When the water comes in India | Why animals matter
Catching rain, improving nutrition in Bolivia
Life is better now

J RON BYLER
MCC U.S. EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly. (John 10:10)

I have heard it said that much of MCC’s work is about too much water, not enough water or having clean water.

This issue of A Common Place features MCC’s work to provide water and food to people who need them.

In Caipepe in eastern Bolivia, MCC is helping families build systems to catch rainwater they can use to grow new gardens. In previous years, MCC has helped build small wells, a windmill and latrines to protect the groundwater from being contaminated.

In the village of Sinisingi in eastern India, a diversion-based irrigation system brings water from the nearby hills into the village for irrigating crops and for bathing. I stood in this village and several others like it and saw firsthand the impact of communities having access to clean running water for the very first time.

“There is no need to leave the village now,” Basudeba Bada Raita says in nearby Munigadiha. “I am dreaming about how to use this land.”

In the village of Dharhai in Odisha, India, Sami Oram shares how irrigation for crops and safe drinking water, coupled with access to electricity and education for children, has changed her life and the lives of those in her community.

“Life is better now for people in my village,” she says.

Life is better now. When you support MCC, you are helping to bring the fullness of life to thousands and thousands of people all over the world. Thank you for your support of this ministry we have together in the name of Christ.

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Mennonite Central Committee (MCC), a worldwide ministry of Anabaptist churches, shares God’s love and compassion for all in the name of Christ by responding to basic human needs and working for peace and justice. MCC envisions communities worldwide in right relationship with God, one another and creation. mcc.org

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Bangladesh
Fruit trees
In Bangladesh, as part of a larger MCC effort to improve agriculture and food security, Beauty Hembrom, shown holding neighbor Sreemoni Hasda, and others receive guava, lemon, olive and papaya seedlings. The trees provide an affordable, easily available source of nutritious food for children and adults. This is one of the projects featured in MCC’s Christmas Giving supplement. Find projects online at mcc.org/christmas, see the printed supplement mailed with this issue of the magazine or contact your nearest MCC office (see page 2) to learn more.

South Sudan
Meeting urgent needs
“Send my regards to all the people who supported us with these food items. This food has brought ample peace of mind,” says Sarah Ayok, who received a two-month supply of sorghum, cooking oil and salt as part of an emergency response in South Sudan. “This is a good help for us widows.” Ayok, 25, has six children and fled home after her husband was killed when violence erupted in their village.

Vietnam
New lunch routines
Thanks to the support of MCC, children at this preschool in Thang village in northern Vietnam have a chance to eat a nutritious lunch at school. MCC provided funding for schools in isolated villages to construct kitchens or repair existing facilities, making it possible to serve lunch at school. As a result, preschool attendance and students’ nutrition improved. As students spend more time at school, they are developing stronger relationships with their teachers, and parents have more hours to work in their fields.

Burkina Faso
Supporting artisans
Through MCC’s Serving and Learning Together program in 2017-2018, Rachel Bissell of Grand Rapids, Michigan, learned about batik, lost wax bronze casting and metal work as she served as a liaison between fair trade organization Ten Thousand Villages and artisan groups, including artisans like Léon Rouamba, in Burkina Faso. Looking for a way to support artisans around the world this Christmas? Find a Ten Thousand Villages store near you, or shop online at tenthousandvillages.com.

Lend a hand — Hygiene kits
Keeping clean is an important part of remaining healthy, but families uprooted by disaster or war often struggle to afford the necessary supplies. Hygiene kits also are given through schools or orphanages to encourage healthy habits for children.

Contents (NEW items only)

1 adult-size toothbrush (in manufacturer’s packaging)
1 large bar bath soap (leave in wrapper)
1 nail clipper (good quality)
1 hand towel (medium weight, dark or bright colors; approx. 16in x 26in)
1 wide-toothed comb (6–8in)

Hygiene kits are distributed in a useful, double-drawstring cloth bag (11¾in x 16¾in). You may sew the bag yourself, request bags from an MCC material resources center or donate contents that we will place in a bag. For bag instructions or drop-off locations, contact your nearest MCC office (see page 2) or go to mcc.org/kits.
Through a diversion-based irrigation system, water flows into Sinisingi, a village in Odisha state in eastern India. The system diverts a small portion of water from a stream high in the hills, then gravity propels the water into this concrete reservoir the community built.
When the water comes

In India, MCC water projects nourish land and enhance livelihoods and health in more than a dozen rural communities.

