Bringing new life to water systems and schools in Jordan
Supporting health and learning | Preventing cholera in Haiti
Imagine the difference!

J RON BYLER
MCC U.S. EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

“For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground…” (Isaiah 44:3 NRSV)

A year ago in West Bengal, India, I saw how MCC’s response to an emergency, devastating flooding, led to working with community leaders to help break the cycle of poverty through education, microfinance, health and sanitation and access to water and housing.

Throughout MCC’s work, I’ve seen how responding to one need often naturally leads to improvements in other areas.

At Bassa Primary School near Madaba, Jordan, assistant principal Oroba Alshahwan says MCC, through its partner, Madaba for Supporting Development, has brought life to her school.

She’s seen the renovations to water systems, the new faucets, the recycling of water, the garden — and the differences in the learning environment that the Green Schools project has brought to the school.

Alshahwan says children are excited to go to school now. She remembers one child exclaiming, “I can’t believe this is our school!”

Jordan is one of the most water-poor countries in the world. Preserving water is vitally important.

Maha Elyan Shteawi, school counselor at Jalool Secondary Mixed School where cholera is a deadly threat.

In parts of the world where the effects of climate change are severe and rains are dangerously infrequent, MCC supports Indigenous communities to preserve their own language and culture.

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Bangladesh
New chances to grow

In Bangladesh, Indigenous communities are among the most vulnerable economically and politically. In response, MCC supports a multilingual preschool education program that gives Indigenous children a chance to learn in the language they use at home, providing a better start for students such as Mgrha Biski, left, and Priy Marmu.

In addition to helping students make a more successful transition to primary school, the program also helps Indigenous communities to preserve their own language and culture.

Syria
Relief kits

In the Darza Governorate of Syria, hygiene items in MCC relief kits continue to provide comfort and hope to people forced from their homes by violence and conflict. MCC partners with the Middle East Council of Churches to respond to the urgent needs of displaced Syrians and the communities hosting them in the Darza region of Ethiopia. The structure, adapted from traditional watering techniques, captures steam released naturally from the ground. The steam cools and condenses into water, which runs through a pipe to a concrete cistern where it’s stored for future use.

Lend a hand - Relief kits

Relief kits provide needed supplies for a family of four and are given to families whose lives have been disrupted by disaster or crisis.

Contents (NEW items only)

4 large bars bath soap
(leave in wrapper)

1 nail clipper (good quality)

1 box adhesive bandages
(minimum 40, assorted)

Sanitary pads (THIN, 1 or 2 packages, minimum 28 pads total)

Place contents in a box or bag and deliver to an MCC drop-off location. The kit will be repacked in a new 5-gallon plastic pail with lid. Go to mcc.org/kits or call your nearest MCC office (see page 2) to find drop-off locations.

Ethiopia
Catching steam

In parts of the world where the effects of climate change are severe and rains are dangerously infrequent, MCC supports innovative projects to improve access to water, including building this steam well in the Afar region of Ethiopia. The structure, adapted from traditional watering techniques, captures steam released naturally from the ground. The steam cools and condenses into water, which runs through a pipe to a concrete cistern where it’s stored for future use.
Bringing new life to water systems and schools

In Jordan, an MCC-supported Green Schools project is not only making needed improvements to school water systems but also encouraging better care of the environment.

STORY BY EMILY LOEWEN
PHOTOS BY MEGHAN MAST

The view along the highway to Madaba, Jordan, is mostly shades of brown—businesses and homes built in beige stone, rocky hillsides, the green of plants in the fields muted by a film of dust.

But there’s one building just up the hill that stands out. It’s three stories high and painted in bright yellow, green, pink and blue, the signature colors of the MCC-supported Green Schools project.

From the road below, the bright colors of Umama Bent Abi Ahhs Primary Mixed School are the change that’s easiest to see, but they’re only a symbol of the important water system upgrades at this and other schools in the project.

Broken water pipes are now replaced with new ones. Rusted and dirty water tanks are upgraded with clean ones. Broken and leaky faucets are replaced with new taps that easily turn on and off. Water runoff is now diverted into tanks. And, with that newly available water, bare, brown school yards are transformed into gardens with trees eagerly cared for by the students.

