

## Peace Corps Volunteers: Source of Their Water and Daily Water Usage

My water is pumped from a spring at the mission and comes through pipes right to a regular sink in my house. The water quality is very good. I do not need to filter it or boil it. I have never run out of water, but my students often do. The taps and toilets in their hostel have been turned off because they were told they were wasting it. So, instead, they draw it from rain collection tanks. When this runs out they usually fetch from the nearby village spring. The villagers beat them away with sticks, though. After a while the sisters will usually see reason and allow one teacher to pump water for them to the school and they collect it there. All of the water on the mission usually runs out in a few months at exam time, just when the rainy season is due to begin. It doesn't look like the supply will hold out this year. Water throughout this country is unevenly distributed. If village people try to go to another village where the water is more plentiful, they will often be chased away.

I use a lot less water here than I did in the United States. I bathe every day, and this usually amounts to two to three liters of water. I use water for cooking and washing, and for tea, but in much smaller amounts than before. Usually a liter or less of water can wash the whole day's dishes. I have a flush toilet, but usually use wash water to flush it and follow the creed—"If it's yellow, let it mellow." Water is used for the same purpose in the community, but sometimes in smaller amounts as they have to fetch it on their heads.

*By Claire Hilger  
Qacha's Nek, Lesotho*

The water source in my village is a public tap—actually a series of taps, located throughout the village. The system is fairly new, installed by Rural Water Supply in 1996. The system is a series of underground and above-ground pipes that carry pumped water from a spring near the top of one of the village mountaintops. I have to say I am quite lucky, compared with other Peace Corps Volunteers. Water has never been a problem. The tap nearest my house did dry out for a few days during the dry season, but villagers were able to collect water from another tap less than a kilometer away.

In general, the water system seems to be quite good. I have spoken to people of neighboring villages who have yet to install a water system and they are having many water troubles. Their sources are slow and unreliable boreholes that are dirty—used as drinking water by cows and goats. I consider myself a blessed Peace Corps Volunteer for having such a reliable water source.

On average, I fill a 20-liter bucket of water every two to three days for daily use. This varies, of course, according to how often I bathe and wash my hair (Sorry, Mom!). In the evenings I boil about two liters for the next day's drinking. I began boiling after a long bout of giardiasis, an infection of the small intestine. At first I found it tedious and "un-Peace-Corps-like" to boil, but having a routine of boiling to get rid of giardia is actually not a problem at all. I bathe indoors using a basin. It's truly amazing how little water is actually required to bathe! I use roughly three liters to bathe and three to wash my hair. During the dry season, when the river is nothing more than a series of stagnant puddles, I also use tap water to wash my clothes, as do others in the village. The Basotho are very particular about washing themselves, their clothes, bedding, and dishes on a daily basis, so their dependence on the village water system, particularly during the dry season, is strong.

I don't even know how I can compare my use of water in the Peace Corps with that in the United States. My life here depends on the availability of water, rain, and the weather in general, as it never did growing up in a big city. I am so completely conscious now of how every drop is used, of how to use water more efficiently, and of the fact that I never know when or if water will not be available.

*By Cynthia Holahan  
Ha Nkoka, Thaba-Tseka District, Lesotho*

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Most drinking water comes from one of three sources: a tap or pump, a natural spring, or collected rainwater. Except for the rainwater, the water has to be transported from the source to the people's houses. This is not an easy task. Water is heavy and people must walk one or two miles on rocky mountainous paths.

Many villages have a water source within a 30-minute walk. Taps are the best. Just turn the handle and water pours! The pumps take more effort. Some are long levers that look like one-sided teeter-totters. Children will bounce them up and down with their whole bodies. Some are two handles that need to be turned like the pedals on a bicycle. And still others need to be cranked in circles horizontally.

