

ripples

fall 2009

**Clinton Global
Initiative**

**School Gets
Clean Water**

WATER
Struggles
& Triumphs

Water Struggles and Triumphs in Three Ethiopian Villages

*By: Heather Arney
International Programs Manager,
Water.org*



The following narrative is drawn from notes taken during monitoring and evaluation visits I made to our project sites with Water.org Africa staff.

For most women in Tigray, Ethiopia, each day begins with a two to three hour journey for water across the rugged, brown landscape.

Where did the green go?

The women we spoke with explained that the land used to be a lot greener. But too many trees have been cut down, and rainfall has become more erratic due to climate change. We saw the terracing throughout the land, a sign of their struggle to sustain life in Tigray; terracing helps to prevent soil erosion and a drop in the water table.

I asked one woman from Were Leke district, “Where did your grandmother go for water, and where did your great-grandmother go for water?” She told me, “they went here – right here, in our village, where there used to be water.”

On the way to our first project site, we met a young girl on the side of the road collecting water from a pond. She and her friends giggled shyly at us when we asked if they would be drinking the water. She said she was collecting it for the animals. But I had to wonder where she goes for her own drinking water – probably this same source.

Only three out of 10 people in Tigray have clean water to drink.

Clean water at last

On the other side of the mountain range, we visited villages in Were Leke district. The villages had completed a hand-dug well. The project

was made possible by the financial support of Water.org donors and implemented with help from the Relief Society of Tigray (REST), Water.org’s partner in Tigray. At a total cost of about \$18 per person, each well serves 300 to 400 people and is managed by a locally elected water committee comprised of community members. To build the wells in these remote areas, the communities often need to construct a path for REST’s vehicles to get to the village.

Yellow specks in the distance

On our way to Mai-teum, another one of the villages served by Water.org in Were Leke district, we didn’t see anything for miles except specks of yellow in the distance. As we got closer, we saw that these specks were actually women carrying yellow jugs containing 44 pounds of water each. They were walking from a distant water source back to their home with the jugs on their backs.

During the dry season, which lasts for more than half of the year, water scarcity is a severe problem in Tigray. When the ponds and rivers dry up, people are forced to dig under the ground in search of enough water to survive another day.

Only three out of 10 people in Tigray have clean water to drink.



Young girl holds contaminated water. Today, she has clean water right by her home, thanks to support from Water.org donors.



New well improves women's lives

After arriving in Mai-teum, REST representatives introduced us to a woman who had been working in the hot sun as part of a government work-for-food program. Besides subsistence farming, government work programs like this one are a main source of income for community members.

A group of women were working on terracing to improve land irrigation. Many women brought their babies with them to work. The babies seemed content strapped on their moms' backs while they worked. I am not sure how the moms felt. The terracing was amazing – groups of 10 people (six women and four men) worked to create the terraces which help to send the water underground to raise the water table higher. This work is generally done after the women have collected water for the day.

The woman we spoke with was very grateful for the Water.org well. Before, she spent hours collecting water; now, she has more time to work, which provides for her family, improving their quality of life.

Next, we went to see Mai-teum's hand-dug well. The water committee had maintained it very well. The well guardian had even arranged a

way to channel the wastewater to a beautiful garden that was growing vegetables and trees. The trees were part of the community's efforts to slow down desertification and to make the land more fruitful. Similar to the other villages, this well serves about 300 people, at a cost of only about \$18 per person.

The journey continues

On the road again, I met a 74-year-old woman collecting water near the Eritrea border. I could only carry the 44-pound load for less than 20 feet before I was exhausted. This is something she does *every day*. She seemed to think it was a bit odd that people wanted to take pictures of her doing her daily chore. How far does she carry the water back?

I really don't know – she passed our jeep and disappeared from my sight climbing into the mountain.

Awahi village: Feten and daughter build latrine

In Awahi village, we visited another well completed by REST and Water.org. REST representatives introduced us to a woman, Feten, who had constructed a pit latrine near her house with the help of her daughter. Made of rocks, it is located in their yard and took three months to complete. Her daughter showed us how they created a sink-like structure to wash their hands after using the toilet. We were amazed at Feten and her daughter's strength and determination. They are now part of the meager 10 percent of people in the area who use a toilet. Today, she motivates others in her community to build latrines – a sure way to improve



health and decrease disease, not only for herself, but for the entire community.

Lem Lem village: new well brings new opportunities

At Lem Lem village we visited a well that was completed by REST and Water.org several years ago. We came to check on the sustainability of the site. It was still working, and the community all came out to welcome us with drums, dancing, white honey, and coffee.