The goal of the Green Schools project is to improve access to clean water and improve the learning environment. All these changes have had a dramatic effect on the water available.

Maha Elain Shtrawi is the school counselor and runs the environmental club at Jalool Secondary Mixed School. Before the project started two years ago, she remembers they had to buy extra water every week or two at a cost of about $30. They also would receive donations of water from families of students with wells.
But now the school doesn’t have to purchase any extra. “There’s always water. Imagine the difference!” she says. Jordan is one of the most water-poor countries in the world. According to the World Bank, it ranks in the bottom 10 for access to fresh, renewable water per capita.

The Green Schools project, implemented by MCC partner Madaba for Supporting Development (MSD), helps schools improve their access to clean water. And it encourages students, teachers and the broader community to do their part in conserving the limited resource.

The project first started when MSD founder Ali Al-Zynat was speaking at a public school about nonviolence. He went to use the washroom and was shocked to find the facilities in disrepair. “There were no faucets, there was not even water to wash your hands,” he says.

When he asked the principal what was going on, she said the pipes at the school were broken and so were the faucets. Like most public schools, they had water to fill their tanks delivered every couple of weeks by the government, but because of leaky pipes and taps, they lost so much water that it ran out well before the next delivery.

After that day, Al-Zynat went with a team to survey other public schools in the area to see how they compared. Of the 20 schools they visited, only two of them had proper infrastructure.

That’s when Al-Zynat got to work. The Green Schools project supports primarily public schools, and while they would ideally be maintained by the Jordanian government, the ministry doesn’t have the money to keep the schools in good repair. “The government would come in, build the school, assign a team or staff and that’s about it, there’s not much money left,” says Al-Zynat.

The first and most important step of the project is to replace the pipes and water tanks where needed to stop leakage and contamination. After the initial repairs and updates, MSD comes to clean out and inspect the tanks every six months to make sure water quality stays high. Poorly maintained water tanks have been known to make students ill.

To help conserve the water that’s delivered, sink faucets are replaced so that they aren’t dripping and wasting water. A water tank is installed in each school to collect gray water, wastewater from activities like handwashing, that can be used to water trees in new school gardens.

The project also includes setting up an environmental club at each school. Students in the club help maintain the garden, make sure the water infrastructure is still working and teach others at the school about the importance of conserving water and protecting the environment. Club members pass on what they’ve learned through morning announcements, skits or just reminders to friends and classmates.

Yasmine Thaher, 11, part of the environmental club at Bassa Primary School, says she’s noticed a difference in how her schoolmates behave. Before the project, she says, “Nobody really cared. They would leave the faucets on and they would play with the water, fill up water balloons and stuff. They would waste it,” she says. But after the upgrades, “Everyone started working together and taking care of the environment.”

The last part of the Green Schools project is to paint the outside of the school in the project’s signature yel-
Give a gift—Where needed most

Your gift meets urgent needs and changes lives, helping to build peace and investing in long-term changes for communities in Jordan and around the world. Donate in the enclosed envelope, give online at donate.mcc.org or contact your nearest MCC office (see p. 2).
A primary school administrator in Jordan reflects on an MCC-supported Green Schools project and her journey in education.

Oroba Alshahwan

I’ve been at Bassa Primary School for three years. I used to teach at another school that was part of the Green Schools project (which MCC supports), so when I came to Bassa I was in shock. It was a drastic change.

This school was established in 1972. The buildings are old, and the infrastructure was old and needed repairs and maintenance. There was not much funding available from the Ministry of Education.

So I contacted Ali Al-Zynat with MCC partner Madaba for Supporting Development (MSD) to put our school on the map at least. He came and visited last year and did the assessment, and he felt this school was in dire need.

The project brought life to the school. This school was established in 1972. The buildings are old, and the infrastructure was old and needed repairs and maintenance. There was not much funding available from the Ministry of Education.

I’ve been here from ground zero. I’ve seen the renovations, the maintenance, the faucets, the recycling of the water, the gray water tank, the paint, the garden — all these things.

