

INSPIRATION AND FUNDAMENTAL HUMAN VALUES IN MEETING GLOBAL PRIORITIES FOR SAFE WATER AND SANITATION FOR ALL

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How would you feel if 1 out of 5 members of your extended family did not have safe water to drink, and 2 out of 5 did not have proper toilet and sanitation facilities? What would you want to do?

That's the situation today in our global family on planet Earth: 1.2 billion brothers and sisters do not have safe water, and 2.4 billion do not have proper sanitation facilities.¹ The health hazards related to this lack of safe water and sanitation are endemic in many regions of the world: as many as 2 million children die each year from diarrhea. The economic impact of the lack of safe water and adequate sanitation reinforces the poverty cycle in a multitude of ways, such as reducing the time for income-producing activities, and limiting educational opportunities for girls (who must carry water for hours each day).



To us, this is a glaring example of the need for inspiration – inspired insights and ideas about how to resolve this ongoing state of suffering, and inspired action to implement those insights and ideas. And this inspiration truly must tap into a cross-cultural awareness and motivation, as the situation is one belonging to the human family, not a village here or there, or a country in some “corner” of the globe.

What is the current state of that kind of inspiration, for both insight and action?

In the year 2000, the member States of the United Nations established eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), each with one or more targets to achieve by 2015/2020.



With respect to water and sanitation, the MDG targets are:

- Target 10 – to halve, by 2015, the proportion of people without sustain-able access to safe drinking water
- Target 11 – to achieve by 2020 a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers

¹ UN-HABITAT: “Water and Sanitation in the World’s Cities”, 2003

A special target was added at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002: to halve by 2015, the proportion of people who do not have access to basic sanitation.

What has been the progress on these goals thus far? A 2004 UN report² states that “only a few countries have achieved improvement at a sufficient rate to meet the target.” This difficulty in providing safe water and sanitation is not new. The International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade (1981-1990) saw impressive action aimed at full provision of water and sanitation to all by the year 1990. Yet, by the turn of the millennium, there were more people un-served than in 1981.

This lack of success is in stark contrast to the rapid implementation and enormous success of the Sri Sathya Sai Water Supply Projects. The initial project in the state of Andhra Pradesh, India, was completed in only 18 months – providing treatment facilities and 2,500 kilometers of pipeline to serve over 700 villages and 1 million people with safe drinking water in this drought prone district with ground water contamination. A UN-HABITAT study of the project³ highlighted the success factors and lessons learned:



- *Faith in what one was doing with devotion coupled with role appreciation and professionalism was considered a prime value.*
- *Task orientation and strict adherence to time frames and efficient completion of project works in a record time of 18 months has been the hallmark of the project.*
- *Bringing up remarkable professional discipline right from the stage of formulation of the project till its completion by building up unity, trust, competitiveness, diversity, and devotion among the partner institutions.*
- *A non-governmental organisation led the way in showing that the success of the entire endeavour depends on unity, purity, and divinity.*
- *The people's devotional involvement in the spirit of the cause – providing all possible cooperation (even bearing losses on their part) – exhibited their full support and effort to bring the project into reality*
- *The project was executed at a minimal cost and time; the project, if completed by the Government with the normal procedures, would perhaps have cost 200% more... and would have taken 4 to 5 years for completion.*

The same success has been repeated in other districts of Andhra Pradesh and most recently in the project to supply fresh water to the city of Chennai. One way to explain this success is to highlight the role that human values – those positive, desirable qualities of character such as honesty, integrity, tolerance, responsibility, compassion, altruism, justice and respect – can have on the design, implementation and maintenance of these projects.

² Implementation of the United Nations Millennium Declaration” (IUNMD). Report of the Secretary-General, 2004

³ UN-HABITAT: “An Impact Evaluation Study of the Sri Sathya Sai Water Supply Project”, 2001

Human values are fundamental to human existence and span across cultures, nationalities and classes. They cultivate an environment of trust, transparency, responsibility, respect, caring, cooperation, excellence, and quality. They are the internal motivators for people to do their best in line with good character, morality and ethics.



Because human values are held in common across all cultures, they strongly tend to be *inclusive* values that bind people together across their differences and prompt a concern for others' well-being. People are able to draw upon the depth of their traditions of culture, nationality, and religion to find and express human values – an important aspect of their common acceptance among people around the world.

