



Water Stories Photo Essay

Real people exist behind every statistic and chart. What does the global freshwater crisis look like? There are families like the Silvas, who live without access to an adequate supply of freshwater in a Mexico City barrio, and are just one family among the one-third of the world's population for whom safe water is scarce. And there are people like Ron Sawyer, faces of change and hope—people who provide basic, sustainable technology home by home, person by person, school by school.

Presented here are photo essays by journalist J. Carl Ganter, a member of the Navigating Peace working group, that chronicle water and sanitation endeavors in three resource-strapped regions of Mexico: Tepoztlán, Valle de Bravo, and Mexico City. The images provide a vivid glimpse of the lives behind the columns of numbing statistics. They remind us of the real families worldwide who can benefit so profoundly from the simple, available, and effective solutions discussed in *Water Stories*.

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Dry Sanitation

Tepoztlán, Mexico—Stunning sunrises, picturesque mountains, and bustling markets belie the underlying water and sanitation challenges in this popular tourist destination south of Mexico City. In the small villages like San Juan Tlacotenco that tuck into the surrounding mountains, disposal of human waste is a serious problem: outhouses and leaking sewer pipes contaminate the region's groundwater through the porous rock.

Ron Sawyer, the matter-of-fact director of the Mexican nonprofit Sarar Transformación, is working to clean up the sanitation problem in Tepoztlán, by promoting nontraditional options that do not require significant flows of water to operate. Dry, water-less ecological toilets separate waste streams into useable byproducts, capturing urine for fertilizer while directing solid waste into a separate container for compost treatment.

"The dream," Sawyer says, "is that we can have a town where there are mixed systems that will include the water-based sewage system for the downtown area, but will have a set of concentric circles with different levels of services for different parts of the population, depending on the physical areas, and depending on their social and cultural preferences, and their economic possibilities."

PHOTOS (clockwise from top):

A dry sanitation building near the village of San Juan Tlacotenco with separate urine and solid waste collection systems.

Ron Sawyer, director of Sarar Transformación, a non-profit organization in Tepoztlán, Mexico, that focuses on affordable dry sanitation options.

Morning on the streets of Tepoztlán, a popular tourist destination outside Mexico City.

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Valle de Bravo

Valle de Bravo, Mexico—Like giant sentries, white pumping towers dot the horizon between Valle de Bravo and Mexico City. The Cutzamala water system, a complex web of massive concrete and steel pipes, stretches for miles to connect dams and spring water to the world's second largest metropolis, Mexico City. Indigenous communities in the Valle de Bravo region are concerned about the large amounts of water being diverted to meet the city's demands.

Valle de Bravo is a popular weekend retreat for Mexico City's upper class and home to the world-renowned winter nesting grounds for monarch butterflies.

PHOTOS (clockwise from top):

Feeding hand-tended irrigation trenches, water flows plentifully from the ground, often from clear springs that are eventually captured by the Cutzamala system to sate Mexico City's thirst.

The giant pumping towers of the Cutzamala system force water from Valle de Bravo's manmade Lake Avándaro up and over the mountains toward Mexico City.

Hundreds of years old, a small fish farm provides protein for villagers using the cold headwaters above Valle de Bravo.

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Batallones Rojos

Mexico City—As the sky brightens over the Batallones Rojos apartments in the Iztapalapa district of Mexico City, Rogelio Gonzalez turns a giant blue valve, releasing a rush of water to the apartment buildings across the street, home to 1,500 working-class people.

The residents have to hurry their morning washing and cooking tasks, though. Gonzalez will turn off the water two hours later, just before the giant reservoir tank above him runs dry. Engineers say there isn't enough water in the Iztapalapa system to supply this and many other Mexico City neighborhoods with enough water.

PHOTOS (near right, top to bottom):

Water tankers proliferate throughout Mexico City, especially in Iztapalapa, where water demand exceeds the supply provided by the municipal underground infrastructure.

Rogelio Gonzalez manages this pumping and reservoir station that supplies water—for only two hours each day—to the 1,500 residents of the Batallones Rojos apartment complex.

Children play in the parking lot of the Batallones Rojos apartment buildings.

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San Miguel

Iztapalapa, Mexico City—In Colonia San Miguel, water trickles from the small plastic pipe for only an hour each week in the Silva family's austere home. This is enough water to fill three rusting tanks with about 200 gallons for bathing, washing clothes, and flushing the toilet. But the water is not safe to drink and the family, like many here, buys water from vendors who travel daily throughout the neighborhoods yelling, "Water for sale!"

PHOTOS (near left, top to bottom):

The family's makeshift kitchen overlooks the sprawling metropolis of Mexico City.

The Silva family stands outside their makeshift home in the Iztapalapa district of Mexico City.

A young boy plays soccer in the streets outside the Silva family's house in Colonia San Miguel.

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