

Barrels and Buckets: Access to Water

Narrative Stories From Ghana

The rainy season here in the Central Region of Ghana is never the same from year to year. One year there may be an overabundance and the next year a drought. This crazy weather pattern makes it difficult for farmers, market ladies, and families. The worry of water is always on their minds.

There is a seminary about a quarter of a mile from the center of the village, which fortunately has a borehole that villagers are allowed to use. The water from this borehole is very clean and can be drunk without treatment. The village also has three wells where clean water can be drawn; however during the dry season the chances of these drying out are good. The river is near and is still the main source of water for bathing and washing, while the wells and borehole are used for cooking and drinking.

The village also has piped water; however, there is a charge to use it, so only a small number use the piped water. This is my main source of water. The water comes from Cape Coast, about 12 to 14 miles from Amisano; therefore it is not always reliable. Pipes break frequently and during the dry season, the water is turned off weekly to help conserve it. I have a barrel I keep full, but during water shortages, I obtain water from the borehole.

*By Molly Campbell
Amisano, Ghana*

I fetch my water from one of the eight boreholes in my village. A borehole is similar to a well, except it is smaller in diameter and it is lined with a plastic pipe. At the level of the water table underground, the pipe has tiny holes or slits in it to allow the water to enter. The plastic pipe is surrounded by a sand and gravel mixture, which acts as a natural filter. A pump is attached to the plastic pipe. We draw the water by hand. Each of the eight boreholes has a distinctive taste, and most people have a preference as to which they like best. Some have a salty taste, others have a high iron level.

Fetching water is often done by women and small children. The boreholes are not only a source to get water, but social places as well. Often I'll see children playing games. There is a game similar to "rock, paper, scissors," but instead of using their hands, the girls jump up and down, moving their legs in different directions while clapping. I still haven't quite figured it out!

The water I use has some silt in it due to improper construction of the gravel filter. After it settles for some time it is clear. I put the borehole water through a filter provided by the Peace Corps to make it safe for drinking.

The other source of water is the river. Many people have stopped using it for drinking, but they still like to bathe and wash clothes with it because it lathers well! ("Sister Ana, we use too much soap if we use the borehole water.")

*By Nell Todd
Mafi-Dove, Ghana*

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In my community there are three sources of water. First, there is the River Dayi and some other smaller streams and tributaries. The community also has two boreholes that are, in effect, covered hand-dug wells, with manual pumps at the top. And then there is the water from above: rainwater.

In my community, the availability of water is not a problem, thanks to the tremendous amount of rainfall that we receive. Not only do people collect this rainwater at their homes with gutters that lead to storage drums, but the rain also keeps the River Dayi at a higher level and constant flow.

Despite being very hard, the bore hole water is definitely the cleanest and ready for immediate consumption. The rainwater in and of itself is good, however its contact with dusty, metal roofs and dirty gutters generally leaves the first bucket collected quite dirty.

The River Dayi remains the number one water source for the people of Gbepi, despite its volume of sediment and dirt. As to the reasons for its top billing, it's the most consistent and has been there the longest, whereas the boreholes are about 15 years old. Also, there are only two boreholes for a community of around 3,000 people, which leads to a great demand and long lines. There are never any lines at the river.

*By Amy Wiedemann
Gbepi, Volta Region, Ghana*