

Guest Viewpoint

Local opportunity to help provide clean water in Africa

By Gordon Okumu

According to the UN Environmental Program (UNEP), more than 400 million Africans now live in water-scarce countries; 300 million people still do not have reasonable access to safe drinking water and nearly 230 million people defecate in the open.

When it comes to politics, African leaders always promise to make water and sanitation their top priorities once elected to leaders. But these promises always just remains promises months and years after elections.

Most people in Africa have accepted the situation as is and are not trying anymore to put pressure on their governments to implement any millennium goals. Corruption is the language that most African government talk and with corruption, only a small group of people in the society gets everything while the larger population languishes in extreme poverty.

But the reasons African governments cite for not implementing integrated water management policies or meeting commitments they have made to provide sanitation are many and varied. A survey of officials led by United Nations Environmental Program in 40 African Countries suggests they are not mainly constrained by a lack of money.

Congo-Brazzaville, Nigeria and Sierra Leone for example don't even have a formal water policy, they told the UN and African Union in the report. São Tomé and Príncipe said it did not have the necessary laws in place; Cameroon said it had no one to champion the cause of water provision, and 25 other countries, including Kenya, Namibia, Swaziland, Rwanda and Mozambique, said they did not have enough human capacity.

Some countries said that they didn't have money for the water and sanitation project yet when looked into how much most governments spent in recurring expenditures, it's frustrating to be told that there is no money to help with water and sanitation.

There is a growing belief that it makes little sense for governments in Africa to make more commitments on water and sanitation. It has now become upon the people to improvise ways in which to increase the availability of water and improve sanitation. Ideally, this should be the role of the government of the day in every country.

The government budgetary allocation for development expenditure has been lower in most countries in Africa than the allocation for recurrent expenditure - which mostly goes towards the payment of salaries and allowances of civil servants/government officials. It is also worth noting that there are disparities in salaries to officials even for those within the same job group, some even with similar qualifications. This is because the remuneration package is not based on a systematic job description and pay analysis. It is also important to note that most government employees in Africa are rarely motivated hence nothing much can be expected from them in terms of performance. Of concern though, is the rate at which the public sector wage bill has skyrocketed, to the extent that it is threatening to stifle government's normal oper-

ations and consequently, economic growth. It is based on this background that Water and Sanitation in Africa remains to be one of those "things" that the African Governments won't handle anytime soon.

Communities fight each other over creeks or rivers. They block one another from using a section of the river believing to belong to a different community. All is because of lack of enough water for everyone.

The governments in Africa will always say that they are having bigger projects like building roads, or re-designing the cities when in the real sense, they are doing so little and even if they were indeed building the roads, the question of concern would be; to whom are they building the roads when the citizens are unable to take care of themselves and won't use the roads anywhere. It's a poor logic and a misplaced priority.

The writer of this article was born in a small town called Migori in western Kenya. Migori just like any other Kenyan towns has problems with water and sanitation. People here have no piped or treated water. All the available water for use is either rain water or water from the rivers and the creeks within the community.

The rivers flows from highlands to the lowlands and different people use the river water for different activities. As the river flows, someone is bathing upstream, someone down stream is doing laundry, someone is watering animals while someone else is fetching water to take home for domestic use. In this kind of a set-up, waterborne diseases cannot be wished away. Diarrhea and typhoid becomes part of the daily lives for people in these communities and eventually death! No government should allow her people to live this kind of life in this century anywhere in the world. The waterborne disease cannot go away because in this set up, people wash off their dirt and someone takes up the same washed out dirt for drinking. This has been happening forever. The writer's mom died of typhoid over 15 years ago due to the same lack of water and sanitation in this community.

In a society where people live in less than a \$1 a day, diseases that can easily be cured are still fatal because they cannot afford cost of medication while the government uses almost 65% of its revenues paying salaries to top civil servants and losing about 25% of the total revenues on corruption and only left with 10% of the revenues for development projects. Its unsustainable and it seem like it will take many more years before Africa can get out of this situation.

It's in this regard that African immigrants always try to help their communities back at home with these basic and necessary human needs. Guardian Angels of African Orphans (GAOAO) is a nonprofit organization founded and registered in the state of Oregon. GAOAO is currently approaching everybody who cares to listen to help raise funds to drill a community well in Migori Kenya. This well will be safe from pollution, this well will provide enough water all year round and it will help save lives in this community. Mark your calendar Sunday July 1st 2018 at 12:00pm at the Trinity Lutheran Church in Cottage Grove. You are welcome to try the Kenyan food, listen to the Kenyan story and make a contribution to help save a life in Kenya.

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resources, but Cottage Grove needs a bigger plan to help everyone work together on several fronts to solve its economic slump.

The Cottage Grove Chamber of Commerce's work is invaluable and its presence appreciated by all, but it needs more help from our local leaders than it receives. Cottage Grove seems to be putting "the cart before the horse" with its desire to "find more affordable" housing. It seems to miss a key factor, which is how housing is directly tied to economic opportunities or the lack of. It would be very helpful if Cottage Grove leaders would focus its priorities on economic development. Instead of trying to solve problems of affordability it would help to

emphasize sustainable solutions for our local residences. How can we employ more people locally, how can we bring businesses to Cottage Grove that will employ our population.

I do not want to see Cottage Grove's future driven by land developers who are not necessarily going to add jobs to the town, but make their money and leave us with bigger problems and no economic solutions for our downtown or our citizens. We need solutions for economic development and job generation. If this is accomplished then coordinated affordable housing opportunities will follow.

Sincerely,
Linda Kleiner
Cottage Grove

This is a shout out to the Cottage Grove Community for their generous support of the Swinging Bridge restoration effort. When we put out the call for donations of items for the Rummage/Flea/White Elephant Sale, we had no idea of the level of support we would experience. As your kind donations of items for the sale started mounding up it soon became apparent that a rental truck would be needed. Many of our donors spoke to the fact that it was because it was for the Swinging Bridge that they decided to donate. So a heartfelt thank you to all who donated items for the sale!

Secondly we want to thank all the folks who showed up to the Earth Day Celebration at Coiner Park and came by the sale. Your generosity added up. Many people when paying for their items paid way more than was asked or said keep the change. It was a good feeling to promote one of the tenets of Earth stewardship, Reuse, during EarthDay by connecting one persons no longer

needed items with a new home. Thanks to all of your purchases and donations we were able to raise over \$1000 that day and when it was added to the City Trust Fund for the Swinging Bridge, the total in the fund went over \$10,000! We are getting some where now, let's keep the effort going to show that we have our money where our mouth is on the Swinging Bridge Cottage Grove.

Lastly we want to thank all the good people at the Coast Fork Willamette Watershed Council for sponsoring the Cottage Grove Earth Day Celebration and allowing the Friends of Cottage Grove Swinging Bridge to set up our Swinging Rope Monkey Bridge and our sale. Also for all that you do to help insure that the Coast Fork of the Willamette River will be healthy and a resource for future generations of Cottage Grovers. Thank you everyone!

Dana Merryday
Cottage Grove

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

I am pleased to see our city planner at work on the 10-year analysis of Cottage Grove's housing situation as well as the Regional Solutions Meeting that occurred recently in our town. Although the purpose laid out for the "housing analysis" is not necessarily meant

to solve housing issues, it may reveal a furtherlack of housing in Cottage Grove. More important related to affordable housing is the recent "Regional Solutions" meeting which seemed to focus on resources outside the city for assistance. No problem with outside

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