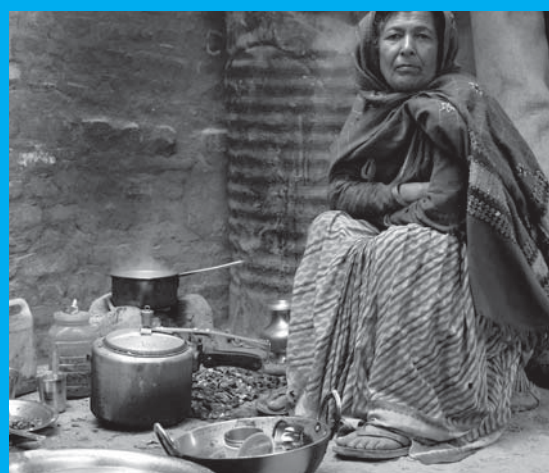




A PHOTO STORY:
WOMEN AND WATER





INTRODUCTION

As in other parts of the world, the urban population of Nepal has been growing exponentially. Between 1991 and 2001, the city dweller population increased by three folds as an increasing number of people moved to cities in search of jobs, education and other facilities.

Nepal's capital, Kathmandu, is home to 2.6 million people – almost 15 per cent of the country's total urban population – and one of the fastest growing South Asian cities. Rapid urbanisation, unorganised urban sprawl and lack of infrastructure development has put a strain on the Valley's limited water resources, creating acute shortages and scarcity which in turn affects the urban poor the most.

According to the Central Bureau of Statistics, one in every five Kathmandu households has no access to a domestic water source and two-thirds of its urban household live with an inadequate water supply. Furthermore, rivers are poorly maintained, wells are drying up and the groundwater table is lowering. The water distribution system is also weak and inefficient.

This photobook prepared by WaterAid Nepal on the occasion of Women's Day is an effort to represent visually the day to day reality of the problems faced by urban poor women in regards to Water, Hygiene and Sanitation. Although the six women documented in this book come from different backgrounds and professions, their problems are the same: limited access to drinking water and basic hygiene and sanitation.



MANJU KARKI, 35

House maid

Like many other domestic migrants, Manju Karki came to Kathmandu from Nijgadh in Bara district in search of a better life. Karki first worked in construction, but switched jobs after facing exploitation. She now works as a house maid and earns Rs 4,500 a month – half of which is spent on rent for a one-room tin house that she shares with her husband and younger son. Her elder son still lives in Nijgadh.

“The biggest challenge about living in Kathmandu today is water shortage,” says Karki. There is only one tap in the housing block where she stays with 12 other families. Water supply is irregular and there are times when residents have to go by with no running water for weeks on end. A nearby well is an alternative source. Although the water is murky Karki and her neighbours have no choice but to use it.

Karki does all of her washing during the weekend (her only off-day) at a river, half an hour walk away from her house. “It’s hard having to go so far everytime but I don’t have a choice. There’s nothing I can do without water.”



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KUMARI LAMA, 30

Driver

Thirty-year-old Kumari Lama has been working as a safa tempo driver for the past 14 years. Lama lives with her mother and two children in a one-room apartment at Chyasal, Lalitpur. Ten other families live in the same building.

The only source of water for Kumari and other tenants is a well in the backyard. However, with the ground water being unfit for drinking and cooking purposes, Kumari has to regularly buy water from private sellers and spends close to Rs 1000 each month.

“I don’t think there’s anyone in my neighbourhood who doesn’t need to buy water from private companies,” says Lama.

“I don’t think there’s anyone in my neighbourhood who doesn’t need to buy water.”

Kumari and her family share a common toilet with three other families living on the same floor of the building. She has to carry a bucket of water up three flights of stairs each time she uses the toilet because it is not connected to a tap.



“When there is no electricity, there is no water.”

KARMA CHONZOM, 65

Yarn spinner

For Karma Chonzom, 65, dealing with shortage of water has been the most difficult part about living in Kathmandu. Until a year ago Chonzom had to regularly scrounge around her neighbourhood looking for water as her tap had dried out. She was able to make it function again after reducing its height and

replacing the faucet with a water pump – a common method adopted by Kathmandu denizens. These days she gets water thrice a week for an hour each day. However, the force of water is low and without a machine to increase the force, she gets enough water to fill only two to three jars.

“When there is no electricity, there is no water because we can’t use our machines,” says Chonzom, who lives on her own and works at a handicraft centre as a yarn spinner.

Her common toilet is 10 minutes away from her room and doesn’t have running water.



SITA CHAUDHARY, 30

Construction Worker

Originally from Sindhuli district, Sita Chaudhary, moved to Kathmandu with her family just last month. Sita is a construction worker and along with her family of six lives in a room provided by her employer. Although rent is free living there has been a challenge for the Chaudhary family due to unavailability of water in the area.

Sita has to wake up at 1 every morning so she can line up her water jars in queue at a public tap – an hour's walk away from home. She carries the filled vessels all the way back to her house. Buying water is not an option for Sita who makes Rs 200 a day.

Sita's makeshift toilet is right beside her room and has no locks. Cleaning herself during her periods is especially difficult for her as the toilet offers no privacy and the family has never adequate water.



Sita's makeshift toilet is right beside her room and has no locks.





SITA SUNUWAR, 54

Housewife

For years Sita Sunuwar, 54, had to go to her neighbours to collect water as she didn't have a tap connected to her house. "They were not always welcoming," she says.

Sunuwar and her husband, an iron smith, lived in a mud and brick house which was damaged in the April earthquake. The couple

built a new house from their savings and also installed a water tap at their new home. "It took us almost two months to get the tap fixed after sending our application to the Department of Water Supply," says Sunuwar who spent Rs 13,000 in the process.

However, the tap has is currently non-functional as new water pipes are being dug out in the area. For now, Sunuwar is back to requesting her neighbours and staying in long-queues for water.



“It took us almost two months to get the tap fixed after sending our application to the Department of Water Supply.





ANJU PARIYAR, 38

Slum dweller

Anju Pariyar lives in an illegal squatter settlement along the Bagmati River with her family of eight. As with most slum dwellers, Pariyar doesn't have water supply in her house. The only source of water is a broken water pipe, 15 minutes walk away, which is used by majority of the residents of the slum. It takes Pariyar and her daughter several hours of wait to fetch few dozen jars of water.

"The rich can afford to buy water, we can't," says Pariyar who sells flowers to feed her family. Her husband is ill and can't work. Sanitation is not a priority for the family who struggles to make ends meet.

The only toilet that the family has is broken and Pariyar doesn't have the money for reconstruction.

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