

My walk to water

By Tara Rava Zolnikov, PhD, MS, MS

National University, San Diego, CA; Kenya Red Cross, Nairobi, Kenya



Improved access to safe drinking water is defined as water located within 1 km from the household and must contain at least 20 liters for each member per household a day.

Facts on access to water:

- 660 million people in world without access to water.
- Improved water is 1 km from household and 20 liters per person per day.
- Poor access to water contributes to waterborne diseases, physical aches and pain, orthopedic-related issues, and miscarriages.
- Improvements in water supply minimize associated negative health impacts.

Autoethnography: While I was in Kenya in the summer of 2015, I made my way to a village with poor access to water. To date, an autoethnographic viewpoint on poor access to water does not exist; therefore, I sought to personally experience what poor access to water means for millions of water gatherers worldwide.

“We walked back up the hill towards the house and my only focus was to keep moving so I could get to the homestead, straighten out my arms, and remove the weight from my neck and back. My arms went numb, sweat was dripping off of me, and the pain was getting worse. I kept walking.”



Walking to gather water. Photos by Evan Dick.

Previously, I placed more emphasis on the necessity of water quality to eliminate waterborne diseases, but this first-hand experience gave me a completely different perspective on the physical difficulties experienced by water gatherers. In fact, as a water scientist, I was shocked that the issue of transport weight is rarely discussed in the access to water issue. This needs to change; water gathering transport times along with accompanying physical duress needs to be moved to the forefront of problems associated with poor access to quality water.

Acknowledgements:

The women who walked to gather water with me in Narok, Kenya.
Citation: Zolnikov, T.R. (2016). My walk to water. *American Journal of Public Health*. 106(4), 623.

Additional Information: Tarazolnikov@gmail.com