



SPANDANEWS

NEWSLETTER OF THE SPANDA FOUNDATION

ISSN 1824-7180

eNEWSLETTER

EDITORIAL

ONLINE EDITION AT WWW.SPANDA.ORG/ARCHIVE.HTML

2/2007

WATER WISE

A PRIVILEGE CALLED WATER

CINTIA TAYLOR

During MY CHILDHOOD AND UPBRINGING I NEVER understood why everyone would tell me to save as much water as I could. In school, the teacher would make us do projects with suggestions on how to save water: to close the tap when you brush your teeth, or to avoid long baths and take showers instead. But I had also learnt the whole water cycle, how it would evaporate into the sky and come down again as rain. So I questioned why was it so important to conserve water when it would always come back?

I could understand the idea behind energy conservation because my mother kept on referring to how much it cost. However, I had noticed that the water bills were not that expensive. And my mum never called my attention to the amount of water I used.

In my teenage years I started learning about climate change. The weather and the seasons were changing, and there was no way we could avoid the discussion in Geography classes. Yet, water was not really a priority. Even though we would mention the fact that it was raining less and some areas were getting drier, no one ever disclosed the big picture. Images of distended bellies in skinny bodies would invade our TV screens from Africa. Media showed children starving and running after the UN planes that dropped bags of cereal. Yes, they were hungry. But to my understanding and to that of my peers, that had to do with war, not water. The direct relation between growing crops and using water for irrigation simply did not get through to us.

I guess when you grow up by the seaside and in a country with 850 kilometres of coast-line like I did in Portugal, you tend to forget how privileged you are. There, living without water is simply inconceivable because it is so far from reality.

That is, until you experience it first hand. When I visited my uncle in Angola in the beginning of my twenties I began to understand

the need to use water wisely. In the capital city of Luanda electricity and water would fail regularly. Those who could afford it had electricity generators and spare water tanks. Once, when the water service failed my aunt restrained herself from turning on the washing machine. By doing that, she would be saving close to forty litres of the tank water, which could be used for showers and cooking. Although not a rich family, they could afford as much water as they wanted. Even though the tank contained enough water for a couple of days, periods of scarcity could last much longer. It was only then that I realised the reasons for saving water.

In Luanda temperatures are high and relative humidity is close to 100% making your skin feel sticky and dusty. Under those circumstances I was taking the shortest showers in my life. It felt wrong to do otherwise, once you understood how people lived over there. The city was built for some hundred thousand inhabitants and today it houses almost five million people. Most of them live in deplorable huts. To them water pipes

and running water are luxurious benefits. Still, Luanda's population is lucky: they are able to grow fruit and vegetables in the region, and the city itself does not even experience half of the hunger that assails the rural areas of the country.

In the western world, we seem to be unaware of our privileges, and little action has been taken in order to reverse this ignorance. We were given the information, but has anyone explained why we should use it? Has anyone come forward with the true facts about water and the consequences of not using water wisely and moderately? People need reasons that justify their change of habits. And one of them is as simple as this: water is a human right – how would you feel if it would be taken from you?



→ | IN THIS ISSUE

- EDITORIAL** *A Privilege Called Water.*
- INTERVIEWS** Richard Megangck
Water Wise: Education is the Solution.
- HISTORY** Veronika Szlavik
Water Supply in Ancient Mediterranean.
- ON FOCUS** Yuri J.P. Schutte
Irrigating Stability.
- IN BRIEF** Andreja Zulim
EU Approach to Water Management.
- FEATURE-STORIES** Sophie Saeffner
Living with Water Scarcity.
- PROFILES** Andreja Zulim.
- NEWSROOM** *From Spanda, UN & NGOs.*