And you should see the reaction of the students! I will never forget this. When they first came to the school (after the renovations), many students were shouting, “Is this our school? I can’t believe this is our school!” It brought life and love and a sense of belonging.

Another challenge I gladly accepted is that while I was working on my master’s degree, I had a baby. I had a c-section and only a week after surgery I had an exam. The teachers never thought I was going to show up, but I did the exam and the professor marked the paper right then and showed the whole class. I got 35 out of 40.

Now I’m a teacher in the morning and in the afternoon I’m a mother. My son is now 5 and I have a daughter who’s 3. Within a few months of graduation from my master’s, the ministry switched most of the IT positions to administration and I was assigned this job as assistant principal at Bassa school.

Initially when I was sent to be an administrator, I didn’t accept it. I had developed more of a dedication to teaching. This is what I do best. This is why I gained my master’s, and I’m working on my Ph.D. in education so I might even teach in universities. My job here at Bassa school helps me to earn money to fund my education while I’m gaining experience.

As part of my research I’m thinking of using what I’ve seen here of how students reacted after the environment was improved. Working here and being a mother and a student is a lot to balance. Five minutes can spell disaster for me in changing any schedule. I start early in the morning preparing food, then come here to work and then study.

Oroba Alshahwan is assistant principal of Bassa Primary School. She helped connect the school with the MCC-supported Green Schools project of Madaba for Supporting Development.

When they were growing up, my family and parents struggled to get an education. My father completed high school and my mother never made it to sixth grade. Back then it was hard to achieve education, especially for women. So they suffered and felt they should give their best to their kids and I felt that. I never gave up. I want education. Of my brothers, one is a doctor, one is an engineer and one has his master’s, so now we have become an educated family. I want to keep that course.

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In Nairobi, Kenya, lessons in hygiene improve health and school attendance, helping give students better chances to succeed in school.

STORY BY LINDA ESPENSHADE
PHOTOS BY MATTHEW LESTER

The sound of a cowbell calls students from their classes at Menno Kids Academy (MKA). Lunch is served, but the chatter of students don’t head to the food line. Instead they swarm around outdoor water faucets, where they wash their hands with soap and water. Then they go to the kitchen for a plate of ugali, cooked white cornmeal, a food even more common in Kenya than mashed potatoes are in Canada and the U.S. The children fill their fingertips with ugali and scoop up seasoned collard greens before popping it into their mouths.

Their routine is well established — wash your hands before you eat. For the 314 students from preschool to grade 8, handwashing is as normal as raising their hands to answer a question.

That’s because at this school, which is a ministry of Mathare Mennonite Academy, a ministry of Embakasi Mennonite Church, students learn practical lessons about purifying water and washing hands that are vital to staying healthy in communities where drainage and sanitation are poor.

“If you feel clean,” said Jay Herine, a sixth-grade girl with a 2-month-old brother and a brother in second grade, told her mother Wilkista Akoth about the importance of handwashing. The WASH promoters visited Akoth, along with all the other school parents, to reinforce the clean water and hygiene messages with them and often with their neighbors.

Accepting their messages was not hard, Akoth says, because she saw her children’s digestive health improve. Enforcing new habits with her family wasn’t difficult either because the children brought their hygiene practices home — after using the toilet they washed their hands without reminders from her. She makes sure she washes her hands after changing diapers.

“It has become a habit. You don’t have to remind anybody; ‘Go and wash your hands,’” she said. “It’s the way of our life.”

At home, Akoth purifies her drinking water by boiling it, but at school, students drink water purified by the sun. Through the Solar Disinfection (SODIS) method, transparent polyethylene terephthalate (PET) bottles and the sun’s ultraviolet rays purify water.

Each morning, students fill their water bottles to the brim from the faucets and lay them on long wooden tables lined with metal. While students study, the sun shines on the bottles. In class, students can drink water from a second bottle that was purified the day before.

Naomy Monyenye, a member of a student club promoting health, is responsible for reminding her seventh-grade classmates about good health habits, including changing their water bottles. Students in the club get extra training from the WASH promoters.

“I also make them remember to remove the bottle and also wash the bottle and wash the rack, so that you can be always clean. You know, if you don’t clean this, the bottle will also get dirty and get germs.”