The Lem Lem water committee for the well was still in place, and was comprised of three men and three women. Abriha, one of the women on the water committee, took apart the well to demonstrate her understanding of how to maintain and make minor repairs

to it. Before the new water source in Lem Lem was built, this woman traveled three hours to a river to collect water each day – the same river animals drank from and relieved themselves in. Today, her journey, like that of others in Lem Lem, is just 15 minutes, and the water is treated, protected, and safe.

Women in Lem Lem told us that the improved water allowed them to spend more time at home, caring for their family. It also reduced sickness in the children. A number of people said that they now have enough water to wash themselves and their children on a regular basis. And for

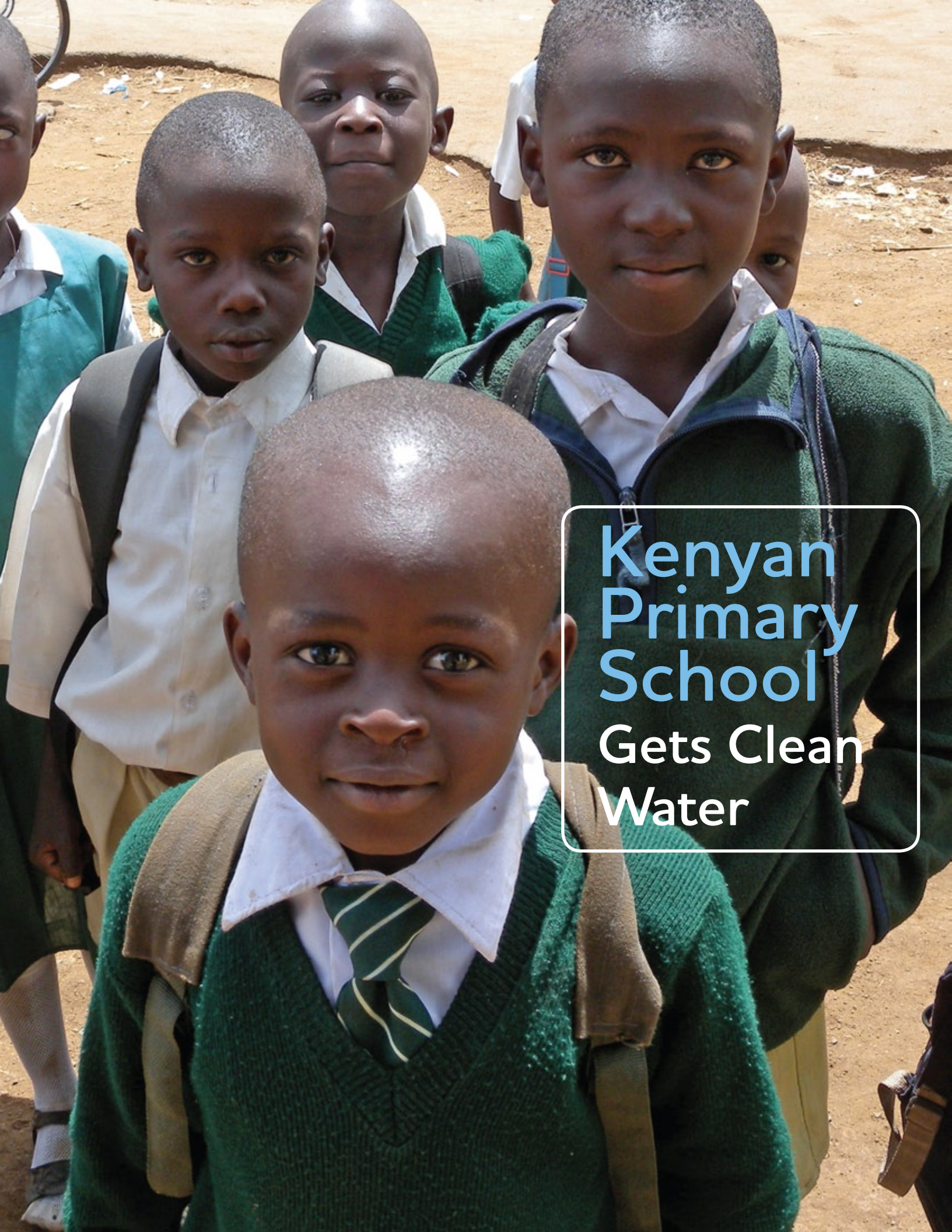
the women on the water committee, their role in caring for the well is a source of pride.

One woman, Gebriemeske, told us that prior to the completion of the well, her life was consumed by walking. She had to travel an hour and a half to collect water each day, and then carry the heavy water – often full of leeches – home on her back. This was the daily chore that she hated the most. Thanks to the new well, made possible through the generosity of Water.org donors, the next generation of girls in Lem Lem won't have to grow up walking long distances for water.