But even taps or pumps are no guarantee of water. Sometimes the water flows only for a few hours a day, often early in the morning around 5 o'clock. Villagers must wake up this early to get their buckets in line and wait for the water. Sometimes the taps dry completely and people must walk even farther to another village or natural spring. (Remember how hard it is to carry water?)

Natural springs are good, but people need to scoop the water into buckets, which can take a long time. Rainwater is collected from most metal roofs, but the traditional houses have thatched roofs. And the dry season can last a long time, which makes collecting rainwater ineffective during that time.

My water comes from all of these sources. I need to pay someone to collect my water from a tap or spring, whichever is available. I can't do it myself. It is too far to carry those heavy buckets and I haven't mastered carrying them on my head! If it rains, my host family will collect rainwater from their metal roof. My house is next to theirs, but my roof is thatch.

My water comes from various sources, and sometimes the water from these different sources gets mixed together. So to be safe, I boil all water I use for drinking, especially my favorite drink, Kool-Aid, sent from the States!

There is no running water at my house. I store water in two large buckets inside my house. I need to scoop the water out of the buckets to use for cooking, cleaning, or bathing. But Lesotho can be very cold. It even snows in the wintertime. So I certainly don't want to pour that cold water over myself for bathing. That means taking the extra time to heat some water before taking a bath. A bath means a few inches of water in a bucket. I certainly can't cover my whole body in hot water. Winter baths are cold!

Because water is so difficult to get, I have learned to conserve and recycle it. I usually have only 60 liters of water for an entire week for all my needs. I can recycle water when washing clothes. The water used to rinse one load of laundry is used to wash the next load (all washed by hand, of course). I have also learned how to get clean by bathing in a bucket with only four liters of water. That's only two 2-liter Coke bottles of water for an entire bath!

*By Becki Krieg  
Qacha's Nek, Lesotho*

The water in my village comes from a borehole, or *cilibeng*. When it is the rainy season (December–February) there is plenty of water. The rest of the year, however, is pure drought. The well usually has water only at 6 a.m., but sometimes at 5 p.m. also. The villagers have to travel to neighboring villages to get water. I boil water for visitors because people have gotten diarrhea from it, however it does not seem to affect me. There are also many taps in my village.

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My day begins with a knock at my door at dawn from a neighbor. She knocks to tell me to come to the well and fetch my water. Each night A'Me comes and takes my bucket to ensure I am the first to receive water.

I have never valued something as much as I value water now. Honestly, I never thought twice about the water I used or how much or where it came from. Now, receiving only 5 liters a day, I save every drop I can! I recycle dirty water for use in my garden and my family also uses rainwater catchments. People here wait all day to get water and travel long distances to fetch it. The Rural Water Supply (government water works) has been promising for over a year now that it will come to my village and deep-drill a borehole, but they still have not arrived. Will they ever? I only hope.

*By JeanMarie Mitchell  
Ha Tebelo, Lesotho*

My village, Ha Ntlale, gets its water from a tap that is fed from a spring box on the mountain. When there is no water at the tap, I must go to the next village or go to a water hole some distance away. I dip the water from the hole and carry it to my house. Often I find the cows, sheep, goats, or donkeys drinking at the water hole. Needless to say I boil all my water and always try to keep two buckets in reserve. There isn't much water available because we had a very dry winter and no rain this spring. I usually try to use only one to one and a half liters of water a day. This includes bathing, cooking, and cleaning dishes. Once a week I wash clothes, but try to use as little water as possible.

My day starts by boiling two liters of water. I use less than one liter to bathe; I drink two cups of coffee; and then I save the rest for cooking and cleaning dishes. If the tap is working, I may indulge myself by using a little more for bathing.

My host family uses a little more than I do because there are more people in the family. They use a wheelbarrow to carry two 10-liter buckets of water. Right now they use more water because they are making dung smear for the floor and walls of a new building. The building was constructed from rock and held together with a mud mixture that dried and became hard.

*By Peter Yurich  
Ha Khayensti, Lesotho*