

Number 6  
in a Church World Service series  
on water

Whenever  
we have an opportunity,  
let us work  
for the good of all.

Galatians 6:10a

## Poisoned skies, troubled waters



photo: iStockphoto.com/yecatsdoherty

There is little water left," says John Manyara as he thrusts his hands into the muddy sludge that once was the Ngarenaro River roaring down Mt. Kenya.

photo: iStockphoto.com/sharply\_done



Other rivers are drying up as Mt. Kenya's glaciers recede, leaving over two million people without enough water. Eight of its 18 glaciers have already disappeared due to climate change. The Naro Moru vanishes in the dry season, and desperate nomadic herdsman raid points up-river, blocking irrigation intakes.

Kenya's forests are being burned to the ground because communities have no affordable alternative sources of fuel, says Nobel laureate and environmentalist Wangari Maathai. The subsequent erosion, decreased rainfall and drought add to Kenya's water crisis and regional weather trends.

The impact of receding glaciers is of particular concern to Church World Service which trains local



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communities in Kenya to manage their water supplies and advocate for better management policies.

In most countries where CWS is active, water is either a desperate need—or a destructive force unleashed during hurricanes, typhoons and floods. CWS helps stricken communities rebuild after climate related emergencies. Ongoing CWS projects provide and safeguard water supplies for drinking and agriculture. Access to clean water and adequate sanitation nurtures health, education, food security, income generation and women's rights.

CWS also campaigns to ensure that globalization and free trade do not trample the indispensable human right to water, particularly for the poor and the vulnerable. Its Water for All advocacy and training campaign supplement Water for Life projects in Kenya's Nakuru, Pokot and Vihiga Districts, and in Burkina Faso, Malawi, Mozambique, Niger and Senegal.

About 200 miles south of Mt. Kenya, the tropical glaciers of Kilimanjaro are vanishing. To the west, the ice caps of Uganda's Rwenzoris, a secondary source of the Nile, are shrinking fast. The total loss of ice masses ringing Africa's three peaks, which scientists project will occur in the next 20 to 50 years, fits a pattern playing out around the world.



**Left: Flooded fields near India's Raipur city. Below: A woman outside her flooded home in Bangladesh's Bogra district**

photos: Reuters/Desmond Boylan & Rafiqur Rahman  
courtesy [www.alertnet.org](http://www.alertnet.org)

**Bottom left: Melting Antarctic iceberg**

photo: iStockphoto/Mlenny

In Asia, thousands of Himalayan glaciers feed more than a dozen major rivers and sustain a billion people downstream. A recent study by the Indian Space Research Organization has found more than a 20 percent reduction in size in 466 Himalayan glaciers between 1962 and 2001.

Shrinkage of the glaciers could lead to a tipping point in the region's drinking water supply, according to the United Nations Environmental Program's Achim Steiner.



Most of Latin America's fresh water comes from glacier melt. In Argentina, irreversible glacier melt generated by climate change is a pressing concern for Elias Abramides, an ecumenical liaison for the Orthodox Patriarchate

of Constantinople and a spokesperson on climate change for the World Council of Churches. His country faces the effects of global warming on the Antarctic.

"In the U.S., Canada and Europe they mostly talk about the Arctic," says Abramides. Yet the Antarctic's ice mantle is also melting, according to bases there and satellite photos. "City-size icebergs are sepa-



rating from the central mass. It will raise the sea level 12-15 feet in our latitudes. We will lose a lot of land through erosion and sea invasion.”

On the other side of the Pacific from Abramides, inhabited islands have already disappeared under rising sea waters. Speaking in 2005 at Ecumenical Advocacy Days, an annual event in Washington, DC aimed at shaping a religious vision for U.S. policy, then General Secretary of the Pacific Conference of Churches Rev. Valamotu Palu urged churches in industrialized nations to be in “the front row” in educating people to care for the earth and limit destructive activities that contribute to climate change.

Climate change is also adding to the ferocity of seasonal weather. Floods in China this year were definitely related to the climate, according to Zhang Liwei of the Amity Foundation, a Church World Service partner. “Over the past year, China has witnessed drastic weather modes such as drought, floods, and typhoons, which has inflicted great losses in human life and property,” said Zhang.

Floods this year affected an estimated 20 million people in India, 8 million in Bangladesh, and 300,000 in Nepal. Warming also threatens food security. “India could lose 125 million tons of its rain-fed cereal production, equal to 18 percent of its total production,” said the Food and Agriculture Organization’s Jacques Diouf.

