

WaterBytes – The Organization Three Avocados

*Recorded by Jennifer Santangelo
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You're listening to Water Bytes, a mini podcasting series to raise awareness of global water issues created by the honors students at Penn State Brandywine.

Uganda is located in Eastern Africa. It lies to the west of Kenya, and is bordered by the democratic Republic of the Congo on the east. Almost 35 million people call Uganda home. It is a poverty stricken area, with almost half the population living below the poverty level. The mortality rate in Uganda is extremely high. Aids accounts for many deaths, however there is another culprit lurking in the muddy waters of Uganda. Hepatitis A, typhoid and plague taint the drinking water of this impoverished area. Waterborne diseases carry off almost as many people as Aids. Some Ugandans are forced to travel up to 4 miles a day to obtain buckets of parasite- ridden water. There is no time for school or work when one is spending the majority of their day gathering contaminated drinking water. This is what they drink...this is what they give their children to drink.

The nonprofit organization Three Avocados has decided to do something to alleviate the water crisis in Uganda.

Jen: Joe, can you tell us a little about your organization?

Joe: Sure. I founded the organization in February 2010 after a mission trip to Uganda in January 2010. I was really going over there and seeing the need, really feeling the desire to want to do something. I landed on the idea of selling coffee from Uganda with all the proceeds going to provide clean water in Uganda.

Jen: And with Uganda facing so many issues Joe, why did you choose water to undertake?

Joe: Water, as I did the research, water really seemed to be the key element, the kind of foundational building block to everything else. It's not uncommon for young girls to spend the majority of their day going and finding water...walking 2, 3, 4 miles to get a couple of gallons of water and carrying you know, 50 lbs. jugs full of water back home. Which means that they don't have time to go to school. Little boys end up not going to school because they're too sick. So you don't have the education piece that is so critical because you don't have water. So we're really looking at, it seems like, clean water led to better education which led to better jobs, better economy, and overall hope for ending the cycle of poverty. Water really seems like that foundational element that was where we wanted to start.

Jen: I think that it is a really great idea that you work with another organization to fix wells that are broken or run dry because we hear a lot of that around here, that is, that organizations will go in with these really good intentions and they don't teach people how to maintain them. Is that something that Three Avocados will look to change, to show villagers how to maintain so that they have a sustainable source?

Joe: Yeah, any organization that we look at working with that's in Uganda, we want to make sure that they are providing what's called WASH. Which is water, sanitation, hygiene, training and typically part of that also involves setting up a water committee in the village which collects a small fee, typically to help provide for some basic maintenance costs. But then they also come in and provide for training on basic fixes of stuff. Where you run into trouble is some of the repairs might be anywhere from 500 to 1,000, 1,500 dollars. And most of those water committees end up collecting a small fee that may add up to a max of 200, 300 dollars. So if they're really only capable of fixing the tiniest of problems and it really comes down to your working in a village where there's maybe 250 people total, that are all working with an average income of well under \$2 a day, probably a dollar a day or less. So, it's not like they have a lot of extra income to be able to put into the water fund. So that's the kind of difficulty when you start dealing with it, and that's why you ultimately have to take a holistic approach to it. You know we're looking at just the water right now, but we like to work with organizations that see a bigger vision for it, that we can work with them on the water side but they are also working towards education and economic changes, otherwise your stuck in the cycle forever.

Jen: How do you feel about the water prices? I mean do you think that people have a right to charge for something that falls from the sky?

Joe: Yeah, I think there's good and bad with that. Obviously, if you're looking at like, you know here in the US. We definitely pay for water. We pay for...our cost is extremely minimal and we pay taxes that basically help provide that infrastructure, where you go to any house, business, any location, and have clean water pumped right in there. So certainly an infrastructure like that has a cost attached to it. There is definitely some things happening in developing countries where, like in the capitol of Uganda, in Kapala, there's places where the cost of water is 20,30, 40% of somebody's income. That's obviously a problem, clearly here are people taking advantage of people who don't have access to clean water. The government isn't able to step up and really provide that basic infrastructure. So, I know like in the particular case of Kapala, water.org is actually doing a lot of work there so they have a big project under way, really working to reduce the cost of water so it can get to a more reasonable level were people can afford it and it's not taking 20, 30, 40% of their income.

We would like to thank Joe for taking the time to talk to us.
For more information, please visit [www.threeavocados .com](http://www.threeavocados.com).

References:

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