

WaterBytes – The Organization Water For People

*Recorded by Taj Magruder
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Taj: Hello, my name is Taj Magruder and today I will be profiling an organization called Water For People. Imagine this: You and your family are thirsty and dirty, and you need water to drink and bathe with. So you walk several miles to your local water source, passing broken pumps and overfilled latrines. You fill your bucket with water. You look down and see that it is thick and dirty. You know that it might make you and your family sick, but what else can you do? All the while, you are school-aged and missing out on your education because you have to travel miles just to bring dirty water home to your family.

This is the unfortunate reality that millions of people have to deal with. There are currently 884 million people around the world who do not have access to safe drinking water. Even more people, 2.6 billion to be exact, are without adequate sanitation facilities. This lack of clean water has deadly consequences. Almost 6,000 people—the vast majority of whom are children—die from water-related illnesses every single day.

But that's not even the beginning of the problem. Many people who live in developing countries are victims of what is known as "drive-through humanitarianism." Good-hearted and well-intentioned people visit developing countries to establish sources of safe drinking water...and then leave. Once these people depart, the projects they created will fall apart and the villagers are left with dirty water and broken dreams.

That's where Water For People comes in. Water For People is a non-profit organization that "helps people in developing countries improve their quality of life by supporting the development of locally sustainable drinking water resources, sanitation facilities, and hygiene education programs." Founded in 1991, Water For People has been challenging the status quo for 20 years to invest in innovative solutions that will help people obtain safe and sustainable water.

However, their story truly began in the early 1980s. Three men—Ken Miller, Wayne Weiss, and John Mannion—came together, united in their desire to create a world in which all people have access to clean water and adequate sanitation. Working with the American Water Works Association, they emphasized the social responsibility of the water industry. In 1989, the Ford Meter Box Company gave the American Water Works Association a grant to establish an organization to help people in developing countries. Thus was born Water For People.

The organization has four guiding principles. One...

Male voice: We believe in people.

Taj: Two...

Male voice: We keep it local.

Taj: Three...

Male voice: We keep good company.

Taj: And four...

Male voice: We keep our promises.

Taj: Rather than celebrating a new water point, Water For People celebrates the anniversary of a water point. The organization monitors every project for ten years, and shares its results with the public. One of the organization's innovative methods is the Field Level Operations Watch, or FLOW. Relying on a combination of mobile phones, Google Maps, and GPS devices, FLOW monitors how well their water systems are working. It enables Water For People to better evaluate its work, seeing which projects are working and which need repairs. As CEO Ned Breslin put it...

Male voice: "The real measure of success is whether investments last. Do water and sanitation investments lead to real and lasting change, or do they fall into disrepair once the cameras have gone and donor reports filed?"

Taj: Trying to solve the global water and sanitation crisis is a daunting—and expensive—task. Every dollar donated to Water For People is matched by funding from governments, communities, local partners, and the private sector. A person who contributes \$1,000 or more can direct their money to a specific country, and a contribution of \$5,000 or more can be directed to a particular region in a country. However, Water For People insists that the local community and government help pay for services, which they believe makes the community more personally invested in their water and sanitation services.

Headquartered in Denver, Colorado, Water For People is currently working in Honduras, Guatemala, Nicaragua, the Dominican Republic, Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador,

Malawi, Rwanda, Uganda, and India. In April 2011, in recognition for their pioneering work across the globe, Water For People and its CEO Ned Breslin received the prestigious Skoll Award for Social Entrepreneurship.

You can find more information about the organization at its website: www.waterforpeople.org.

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