STORY BY JULIE BELL
PHOTOS BY COLIN VANDENBERG

Water might flow year-round through a stream in the hills above the village of Sinisingi in eastern India. But for residents like Maheshwar Pujari, who was born in the village 69 years ago, retrieving the water long meant an upward trek of at least an hour through difficult terrain.

All of that changed in 2013, when water began pouring from a pipe not far from Pujari’s home.

“That first day we were so happy,” says Pujari. “We had a shower, we washed our clothes. Then we started developing our land.”

Through a diversion-based irrigation system, a small portion of the water is diverted from a stream into overland pipes, then gravity propels it down to the village below. The water is used for irrigation, bathing and washing dishes and laundry.

MCC supports the building of these systems in Odisha state in eastern India through its partner Institute of Social Action and Research Activities (ISARA).

Thirty-four-year-old Basudeba Bada Raita and his family used to walk more than a mile a day to get water for their garden. Their 1.4 acres of land had just one growing season—from May to October—and harvests were only millet and legumes. Unable to support his family from crops alone, Raita would migrate across India to find work.

That changed when, in 2015, a new diversion-based irrigation system brought water to Raita’s village of Munigadiha. Today he has three major growing seasons a year, his land producing cabbage, cauliflower and other vegetables, as well as corn, millet, legumes and rice.
Now, his life, and his work, are in Munigadiha.

“There is no need to leave the village now,” Raita says. “I am planning how to cultivate even better with the water. I am dreaming about how to use this land.”

Pabitra Paramanya, an MCC project officer in India, says Raita is a good example of one of the project’s goals—keeping younger people in their home communities.

For many generations, people in this region lived by the forest and alongside rivers, growing millet, foraging for native plants and raising livestock. More erratic rainfall and the degradation of traditional lands due to deforestation and erosion have forced people to go to nearby cities to sell firewood or work as manual laborers.

Paramanya says younger men, especially those with less education, often turn to manual labor in quarries or factories where they are poorly paid and exposed to hazardous conditions.

With a new source of irrigation, they have alternatives.

“They say, ‘My father was a farmer, I have a passion for farming,’” Paramanya explains. “And they say, ‘With this water we can grow vegetables that we can eat and sell.’”

Twenty-six-year-old Kandha Sabar is doing just that. Since a new sys-
tem brought water to his village of Patrabasa in 2015, he’s been growing everything from vegetables to bananas on his 7 acres of land. After supplying his household, he sells the rest. “Now I am only growing an acre of millet and adding more vegetables,” he says. “We are getting a good rate at the market for vegetables and this is good income for us.”

Sabar uses the money he earns from selling vegetables to pay off debts and hire laborers for his fields. Eventually it will pay for his son’s education and improvements to the family home.

From 2014 to 2017, diversion-based irrigation systems were installed in 14 villages. Systems are scheduled for installation in another three villages by the end of 2018.

More than 300 miles away in another region of Odisha state, reliable irrigation is also improving food security and livelihoods in rural communities.

MCC is supporting Disha (an Indian partner organization whose Hindi name means finding the right path or direction) in more than a dozen villages. The effort is funded through MCC’s account at Canadian Foodgrains Bank, with matching contributions from the Canadian government.

Work begins in each village with the construction of earthen berms, or raised banks, in the mountainous areas above villages. The berms collect runoff and channel the water downward, replenishing wells and groundwater levels in and around the communities.
Marim Toppo says that before there was a reliable source of irrigation for her garden in the village of Sandalki, her family’s diet was mostly rice and ground dry leaves cooked in water.

When Disha brought water to her village, along with training on composting, organic pesticides and mushroom cultivation, Toppo took part in everything.

Today her garden is lush with fruit trees, vegetables and flowers, and she began growing mushrooms.

“I am illiterate and cannot find work easily,” Toppo says. “So this is my way of earning income.”

She also joined a women’s self-help group that Disha helped organize. With money from the group’s loan program, she drilled a borehole and bought a small foot-operated pump to irrigate her garden. Her next goal is a motorized pump to irrigate more land.

Disha provided a male goat to each village, which families can use for breeding.

As a result, Mathilda Burwa, a widow in Sandalki, now has more than a dozen goats.

“I sell some goats when they are ready and then I can buy vegetables and rice and seeds from the market,” she says. “Now I have three meals a day.”

By early 2016, earthen berms were built above 12 villages. The project will be extended to an additional 10 villages by the summer of 2019.

About 1,700 households will benefit...
Give a gift that changes lives around the world

This Christmas, choose from gifts like irrigation for crops, skills for young farmers or meals at school. Find these and more in MCC’s Christmas Giving supplement, mailed with this issue of the magazine. See Christmas Giving projects online at mcc.org/christmas or contact your nearest MCC office (see page 2).