In the water supply and sanitation sectors, the practice of human values is associated with ethical behaviors such as:

- Showing respect for public property (human values: non-violence, self-control)
- Serving the poor communities (human values: compassion, love, brotherhood)
- Fulfilling job duties (human values: responsibility, determination, discipline)
- Considering the views of others (human values: harmony, tolerance, broad-mindedness)
- Producing high quality work (human values: sacrifice, satisfaction, caring)

In contrast, human values are conspicuously missing with unethical behaviours:

- Lies or secrecy with information (human values missing: honesty, transparency, accountability)
- Bias and partiality (human values missing: equality, justice, broadmindedness)
- Bribery, speed money, and kickbacks (human values missing: character, integrity, conscience)
- Laziness, refusing to do good work (human values missing: discipline, duty, respect)



It is because of the universality of human values that they offer the promise of helping to bring the same success in water supply and sanitation projects to every project around the world where WSS projects are undertaken. But how viable is this?

The task may seem daunting. According to studies by agencies such as the Asian Development Bank⁴, there are ten key causes of the lack of progress in meeting the humanitarian and economic goals related to water supply and sanitation;

1. Insufficient investment and aid
2. Poor quality work
3. Lack of good, pro-poor governance, transparency and accountability
4. Political interference
5. Limited awareness in civil society
6. Delays in implementation
7. Corruption
8. Insufficient tariffs
9. Long procurement processes
10. Lack of faith in the participatory processes

For example, in a cooperative project between UN-HABITAT and a USA-based non-profit organization, the Global Dharma Center, stakeholder consultations were held with over 500 professionals from India and a dozen countries in Africa – including utility management/engineers, elected officials and municipal government staff, educators/administrators, NGO representatives, and water/sanitation technical advisors. When asked about the need for human values they made comments such as:



- *The honesty of officers and politicians has changed. They feel they can take speed money or a bribe and they are honest if they do the job as promised.*
- *Municipal labour refuses to do their job; the subcontract work isn't done. About 40% of the workers do not work genuinely; they come but do not do anything.*
- *The supervisors are not going to the job sites and checking to make sure the workers are wearing the proper gear.*
- *The workers are not being recognized for the good job they are doing.*
- *If action needs to be taken against someone who is stealing water, the community will rise up against those who are trying to take corrective action.*
- *The supervisors of the water and sanitation project and the utility are in collusion to reduce the quality of materials in order to increase their profits.*
- *Fudged bills are given when the work was not done.*
- *When complaints are lodged, they are not being monitored.*

However, when the same stakeholders were also asked to tell stories about how human values were already being practiced, and the impact that had, they readily provided examples such as:

In some places there were many illegal connections. One way we are addressing the problem is to forcefully stop the illegal connections. Another is to have love and

⁴ ADB: "Impact Evaluation Study on Water Supply and Sanitation Projects," December 2002

compassion, so we can make the connections legal. We are trying to understand the cause of the illegal taps through camps and public awareness, rather than just cutting them off.

One man went to a politician and asked him to pay for his water so he would be a model for others and neighbours would start to pay. The one leader in a cluster of homes is the one we look for. If they pay, then the others will pay.

There was a sewage treatment plant that wasn't working – no one knew what to do. A retired man came forward and solved the problem. He worked hard to solve the problem and saved the corporation a lot of money.

There were 3 or 4 families who had no drainage because it was blocked by others, so they had to collect their waste and take it away to a distant place. Our engineer saw that the problem was that the drain had to go through the path of the political heavy-weights. She worked to make sure the drain was put in, despite the political interference.

The potential of human values to turn around the drastic situation of water supply and sanitation cannot be overestimated. And the necessary political, social and individual will to achieve water and sanitation goals, cannot be forced. Justice P. N. Bhagwati, former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court in India and a current member of the Human Rights Committee of the UN, has stated that compliance measures – using the judicial process, international public opinion, or the censure of international or regional organisations – are insufficient. He states⁵:



“These are the external compulsions which have limited efficacy. From human values springs humanism, and the establishment and maintenance of human dignity is not possible without instilling humanism in the hearts and minds of people.”

A focus on human values evokes the inner source of motivation for ethical and moral choices. As an illustration, a public health official in Jabalpur, India declared during a stakeholder consultation meeting:

“You have to help the workers realise they are supplying water to the people. This instils a moral duty and a moral feeling. A sense of belonging will come. It instils a feeling of wanting to get the things fixed as soon as possible. Our forefathers fought for this feeling – we must sacrifice for this feeling of being proud of our culture. When a leader teaches this, it helps us to improve the work.”

It will take more than just “throwing money at the problem.” By analyzing each obstacle in terms of the human values that are missing and identifying how human values can be

⁵ Speech delivered at the ILO in Geneva, Switzerland, 9 July 2004

strengthened and applied in practical and relevant ways, it can stimulate a range of creative ideas for overcoming or diminishing the obstacle. For example, stakeholders were given the following situation and asked (1) “What human values are missing?” And (2) “How could human values help the situation?”

