

## **Barrels and Buckets: Access to Water in Kenya**

### **Narrative Stories From Kenya**

The people of Kericho District in Kenya's Rift Valley Province enjoy an annual rainfall of 1,000 mm to 2,000 mm, the equivalent of 3.25 to 6.5 feet. In fact, rain falls every day in Kericho, usually during the afternoon. The hilly topography of the district results in continual flow of many small- and medium-sized rivers. Kericho Town draws its water from one of these local rivers. The water intake is located in the Mau Forest, one of the few remaining natural forests in Kenya. From the intake, pumps drive water to a modern treatment facility. Kericho is one of the only towns of its size in Kenya to employ such a treatment works.

My house, located near Kericho Town, is supplied with piped water from the treatment system. The water flows clear and cold and tastes pure. Despite the good water quality at my home, I boil water for drinking to ensure that all pathogens are deactivated.

Kericho District has abundant water resources. The government Ministries of Health and Water supervise development of water resources. Community water supplies throughout the district incorporate rivers, wells, springs, and rooftop rainwater collection to ensure enough clean water is available to community members.

At times, the volume of water in Kericho District causes problems. El Niño rains during 1997 contributed to the degradation of many roads within Kericho. Standing water creates explosions in the numbers of mosquitoes and subsequently, in the number of malaria cases. The people of Kericho District will continue to be challenged in future years to develop their water resources in a positive manner.

*By David Frommell  
Badoo, Rift Valley Province, Kenya*

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Mombasa is an island in the Indian Ocean populated by about 500,000 people. Living at almost sea level surrounded by the ocean means that the water in our water table is saline. As a result our water must be piped in from the mainland. Most of our water comes from Mzima Springs, in Tsavo National Park (about 200 km away). From there it is piped to Mazaras (about 20 km away), where it is treated at the reservoir. While the water is generally considered safe, many people, like me, take the precaution of boiling the drinking water. Water vendors offer another source of water as well. They push a cart around town selling 20 liters of water (usually tap water) for between five shillings (7 cents) and fifty shillings (67 cents), depending on how scarce the water is at the time.

I am one of the lucky Peace Corps Volunteers who have running water, although it is not as reliable as one would imagine. In fact, as I write this I have been without water for two days. This is common throughout Kenya, so people have adapted methods to compensate. The building I live in, for example, has tanks on the roof that fill when the water is working and we store it until the water is not coming through the pipes for whatever reason. These tanks are connected to the plumbing in the building and help maintain a more constant water supply. However, if the water does not come back on within a few hours the tanks are depleted and the residents of the building are left to find their own sources of water until the piped water returns. Many of the people, myself included, have plastic barrels that we fill when the water is on. We can use that when the water is off.

*By Patrick Campbell  
Mombasa, Kenya*

Although my house in Kenya has pipes, this does not guarantee that water comes through them. I live in Western Kenya's Vihiga District, which is one of the most densely populated areas of the world, with more than 110 people per square kilometer. Therefore elements of infrastructure in Vihiga, such as piped water systems, which were built in the past, are no longer adequate to supply the exploding population. The solution? Ration water by days. Mine is supposed to come for a couple of hours on Wednesday and Friday mornings, but it rarely comes on schedule, if at all.

On a "water morning" (whether it is scheduled to come that day or not) water trickles slowly out of one tap in the backyard. Pipes leading to the kitchen and bathroom stay dry, due to low water pressure. I must remain at home these mornings and collect as much water as possible to store in plastic containers, for I have no way of knowing when it will come again. Tap water looks, smells, and tastes clean, but still I boil and filter it before drinking, just to be safe.

If the tap stays dry much longer than a week, I must resort to collecting rainwater. Luckily Vihiga is a high potential area—it rains here most months of the year. I have spent many evenings eagerly watching the sky, hoping that the rains will come to fill my basins. Rainwater that runs off the overhanging roof is noticeably dirtier than the tap water, but after boiling and filtering, it is potable.

During the dry season (December to February), both tap water and rain are difficult to come by. My plastic containers run dry. Simple tasks like cooking, and washing dishes and clothes must be postponed so that I can ration the little water I have between drinking and bathing. As a last resort, I must buy water from the mamas who fetch it at the river. This water can be used around the house, but I will not consume it. One time the water I received from the river smelled like gasoline.

*By Barbara Hinsman  
Vigeze Village, Vihiga, Kenya*