From the two projects in Odisha state, residents contribute by clearing land, laying irrigation pipe and building berms and water storage areas.

As villages begin to prosper, other benefits follow. Governments are providing electrical services and new roads into some areas, says Gordon Zook, who is from Lancaster, Pennsylvania, and serves as MCC representative in India with his wife Carol Zook.

“Now the markets for vegetables from these villages are opening up and we need to think about the best way to market them,” Gordon Zook says. He attributes the success of the projects to the partnership of MCC and organizations like ISARA or Disha with residents of each local community.

“But the biggest component is the community,” he says. “This type of food security is about using what’s available in each village. These communities work hard, and they adapt. That’s why these projects do well.”

Julie Bell is senior writer and editor for MCC Canada. Colin Vandenberg is a photographer in Winnipeg, Manitoba.
I am from the village of Dharhai in Odisha, a state in eastern India, and I live with my mother and three younger sisters.

My father died when I was 13 and in eighth grade. As the oldest child, it was my responsibility to take care of the family.

I wanted to stop my studies and go to work, but my family told me to continue my education. So I did both. My mother and I did construction work building a bridge. We struggled a lot to find enough money to buy clothes and food and pay for studies for me and my sisters.

Sometimes there was no money to buy rice or anything else, and we thought, “What’s the use of living? Maybe it would be easier if our family wasn’t here anymore.”

In my village, I saw children who didn’t go to school because their parents put them out to work. Some of them ate only rice and ground leaves cooked in water and had scabs and sores on their bodies. I felt so badly for them.

At that time in my village, there was no electricity, no irrigation for crops and no safe drinking water. People got diseases because of the difficult conditions.

Then when I was about 15 or 16, Disha (an MCC partner organization whose Hindi name means finding the right path or direction) came to my village and talked about doing some work with us.

They began with a program to help people with agriculture. Slowly Disha added education for children and self-help groups for women. This meant that women could take loans from the group and buy seeds or livestock that they could raise to help feed their families and earn income.

Back then, I was the only girl in my village to pass through class 10. I participated in all of the Disha education and training and when they saw that they said, “You can work with us and help us, and you can still go to college.”

So, I went back and forth — studying in one place and teaching children with Disha at home, I think I got paid about 500 rupees per month (about $7), but the amount doesn’t really matter. What mattered to me was the opportunity to teach small children.

I was already the head of my household, and people had always come to me for advice. Then Disha sent me for training where I learned how to be a leader in my village. They said I could also

“I started to think about what I could do to make things better in my community.”
look after the women’s self-help groups. My salary increased, and I could help support my sisters’ education.

Here I was, a woman who was a leader in her village, and I started to think about what I could do to make things better in my community. We had so much hunger and poverty and people were being exploited in so many ways.

There was an old village leader who dominated everyone, and he wasn't happy about me being recognized as a leader. He told a community meeting that he would beat me and other women, too. But my community supported me, and I was safe then. I am still safe.

Over the years I was working more with Disha. I was responsible for my village and two more. Slowly, as people in the villages began to trust me, more villages were added.

Now I have my bachelor’s degree and I am a field worker and community organizer with Disha and responsible for four villages in my district. As I got more responsibility, my monthly rate increased. I have enough money to support my mother and sisters.

People have a lot of trust in me. I talk to them about how to take care of their money, how to plan what they want and save for that. People I met over the years have my cell number and still call me when they have problems.

Life is better now for people in my village. I still live there with my mother and three sisters and after all those years of struggle we have a new house. Two of my sisters are studying for bachelor’s degrees. One has an electrical diploma. When my sisters finish their education or get married, my job of caring for them will be done.

The entire village is family to me. My community and other communities have changed, and I helped with that.

Sami Oram, 34, is a field worker and community organizer for MCC partner Disha.
Catching rain, improving nutrition

In dry areas of Bolivia, MCC is helping farming families install systems to catch and store rainwater.

STORY BY RACHEL BERGEN
PHOTO BY MATTHEW SAWATZKY

Small tomato, beet and lettuce plants are sprouting for the first time outside of Ezequiel Domingo Velez’s home in the Indigenous Guarani community of Caipepe in eastern Bolivia. It’s considered rainy season, but rainfall has become less predictable in this area, which was already drought-prone.

In the past, Velez and other community members have had to buy corn and other vegetables brought in from the nearest city, Santa Cruz, because scarce rain in the region made it impossible to grow enough to eat.

