceremony and all the excitement, Fran laid down for a nap and died of a heart attack. His family and friends will miss him. Fran was a brilliant teacher, and his colleagues in Russia will be continuing his work.

In this rough time in our nation's history we are so grateful for the national leadership offered by President Barak Obama. Our international friends are curious to see what this new President will do, and believe that our country has elected a wise black man as our new president. A year ago, in the grip of pessimism about the presidency, we could not imagine that the same country that twice elected George W. Bush (arguably the worst president in our history) could be so wise as to elect Obama. It was a miracle.

Now we dare to hope:

- for an involved foreign policy that includes giving US aid to ordinary citizens and non-governmental organizations rather than big government-run projects out of touch with real people.
- for a science policy based on real scientific evidence instead of political and religious dogma
- for implementation of human rights as found in our Constitution. Having taught Constitutional Law before being elected, we have a President who will fight to uphold our rights..
- in this time of financial crisis, we hope for no denial - that

our President will deal with it straightforwardly

- that our fighting troops will be removed from Iraq
- that musicians, poets, writers from a younger generation will be honored
- that medical insurance for all may become available
- that there will be no more use of torture in prisons (secret or open) such as Guantanamo
- we hope for surprises we cannot anticipate

Now we may not appreciate some of Obama policies and actions. We will still maintain our vigilance, and communicate with our Representatives and Senators about how they should vote. We citizens still have our jobs to do, but we are encouraged by the lightness felt in many corners of our country.

Citizen diplomacy – what Crabgrass does – will still be needed to repair America's image in the world as well as do the very real work that must be done in foreign lands. Fran Macy worked with Russians to alert them to the dangers of radioactivity, and the problem of nuclear waste from power plants and nuclear weapons. Crabgrass is currently organizing in Africa so that women there can find out how to test their water and how to make polluted water safe to drink. We also continue our work with an Indian organization to clean the Ganges River. Citizen diplomats are doing all kinds of work all over the world. We are the third force in international relations. The first force is government diplomacy. The second force is the military.. Then comes the Citizen Diplomat (also known in Crabgrass circles as “social change workers.”) We all need to join hands with Obama in repairing America's standing in the world.

Thanks!!

We want to acknowledge all the special donors that contributed funds specifically for the Kenya conference – it wouldn't have happened without your support. We hope you are convinced of its worth and will want to continue to support our work in Africa.

Susan Wyatt, Helen and Raj Desai, Dick and Phyllis Taylor, Nancy Gabriel, Sylvia Perez, Rita Archibald, Ellen Greene, Katherine Da Silva Jain, Leonard Kurz, Carlisle Numi, Bev Brice, Dan Seeger, Jean Barker, S.F. Friends Meeting, Elizabeth Boardman, Ann Scott, Martin Edwards, Marti Roach, William Roman, Marieann Shovlin, Patricia Nicholson, Catherin Tornbom, Marilyn and Jim Marcel, Jane Stallman, Lamorinda Peace Group, Barbara Hollenbach, Janet Thomas, John Kikuchi, Elizabeth Ferree, Sheila Valorose, Barbara Wille, Elizabeth Vollmer, Maria Pedroza, Carla and Michael Preisler, Patricia Shanahan and Bradley Waite,



Western Kenyan boy draws water