Thank You

Because of you, today people like Feten and Gebriemeske have clean water to drink and the dignity of a toilet.



Kenyan
Primary
School
Gets Clean
Water

Wi Rabuor community and primary school is located in the highlands of Kenya, in Nyanza province. Community members explained to Water.org's partner organization, KWAHO, that for many generations their land was not affected by water-borne disease.

Thanks to the Kodera forest which influenced the rainfall, the streams, and the Agido and Awach rivers, water was never a problem. But changes in the water have occurred with time. Diseases, such as cholera, have been brought on by an increase in population. The forest has been destroyed and the rivers polluted by washing, bathing, and disposal of human waste.

Steep hills and heavy loads

Rakwaro, a protected spring with clean water, is less than one kilometer away from the Wi Rabuor primary school and is the main water source for all community members. For students who live on the lower side of the school, walking to collect water from Rakwaro is not difficult because they are close to the spring. But for people who live on the upper side of the school, fetching water is an arduous, time-consuming task, made more difficult by a steep hill and the need to make the trip multiple times each day.

Children no longer miss school searching for clean water

Mama Grace Otien is a mother, a native of the community, and a member of the school management committee. She is grateful for the water project in the school, implemented by Water.org as part of the SWASH+ (Sustaining and Scaling School Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Plus Community Impact) initiative. "I am happy that you have constructed a water tank in our school because our children really needed safe drinking water that is readily available. Now the children can avoid losing class hours in search of clean, safe water."

New water tank a blessing to the elderly

KWAHO also spoke to an elderly couple, Mr. Fidelis Ondieki and his wife, Mama Sara Atieno, who live next to the school. "Mama and I live alone," Mr. Ondieki said. "I weave and sell baskets, while my wife sells avocados to school children. We also grow and sell bananas. That spring is far for a person of our age. It is difficult for my wife to come up the hill with water multiple times every day for our household use.



Simple math: clean water access adds up to more time students can spend at school.

This tank is a good project for our community because as much as it will benefit the pupils, it will help the needy and the aged in the community, like me and my wife. God will bless the people who brought this development, not just to the school, but to the community."



Water.org Featured at CGI

Water.org's Big Announcement

Water.org co-founders Gary White and Matt Damon joined President Bill Clinton on stage at the 2009 Clinton Global Initiative (CGI) Annual Meeting. During the opening plenary on September 22, Gary provided a progress report on the \$9 million in current Water.org programs funded under CGI, and Matt announced a new \$2 million CGI commitment that will launch the work of Water.org in Haiti.

About our Haiti Commitment

The situation in Haiti is extreme. It's the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, and nearly half of its people don't have access to clean water. Expanding our programming to Haiti will help people break the cycle of disease and poverty.

Over a three-year period, Water.org's Haiti commitment will bring safe drinking water and sanitation to a minimum of 50,000 people. It will also enhance awareness of good hygiene practices among local communities and focus on integrating sustainable water resources management into community practices.

Water.org will reach beneficiaries through grant-driven programs to enable some of Haiti's poorest communities to establish sustainable water and sanitation infrastructure right away. In the longer term, we'll also explore relationships with local microfinance partners to extend our WaterCredit Initiative to Haiti.

Watch video of Water.org at CGI:
<http://water.org/media/clinton/>

How you can help:

The Haiti Challenge



We've launched a social media campaign so that anyone can participate in meeting the water challenge in Haiti. The Haiti Challenge site, <http://challenge.water.org>, encourages visitors to fundraise and "friend-raise" for the cause through their online social networks. Getting a friend to care about the water crisis is as important as asking for a donation.

The Haiti Challenge site:
<http://challenge.water.org>

New tech tools to help you help them



RT.water.org
alpha

Water.org has been added to Twitter's "suggested users" list!

The Haiti Challenge website includes new technologies that allow you to log in to the Haiti Challenge site with your Facebook or Twitter account to donate, invite your friends, and track your progress and the overall campaign success. You can even direct message those who follow you and who you are mutually following on Twitter and invite them to join the Haiti Challenge.

The project is Water.org's second major Twitter initiative. In August, we released a retweet application (<http://RT.water.org>) that allows users to "donate" their Twitter status to Water.org. We can then use these status donations to further share news and developments about the water crisis.

As Mike McCamon, Chief Community Officer at Water.org, said, "By developing a site that allows Twitter users to invite those they follow and to automatically generate news on a user's Twitter feed, we believe we can quickly and drastically create change for those in need of water solutions."



