



Portfolio sample by Stacy Dry Lara

Safe Drinking Water and Sanitation-Fundamental Human Rights So Many Live Without September 10, 2014

What resonates with me about September 9th at HRC27 is the Special Rapporteur (SR) presentation on the right to safe drinking water and sanitation. I recall FAWCO's 2009-2013 Target Program that focused on the global environmental issue of clean water. Under this 2-year program member clubs raised awareness about the importance of clean water globally with specific focus on Tabitha Wells for Clean Water, Cambodia. Remember the efforts by your club? I was a member of the Zurich club at the time and very well remember our team planning fundraising events and contributing to the Target Project.

In her sixth and last report as SR on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation, Ms. Catarina de Albuquerque, said that in the last six years she had been confronted with a multitude of human rights violations and challenges faced were amazingly similar when comparing the world's poorest, medium income and rich countries. She said that, "key components of human rights to water and sanitation were still too often viewed primarily as aspirational policy goals."

Ms. Albuquerque said that [no matter the demographic] her findings consistently revealed:

- patterns of marginalization and discrimination;
- a failure to take the necessary immediate steps to realize the rights to water and sanitation to the maximum of available resources;
- a failure to regulate and protect those rights where services were delegated to third parties and;
- instances of retrogressive measures and poor investment in operation and maintenance and lack of consideration for sustainability.

Although closely related, with one impacting the other, water and sanitation are two distinct human rights and reports suggest, as humanitarians, we should draw the distinction. A multitude of United Nations (UN) resolutions refer to the right to safe water and sanitation but in many cases efforts to provide safe water overshadow the right to sanitation. Ms. Albuquerque said, "violations of the right to sanitation in general have not received the attention they deserve. Victims of violations of the right to sanitation are among the most stigmatized and marginalized in society, and there remain taboos preventing an open discussion about the indignities linked to unhygienic conditions."

During the interactive dialog, the European Union (EU) raised the question of what is the best and most cost effective way to address and prevent violations from the point of view of victims? SR Albuquerque passionately said there is not one answer to the question. She went on to say that planning and strategic development on many levels during times of normalcy would be the first place to start. Governments need to prepare and focus on strategy in order to be as cost-effective as possible.

Speaking as a concerned country dedicated to improving clean water provisions and sanitation, Brazil said that, "among the many initiatives adopted, we would like to highlight the expansion of investment, the combined work of different governments, decentralized use of resources allocated from the federal

budget, the reduction of financial compensations and the flexibility of debt limits for states and cities, technical and financial support for projects, reduced time of bidding projects as well as intensive monitoring of contracted operations.”

In terms of the legal responsibilities, Uruguay spoke on behalf of the Blue Group, a cross-regional group of States consisting of Bangladesh, Brazil, Croatia, France, Germany, Egypt, the Maldives, Morocco, Slovenia, Spain and Uruguay that formed in 2011 to support the implementation of the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation. The delegate reported that, “in our first statement as a group we declare that the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation contained in existing human rights treaties and entails, therefore, a legally binding obligation.”

Reflecting on her term as SR, Ms. Albuquerque said, “If I can be proud of one thing it is the tireless dialogues with so many different stakeholders, even though sometimes we thought we were speaking different languages.” During her term as SR, Ms. Albuquerque has worked closely with several organizations dedicated to understanding the meaning of the human right to water and sanitation and translating it into reality. As a step forward and response to her mandate research, she introduced today her handbook for implementing the human rights to water and sanitation.

This Handbook has been developed to:

- clarify the meaning of the human rights to water and sanitation;
- explain the obligations that arise from these rights;
- provide guidance on implementing the human rights to water and sanitation;
- share some examples of good practice and show how these rights are being implemented;
- explore how States can be held to account for delivering on their obligations; and
- provide its users with checklists, so they can assess how far they are complying with the human rights to water and sanitation.

As a helpful tool beyond her mandate and to ensure its relevancy, SR pursued a collaborative approach in the development of this handbook. She told the assembly, “the past six years have brought me into contact with so many well-informed, interesting and engaged people: mayors and ministers, engineers and economists, business managers and community organizers, human rights lawyers and government officials. I have shamelessly used these people, with all of their extensive experience, opinions and ideas, to develop strategies to realize the human rights to water and sanitation – and these ideas and strategies have been condensed into the nine booklets of practical guidance and checklists that I am presenting to you here today.”

The handbook has nine chapters and can be accessed [here](#). I found the guideline interesting, even on my local level here in Geneva.

Thanks for reading – until the next blog Stacy Dry Lara.

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