Caipepe is a bumpy seven-hour drive from Santa Cruz, so vegetables only come in once a week. They are expensive and aren’t fresh.

This year, though, Velez was able to grow his own vegetables thanks to an MCC project that helped community members install rainwater catchment systems that provide irrigation.

Velez received a 1,600-liter tank to collect rainwater and plastic piping to funnel water from the roof of his house. The project also provided fencing for new gardens, as well as vegetable seeds.

Today, with rainwater to irrigate his new garden, Velez’s vegetables are growing well. “I feel very happy and pleased,” he says. “I’m content with what I’ve been able to do here with this tank.”

The purpose of the project is not only to improve access to water in Caipepe, but also to enhance nutrition in the community, says MCC rural program coordinator Patrocinio Garvizu Salazar.

“The major component of Guarani diets is corn and very few vegetables. This project is an important way of improving access to healthy foods in Caipepe,” Salazar says.
In Caipepe, MCC worker Patrocinio Garvizu Salazar examines a garden.

Velez’s family of seven is one of 15 households in Caipepe that received the catchment system this year. MCC will provide 15 more households with these systems every year until 2020, benefiting a total of 45 households.

In addition, MCC supports drought-affected Low German Mennonite families in the communities of Durango and La Esperanza, providing materials for rainwater catchment systems for 62 families and water distribution systems that connect to wells for 120 families.

MCC has worked in this region for years, helping to provide systems that bring water within reach for both Guaraní and Mennonite communities. In Caipepe, MCC helped install a windmill in 2009 to pump water from the ground to people’s homes and helped drill eight small wells since 2010. And MCC helped 45 families build dry latrines on their properties to protect the groundwater from being contaminated with human waste.

Community members remember what life was like before water was available at each house.

“We had to get up really early in the morning to get water. We had to sometimes carry it in (jugs in) a wheelbarrow and sometimes it wasn’t enough. We had to wash clothes with that water, cook food with it and clean with it,” says Marcia Romero. “It was hard to get enough.”

It would get even worse during droughts. Food staples in the Guaraní diet, including corn, would be especially affected. Sometimes animals would get sick and die, Romero says.

Now, thanks to the windmill, plus a new rainwater catchment system installed in 2017, Romero and her husband Eduardo Segundo can irrigate their vegetable garden and provide clean water for their goats, pigs, chickens and ducks year-round.

“Thanks to God, we have water here constantly,” she says.

Rachel Bergen is a writer for MCC Canada. Matthew Sawatzky is a photographer in Winnipeg, Manitoba.
Why animals matter

For the families that MCC works with around the world, the bleating of a goat or the clucking of a chicken is the sound of opportunity. A new herd or flock can be a source of affordable nourishment, a walking savings account to help cover emergencies like medical bills or one more way that farmers can eke out a living even on small pieces of land. Experience some of the ways animals are changing lives through MCC’s work.
Nutrition for a nomadic life

In Ethiopia’s Afar region, the pastoralists who have lived on this rugged land for generations rely on the milk and meat that livestock like goats, sheep and camels provide. But increasingly severe droughts since 2010 turned traditional grazing lands into useless stubble. First the cattle, ill-suited to arid regions, died. The herds of camels, sheep and goats dwindled.

MCC’s partner, Afar Pastoralist Development Association, estimates that between 2015 and 2016 alone, more than 500,000 animals died of starvation and illness. In response, MCC provided some 4,700 goats to help rebuild herds. Since then, MCC has supported a variety of efforts to help families continue to support their herds, including emergency water projects and emergency veterinary treatment and vaccinations for more than 100,000 animals. (Did the camel in the background catch your eye? In addition to providing milk, camels also serve as moving vans, transporting families’ belongings as they move to seek better grazing grounds for their animals.)

Income and even savings

Chickens provide a ready source of eggs and meat and can be sold to boost family income. In Pichilín, Colombia, MCC partner Sembrandopaz, with support from MCC and the U.S.-based organization Growing Hope Worldwide (formerly Foods Resource Bank), helps farmers experiment with a variety of approaches, from kitchen gardens to organic pesticides. Through the project, Olida Rosa Feria Tovar received a loan she used to buy chickens. “Before, I had never really had a lot of chickens,” Tovar says. “I knew through Sembrandopaz it was something I could do. I saw that it could really help me and my family.” She uses the income from selling chickens to buy other food, plants or items she needs for the house. But it’s also allowed her to put aside savings, increasing her family’s ability to withstand an emergency or explore new ventures later.
Pork, peace and young people

In rural Uganda, pigs such as this one are part of an effort to create new opportunities for peace. After years of conflict and violence in the country, ethnic divisions remain strong. A large youth population, combined with few opportunities for employment or training, make the situation more unstable.

