

Round up of the year 2007-08

Barbara Frost, WaterAid's Chief Executive

Once again it is wonderful to see so many of you here - representing the many individuals, companies, foundations and institutions that contribute so much to WaterAid and to people in some of the world's poorest countries getting safe water, improved hygiene and sanitation.

This afternoon I plan to speak about some of the many highlights of the year, about our future plans and the challenges - and to feature the amazing work of our supporters in raising awareness and funds.

Thanks to your fantastic support we have further extended our work and influence this year. It is a very dynamic time for WaterAid.

In the past four years in partnership with WaterAid America and Australia we have doubled our income and spend allowing us to do more good work in the 17 countries of Africa and Asia where we work and to increase our influence through raising our profile.

We have also started researching the possibility of work into several new countries and are about to pilot new work in Rwanda and Kenya.

Everyone in this room has played a crucial part in making all this happen. Last year our input meant that one million more people got safe water and an astonishing three million improved sanitation.

As we want our work to be of high quality we also have revised our water quality guidelines and furthered our understanding of good water resource management.

We have partnered with organisations who are working with the most excluded people to make sure they also get safe water and improved hygiene - older people, disabled people, ethnic minorities and people with HIV/Aids.

Our income rose to over £40 million - which given 5 years back we predicted it to be £35m by 2010 - demonstrates how important all of us think water and improved hygiene are in helping people step out of poverty.

Every day I feel so privileged to be in this role - meeting people who are in desperate need and those whose lives have been transformed by getting a tap, a toilet or a well close to their homes.

Every one of the millions of people we have worked with is an individual with their own story to tell.

This is 15 year old Odette from Ankafotra village in Madagascar. She used to walk down a steep and slippery hill to collect her water and her family didn't have a latrine. Now they have a tapstand right by their house and a toilet - she said:

"Fetching water was a really painful experience and we used to get frequent diarrhoea. We had to go to the health centre which was one hour from here.

Our lives have completely changed and we have no more diarrhoea. The water is really close - it takes no more than one minute now. I can do other things."

We have also done a huge amount to use our practical, hands on experience and research to campaign and advocate.

We were a founding member of the End Water Poverty coalition and our supporters did an enormous amount this year to raise the issue of water poverty with the world's leaders.

As you know we invest in local governments, community and private sector organisations - our partners - to help them to deliver services to the people that usually miss out - the very poorest and most marginalised.

We support their advocacy work and here we see community action happening in Nepal.

Our reputation for quality work and a good understanding of the realities faced by people both at village and city level who live without water and sanitation has meant that our international influence has increased.

We were delighted that water and sanitation were featured in the progress review of the education and health Millennium Development Goals held by the UN last month AND that agreement was reached to set up a Global Framework for Action on water and sanitation to focus governments on what needs to be done. This is something we have been advocating for many years. The Secretary General of the UN Banki Moon said at the event "we say water is life let us act as if we mean it".

Recent UN reports do show an improvement in the overall numbers of people getting safe water but there are still nearly a billion people without safe water and the situation in Sub Saharan Africa is very poor still. What's more a staggering 40% of the world's people do not have a place to go to the toilet and why we have been as active as possible in this the International Year of Sanitation about which you will be hearing more later.

We are currently developing our plans to take us to 2015, having achieved much of what was set out in our current strategy. However with there is so much more to be done.

Thanks to all of you who took the time to provide us your views after last years ASM and to those of you who have been part of the stakeholder discussions we've held. There was a high degree of consensus that we need to do a whole lot more and we welcome your further comments about this.

Indeed we have some very ambitious plans to extend our work to more of the poorest countries of Africa and Latin America in partnership with WaterAid America and Australia. We also plan to establish WaterAid in Sweden through the water companies and the support of the public.

We will of course be scaling up our support of affordable sustainable service delivery and to ensure more innovative approaches - especially to meet the increasing pressures of climate change.

And we will do more policy and advocacy work encouraging governments and decision makers to prioritise water, improved hygiene and sanitation and put them at the heart of plans to reduce poverty.

However there are some serious challenges – the spiralling food and fuel costs; faltering world markets; increased urbanisation; changing climate – water tables dropping and erratic flooding – and of course the critical situation of many countries in Sub Saharan Africa.

We also realise that our exciting plans to grow and develop as a global organisation bring internal challenges – for instance we will need to further develop our international management and governance systems.

We are very excited to announce today a new partnership that will be taking place this winter - we have been chosen by the Financial Times for their seasonal charity appeal. The paper will be reporting on our work from the end of November and we know this will raise awareness as well as encourage new supporters.

So, how have we achieved what we have to date and how will we achieve these ambitious plans going forward? Well, a big answer is YOU and all of your amazing efforts in raising funds, campaigning for change and drawing attention to the world's water and sanitation crisis.

Every year I am humbled by the time, energy and commitment that you have all put into supporting our work and at your brilliant creative and ambitious ideas!

And it is heartening to know that our supporters from the UK are now joined by many supporters from the US and Australia.

The long-term support from the water industry, your staff, suppliers and our regional committees has continued to grow and strengthen with some outstanding events, balls, raft races, race nights and gala dinners.

We have also benefited from some innovative and creative partnerships with philanthropists and businesses.

Glastonbury festival was once again a great success - WaterAid had 150 volunteers all loving their loos!

Schools, churches, Rotarians and community groups have spoken about our work tirelessly and held all sorts of events for us. Schools from as far afield as this one in Kuwait chose us as their charity.

There have been so many events you have supported - ranging from speaker tours, best chilli plant competitions and quizzes to the more strenuous marathons, mountain climbs, polar expeditions and challenges such as the Cisco Euro challenge with over fifty companies taking part.

In each and every one of these, individual efforts have been extraordinary.

Names poured in of all the fantastic people and companies that my colleagues wanted me to thank - all of you have done so much and it was quite impossible to choose. I would still be here tomorrow if I tried to thank you all individually - but you know who you are and believe me we appreciate your efforts.

However I couldn't resist showing you ten year old Olivia Revans who swam 1 mile for WaterAid. She had hoped to raise £100 but smashed this target to raise almost £2,000!

And lastly in the International Year of Sanitation Dave Whiteley created this amazing toilet bicycle and raised awareness along the way!

We are very lucky in having a fantastic team of staff around the world, willing volunteers and supporters and wise trustees to guide us and in closing I would like to thank you all for everything you have done.

Thank-you all so much and we look forward to working together in the future to bring safe water and improved hygiene to many more people.