Four Ways a Toilet Can Change a Girl's Life

By: *Erin Swanson*
Communications Specialist, Water.org

1 She can stay in school.

Girls in the developing world often drop out of school once they reach puberty because there are not separate sanitation facilities for boys and girls. When they are menstruating, there is nowhere private for girls to tend to their needs or deal with soiled clothes. The resulting embarrassment and anxiety causes girls to give up on school. But bring a toilet into the picture, and education can remain a rightful priority.

2 She'll have better health.

Lack of toilets or other sanitation facilities forces girls to wait until nighttime to defecate (under the cover of darkness) or to wake up very early in the morning. This not only causes extreme discomfort, but can also cause urinary tract infections and other gastro-intestinal problems.

Fecal matter is the leading cause of illness in the world. Most of these illnesses, such as diarrhea, are easily preventable with access to sanitation (toilets or other means of waste disposal). Because no sanitation facilities are available, open defecation is a common practice in rural areas in the developing world - despite the fact that people are ashamed of being forced to use this practice and often know that it is associated with disease. While many adult women suffer chronic diarrhea and survive, hundreds of thousands of girls less than five years old die each year because of it.

3 She'll feel safer.

With the setting sun comes the long-awaited opportunity for girls to relieve themselves; but fear is a companion to their relief. When a girl's only option is to relieve herself under the cover of darkness, in a remote field or other removed location, she is more open to attack by wild animals and poisonous insects, and more vulnerable to rape and physical and sexual assault.

Mrs. Paramaeshwari, from Velayudham palayam Village of Thuraiyur Union, India, suffered a severe stomach trouble one evening. Because of its urgency, she did not find anyone to accompany her. "I went alone to attend the call of nature, at that time a drunkard came and fell on me," Paramaeshwari said. "I started to shout, two men came and scolded me for being alone. At that moment I felt so ashamed. Why did I not have a toilet?" Today, thanks to the support of Water.org donors, she has a latrine right at her home.

4 She'll have the dignity she deserves.

Imagine living life without sanitation: you have no privacy, no sense of security, poor health, and limited options for staying in school.

Now, imagine this: because of a loan or grant, you have a toilet. You can stay in school. You experience privacy, safety, health, and dignity.

There are few needs more basic - or more important - than sanitation. Once women and girls have access to sanitation, they regain their dignity and the opportunity to thrive in all other areas of their life as well.



Thank you for enabling us to bring the dignity of a toilet to girls and women around the world!



920 Main Street
Suite 1800
Kansas City, MO 64105
816.877.8400

WaterPartners and H2O Africa Merge to Create Water.org

Working for global access to clean water

In case you have not heard, we're excited to share that Gary White, WaterPartners executive director and co-founder, and Matt Damon, H2O Africa co-founder, have joined forces to co-found a new organization: Water.org.

The merger leverages the expertise of each organization and increases the overall social return on donations. The result: far more people with access to safe drinking water and sanitation.

What inspired the change? Matt Damon and the other co-founders of H2O Africa did a tremendous job of advancing its mission by creating widespread public awareness of the water crisis in Africa and gathering support for clean water programs. The natural next question was how best to deploy the funds raised. That's where WaterPartners and its nearly two decades of on-the-ground water project success entered the picture.

Water.org continues to deliver the same high-quality water and sanitation projects that have defined WaterPartners throughout its history. We'll also continue our relentless pursuit of new, innovative ways to reach more people with safe water.

On behalf of Water.org and the people we serve, thank you for your compassion and action on behalf of those in need of safe water! With your continued support, together we can make global access to clean water a reality.



Water.org co-founders Gary White and Matt Damon join Hyderabad slum residents in celebrating their new water connection, July 2009. For more on the co-founders' trip to India, check out the October *Esquire* cover.

ripples

Editor's Note:

Water.org, a U.S.-based nonprofit organization, provides safe drinking water and sanitation to people in developing countries. Water.org projects create a ripple effect – saving lives, preventing illness, and improving quality of life.

Ripples is published twice per year for friends of Water.org. To subscribe or unsubscribe, contact *Ripples* editor Nicole Wickenhauser at 816.877.8421, or nwick@water.org. Comments, questions, and suggestions are welcome.

Thank You:

Thank you to all of our supporters. You make our work possible. Each life transformed is because of you.

© Copyright 2009, Water.org, Incorporated. Water.org, the drop infinity logo, the stylized wordmark, and WaterCredit Initiative are trademarks of Water.org. Photography by Water.org and its partners. Bird illustration ©iStockphoto.com/lushik and used under standard license. All other distinguishing marks property of their respective owners. For more information visit www.water.org