In response, an MCC-supported peace project, Living With Shalom, is giving youth such as Fred Ayesiga a chance to learn new farming techniques and entrepreneurial skills while interacting with and learning about other ethnic groups in Uganda. Through the project, Ayesiga received a loan to begin raising pigs. He has paid back the loan and continues to grow his farm. In addition to providing for daily needs, the profits are helping his brother, sister and wife begin to build their careers and paying school fees for his older sister’s children.

Passing on the benefits

In Vietnam, raising cows provides new opportunity for income for families affected by Agent Orange, including Lê Mạnh Châu and his wife Trần Thị Phước. They were among the first 20 families to receive a cow in 2015 through the program. Over the course of three years, the project provided cows to 120 families. Those families give their first-born calf to another family—doubling the impact of the program. After donating the first calf, families can choose to sell the cow to start another business or to breed the cow again and sell the offspring or start a small herd.
The sheep and the goats

In Lebanon’s Bekaa Valley, where many families struggle to make ends meet and resources are stretched by an influx of Syrian refugees, sheep and goats are prized for their milk, which can be sold or made into products like yogurt. In 2014, MCC began supporting a project to provide sheep and goats, helping establish flocks like this.

Rabbit math

From Zimbabwe to Vietnam to the Gaza Strip, MCC is helping people hop into the rabbit business. And it’s an enterprise that can multiply quickly. In Phu Tho Province, Vietnam, for instance, families receive a starter herd of five female rabbits and one male, as well as training in rabbit care. Within a few months, one woman, Ha Thi Chung, had quadrupled her herd. A year later, she had 60 rabbits, including these, and had sold enough to earn some $500.
Water resource workers

Names: Loida García Quiroga and Nathan Harder

Hometown: Mountain Lake, Minnesota (First Mennonite Church)

Assignment: As water resource and community development workers in Bolivia, we carry out project activities with our local partners in the Mennonite colonies of Durango and La Esperanza and in the Indigenous Guaraní community of Caípepe.

Typical days: We typically travel to visit Caípepe and the colonies once or twice each week. The places in the colonies where we work with families are a one- to two-hour drive in a pickup truck, while we usually travel to Caípepe on bicycle since it is much closer to our home. Our work currently is focused on accompanying families as they install household rainwater catchment systems and helping them learn how to use the water to grow vegetables. We usually arrive back at home mid-afternoon and work on the experimental fruit and vegetable plot which occupies most of the property where we live.

Joys: Getting to know many interesting people and hearing their stories of living in this area. Our main motivation is in seeing how we can come together from different backgrounds to work toward a better understanding of how we are all members of God’s creation, and where our efforts can do the most good with the tools we have to use.

Challenge: Understanding the very different viewpoints within and between the communities we serve, which affect how people make decisions individually and collectively.

Find your place
MCC has workers in Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America and the Middle East, as well as in Canada and the U.S.

Go to mcc.org/serve, contact your nearest MCC office or follow @servemcc on Twitter to learn about current service opportunities.

MCC workers are expected to exhibit a commitment to Christian faith, active church membership and biblical peacemaking.
My name is Manoj Kumar Pradhan.

Age: 12

Lives in: Sinisingi, India

I live with my mother, father, three sisters and grandmother. I am in grade six and walk to school. It takes me about 25 minutes each way. I love to read and I especially like poems. One of my favorite poems is called “My Small Village.”

When I am not in school, I help my father harvest corn and I take care of the cows. I like to cook and help my mother make rice.

I remember when people in my village dug channels to put in an irrigation system (through an MCC project) in 2013. Before that my family could only grow corn. Now we have cabbage, eggplants, beans and cauliflower, along with other things. Now I eat more vegetables.

Kabaddi is a popular sport in India, and it’s my favorite game. (Kabaddi involves tagging members of the opposing team without being tackled.) I’m good at scoring points.

My favorite food: fried potatoes
My favorite subject: literature
What I want to be: mechanical engineer

Poetry and a favorite place

One of Manoj’s favorite poems, “My Small Village,” is by Sachhidananda Rautray, who’s from the Indian state of Odisha, where Manoj lives. The poem is full of the sights of life in this region — from the sea touching the land to herbs, shrubs and forest. There are cows and goats, neighbors, harvests and songs.

If you were writing a poem about your town, or about a place you love, what five sights (or sounds or smells or things or even memories) would you describe?
25 WAYS TO GIVE

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