Recently the WASH programs at the two schools have added another sanitary practice that helps keep older female students in school — the distribution of reusable sanitary pads to all menstruating girls. The WASH promoters also teach the girls about menstruation, a topic that is still taboo in many homes, as well as how to clean and use the pads.

Disposable pads are too expensive for most parents who earn unpredictable wages as day laborers or street vendors, says Irene Anyango, WASH promoter at Mukuru Mennonite Academy. Rags are often the default, which can cause infection and embarrassment if they leak.

As a result, menstruating girls tend to stay home from school and isolate themselves from group activity, she says.

Now, she says, the girls have the supplies they need to participate confidently in school.

All of the work of the WASH program is about dignity, says MCC worker Krista Snader of Ephrata, Pennsylvania, who oversees the program at the two schools.

“There’s a greater sense of dignity when you feel clean.”

Linda Espeneshade is news coordinator for MCC U.S. Matthew Lester is a photographer in Lancaster, Pennsylvania.
Preventing cholera in Haiti

In remote communities where cholera is a deadly threat, latrines and handwashing stations can literally save lives.

STORY AND PHOTOS BY ANNALEE GIESEBRECHT

Because cholera can be spread by insects that land on fruit and vegetables after coming into contact with infected waste, thoroughly disinfecting produce with water and bleach, as Cilana Louissine is doing here, is a simple and effective way to prevent transmission of the disease.

MCC’s cholera work is multifaceted, including providing buckets for handwashing stations and water filtration to 231 elementary schools — only five of which had regular hand washing and clean drinking water available for students before. After 2016’s Hurricane Matthew, MCC also supported the rehabilitation and expansion of a Zanmi Lasante cholera treatment center in Verrettes that was initially constructed as a temporary response to the 2010 outbreak of cholera.

I n 2016, when a fresh outbreak of cholera began in the mountainside community of Wopisa-Gabiye, Haiti, Precius Estilus was among the first to fall ill. Early one morning, he was gathering his tools to work in his garden when he was overtaken by a sudden, extreme weakness.

By 11 a.m., he was vomiting. A friend encouraged him to go to the doctor, and they began the long descent to the nearest cholera treatment center. The only way out of Wopisa-Gabiye is on foot. The descent is steep and covered with loose rocks, and at one point requires climbing down rocks through streaming water in the middle of a waterfall. Despite his friend’s encouragement to hurry, Estilus had to stop every few minutes to recover and gather his strength.

By the time he finally arrived in the town of Verrettes and the cholera treatment center of MCC partner Zanmi Lasante (the Haitian branch of the nonprofit Partners in Health), it was 10 at night. Another patient in the center had just died. Seeing his condition, doctors immediately started him on rehydration solution.

“As the IV dripped, I felt closer and closer to God,” he says. “I knew only God could give me back my life.”

Estilus was 28 years old at the time; his wife was pregnant with their youngest child. Given how quickly severe cases of cholera can progress, even strong young men like him can die in a matter of hours.

Estilus was lucky. After seven days, weak but alive, he was discharged and came back to his community with a supply of water purification tablets from the center.

Not long after Estilus returned, MCC staff visited to find out what was most needed in the community, which was lashed by the winds, rains and flooding of Hurricane Matthew in October 2016.

“We assumed that we’d probably be doing a food security project, as this had been the priority issue in most areas we visited,” says Paul Sherler Fast, at the time an MCC representative for Haiti and now MCC’s global health coordinator.

“But they were very clear that no, latrines and stopping cholera was number one, gardens could come next. I remember one older man said something like, ‘What good is food if I’m too sick to eat, what good is a garden if I’m dead?’”

Cholera is a fast-acting bacterial infection that is transmitted from person to person through contact with infected fecal matter, most often when water sources are contaminated by human
Getting to zero

Thanks to strategic interventions in Wopisa-Gabriyèl and Kabay, two communities at the heart of Haiti’s cholera epidemic, there have been no cases of cholera in the more than two years since MCC projects began there. Here’s what it took to get to zero.