Some collectors mis-read the meter in return for a “fee.” Some VIPs do not receive bills, and there are other social inequities. The work force needs to be more assertive in collecting unpaid bills. Supervisors are apathetic to improving the system

Their answers included:

- Human values that are missing: *lack of honesty ; no ownership; lack of long-term planning; no caring; no transparency*
- Application of human values: *educate the staff on how much is spent for making good water; take ownership to collect bills and run the organization; use public monitoring to increase transparency; give incentives to collect.*

Since human values are found across all cultures, and are thus inherent in humanity, the question is, “How can we elicit and evoke our natural capacity for expressing human values in our lives?” When it comes to adults working in the water supply and sanitation sectors, this translates into the development of six capabilities:

- Increase awareness about the importance and role of human values and ethics at work
- Draw from human value strengths in all work activities
- Define the need for ethics at work and generate creative ways to strengthen the environment for human values and ethics
- Develop a purity and unity of thought, word, and action
- Establish a set of guiding principles based on human values and recognize how to positively influence their environment
- Make the commitment to being a champion of human values and ethics in their workplace



And this can't be just in theory, but in practice. Increasing the capacity to work in accord with human values must not stop at “new understanding,” but actually lead people through five levels of engagement:

1. *Awareness* – “I understand this and find it meaningful.”
2. *Aspiration/Intention* – “I want to achieve a purposeful goal.”
3. *Motivation* – “I am moved and energized.”
4. *Action* – “I am doing something to achieve the goal.”
5. *Actualisation* – “I am seeing results.”



The effectiveness of this approach has been demonstrated with the professionals attending the workshops on “Human Values and Ethics in the Workplace” as part of the afore-mentioned project with UN-HABITAT and the Global Dharma Center. At the end, each participant wrote a “letter” to themselves, stating their commitment to concrete actions to implement their insights from the workshop. The typical letter included commitments such as:

- *I will try to work for the poor people with honesty to upgrade their living standards.*
- *I will encourage my sub-ordinates to work hard by appreciating when they achieve their targets.*
- *I have to improve my patience to solve the problems of water supply in the village where there are severe water problems and have the villagers develop trust in me by fulfilling their requirements.*
- *I would like to motivate others to follow the ideal goal of selflessness: not to entertain corrupt practices; not to be selfish; and to give a human ear to the people’s problems.*
- *When we work hard people will recognize and cooperate with us to get better results. I have to work for the welfare of the people; then only will I get satisfaction for whatever the government has paid to me.*

The Secretary General of the UN, Kofi Annan, strongly reminds us that the time to act is now⁶:

“Overcoming human poverty will require a quantum leap in scale and ambition: more nationally owned strategies and policies, stronger institutions, wider participatory processes, focused investments in economic and social infrastructure, and more resources, domestic and external. Realistically, if the goals set are to be reached, these developments need to happen very soon. The Millennium Development Goals are still technically feasible in even the poorest countries, but the window of opportunity is rapidly narrowing and the political will remains largely absent. We must seize this opportunity.”



Achieving the MDG targets for water and sanitation requires the power of compassion, conviction, commitment, conscience, and character. It requires a spirit of humanity that spans generations and works on behalf of the well-being of all people and the environment. Most of all, in the words of the Secretary General, it requires⁷:

“...a world united by common values and striving with renewed determination to achieve peace and decent standards of living for every man, woman and child.”

⁶ IUNMD, page 2

⁷ Ibid.

In conclusion, we ask, "Is it really possible to evoke this kind of inspired action based on a cross-cultural set of fundamental human values? Can they be the key to fulfill the promise and potential of providing safe water and proper sanitation to everyone in our global neighborhood?"

In answer, we offer these comments from three eminent figures in the world political scene...



"Human values and ethics are directly relevant to the art of responsible public policy making. Human values and ethics can become a source of political mobilization and contribute to social change. These fundamental values should guide and inspire us in our efforts to promote development and combat poverty."

Kjell Magne Bondevik
Prime Minister of Norway

"As long as poverty, injustice and gross inequality persist in our world, none of us can truly rest. Poverty is not natural. It is man-made and it can be overcome and eradicated by the actions of human beings. Overcoming poverty is not a gesture of charity. It is an act of justice... the protection of a fundamental human right, the right to dignity and a decent life."

Nelson Mandela, 3 February, 2005
"The Campaign to Make Poverty History"



"We want to couple economic prosperity and human values, which are drawn from this civilisational heritage."

"I am not interested in listening to 100 ways by which it cannot be done. Can you tell me one way in which it can be done? If I am authorized, I will remove the word 'impossible.'"

The Honourable A. P. J. Abdul Kalam
President of India
From personal interview and
"Vision to Mission" (2003)