291 deaths in Wopisa-Gabriyèl and Kabay in the year prior to MCC’s intervention

Clean water

Water treatment tablets and filtration buckets distributed in both communities

Hygiene training

Training and supplies provided to community health workers who train at-risk households in cholera prevention techniques

Civil protection

Community emergency responders trained in cholera prevention, detection and response

Latrines

Latrines built to keep streams and rivers free of infected waste

Schools

Students and teachers trained in cholera prevention, provided with handwashing stations and clean water

Annalee Giesbrecht of Winnipeg, Manitoba, is advocacy and communications coordinator for MCC in Haiti.

In Wopisa-Gabriyèl, Precius Estilus was among the first to fall ill with cholera during an outbreak in 2016. With MCC’s help, Estilus built a simple latrine and received a water filtration bucket and hygiene training.

MCC provides a cement base, tin roof, PVC pipe and nails for each latrine, while residents supply labor and local materials for the walls.

and washing. Cholera cases, which had been declining since 2010, spiked.

The idea for prevention is simple: if potentially infected waste is contained and kept away from floodwater and flies, the risk of cholera transmission can be dramatically lowered.

MCC provides basic construction materials — a cement base, tin roof, PVC pipe and nails — and the community provides labor and local materials for the walls.

Alongside latrines, MCC provides water treatment tablets and water filtration buckets, as well as training on the use and maintenance of latrines, techniques for washing fruits and vegetables and techniques for effective hand-washing.

The year before this project began in Wopisa-Gabriyèl and in the community of Kabay, health workers reported 291 deaths from cholera in the two communities. In the more than two years since these projects were implemented, there have been zero.

In fact, the work has been so successful that, after Hurricane Irma caused flash floods in the Artibonite Department in September 2017, a scaled-up version of the project was implemented throughout the larger region where Wopisa-Gabriyèl is located. That project, which targets schools and other potential transmission points and supports the local water authority and civil protection volunteers, has seen the same success.

When Estilus thinks about how his life has changed since 2016, latrines are a major component. “Before, we had to take care of our needs outside,” he says. “Cholera almost destroyed us, but now it’s gone. Now we have latrines.”

Louissine is especially thankful for the training she received with her new latrine. She hopes that, as her children grow up and have children of their own, they’ll continue the hygiene practices they learned as part of MCC’s trainings. It’s this knowledge that will ensure that Wopisa-Gabriyèl remains safe and free from cholera into the future.

“We thought our life was finished,” she says, “but now, with MCC’s help, we’re moving forward.”

Annalee Giesbrecht of Winnipeg, Manitoba, is advocacy and communications coordinator for MCC in Haiti.
Planning coordinator

Name: Stephen Deunk

Hometown: Leduc, Alberta (Ebenezer Christian Reformed Church)

Assignment: As planning, monitoring, evaluation and reporting (PMER) coordinator for MCC in Lao People’s Democratic Republic, I get to be actively involved with MCC staff in planning and following up on projects in peacebuilding and other areas.

Typical days: I may be on the phone with field staff to support data collection, coordinating a working group to plan a new project or at my computer writing a six-month report. My work is never boring, and I am always challenged to find new ways to strengthen our planning and monitoring systems to support a strong program.

What I’ve learned: Due to my social and economic status, my voice can be given a privileged position, and this can weaken planning, monitoring and evaluation processes. Technical know-how is not equivalent to vision and strength, and the voices and efforts of people striving to overcome their own circumstances can generate hope, create vision and galvanize action.

Joys: Supporting the creative work here. I enjoy finding new ways to bring MCC staff together to brainstorm, analyze and problem-solve, even though much of my work is focused on ensuring routine PMER tasks get done.

Challenge: Becoming overwhelmed by the size of global issues. Investments to address development issues can seem so minuscule in comparison to the scale of the problems and needs of people.

Find your place

MCC often has positions available in planning, monitoring, evaluation and reporting (PMER). Workers have an opportunity to get an in-depth understanding of local people, situations and challenges while helping plan for and report on MCC projects.

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

Caring for the earth

As you read Yara’s story, think about the things that you and your family or school do to preserve the earth. Yara is conserving water and using it to help her school garden grow. Can you name three actions you’re taking now, or could take this spring and summer, to care for the earth?

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