The United Nations Development Program’s 2006 Human Development Report—its 2007 report focuses on climate change—warns that many of the world’s most water-stressed areas will get less water, and water flows will

## The WATER FOR ALL campaign: what CWS is doing

- **ENABLING** access to, and provision of, potable water through local and global partnerships.
- **SUPPORTING** community-based water projects and building local community capacity to inform national water and sanitation policies.
- **PROVIDING** a collective ecumenical voice in global public debate on water and sanitation issues.
- **ADVOCATING** for access to, and provision of, water as critical to achieving the Millennium Development Goals.
- **BUILDING** grassroots support for Senate resolutions and House bills that support universal access to water worldwide.



**Amity Foundation's  
Zhang Liwei**

photo: Helen Jingwen Zhao/  
Amity Foundation

become less predictable and more subject to extreme events. As a result, the production of basic food staples like maize, sorghum and millet could drop up to 33 percent in East Africa, exposing an additional 75-125 million people to the threat of hunger.

“A warming climate will cause or aggravate a host of ‘natural’ disasters, such as hurricanes, droughts, floods, disease epidemics, and wildfires,”

CWS and two faith partners in the U.S. said last year in a brief supporting a legal challenge to the Environmental Protection Agency for not regulating carbon dioxide emissions from motor vehicles.

Alluding to the communities alongside which CWS serves, the brief also noted that “these disasters . . . threaten most acutely the powerless segments of society: the poor, the sick, the landless and homeless.”

Poorer countries face some of the worst effects of climate change even though their greenhouse gas emissions are minimal, according to the fourth report of the International Panel on Climate Change published earlier this year. But poverty also contributes to climate change. “People cut trees because of poverty,” the United Nations University’s Janos Bogardi noted earlier this year. “This increases the frequencies of disasters, via topsoil and watershed loss.”

In a set of principles drawn up this year, an emerging coalition of development, faith-based, and environmental groups in the U.S. points out that the negative impact of climate change will even reverse the “development process” as a whole. CWS and other members of the coalition call on the U.S., which emits some 25 percent of greenhouse gases generated by human activity, to reduce emissions by 80 percent below 1990 levels by the year 2050.

The coalition is calling on the U.S. to take a leadership role in helping developing countries adapt to the consequences of climate change, work collaboratively with

other nations to address critical links between global warming and global poverty, and shift to a more sustainable domestic energy path while supporting other countries in making the same transition.

Without such leadership, other major emitters of greenhouse gases have little incentive to cut back. China may not be willing to reduce emissions unless the U.S. does. Although China's per capita emissions is still one-sixth that of America's, it recently overtook the U.S. to become the world's top emitter.

"Global climate change is mostly a result of the long history of emissions and the current high per capita emissions of developed countries," Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi said at a meeting of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations in Manila.

"In linking water, climate change and drought," says Agnes Abuom, advisor to the All Africa Conference of Churches, "you'll notice that for a long time churches have been helping communities develop water sources." She credits CWS work as a founding member of the Ecumenical



**Agnes Abuom**

photo: Rick Reinhard  
Photography

Water Network (EWN) in rallying African churches around water.

Abuom said a conference in Uganda organized by EWN, several church bodies including the AACC and non-governmental organizations last May helped churches in Africa realize they had a major role to play

in responding to climate change and the water crisis.

"Particularly in the Horn of Africa drought is becoming cyclical," says Abuom, "a sure sign of changes in the weather. It's a Kairos moment resounding throughout creation." She warns that humanity and nature deserve to be treated with dignity. "Otherwise Mother Earth is going to give up on us."

## YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Protect everyone's access to safe, affordable water:

- **LEARN MORE** at the Church World Service website [www.churchworldservice.org](http://www.churchworldservice.org)
- **CONTACT** your elected officials and join the CWS Speak Out network to receive legislative alerts: [www.churchworldservice.org/Educ\\_Advo/index.html](http://www.churchworldservice.org/Educ_Advo/index.html)
- **CONSIDER** and **CELEBRATE** the importance of water using CWS educational and worship resources on water: [www.churchworldservice.org/Educ\\_Advo/water/index.html](http://www.churchworldservice.org/Educ_Advo/water/index.html)
- **CONTRIBUTE** to the work of Church World Service by calling your CWS Regional Office toll-free at 888-297-2767. CWS is helping local communities meet their water and sanitation needs in self-reliant and sustainable ways that represent positive alternatives to water privatization: [www.churchworldservice.org/Development/water.html](http://www.churchworldservice.org/Development/water.html)
- **CONSERVE** water by repairing all leaky fixtures and by turning off the water in sinks, baths and showers when you are not using them.
- **CAMPAIGN** with others to advocate for the implementation of the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals that include reducing by half the number of people without clean water and adequate sanitation by the year 2015: [www.millenniumcampaign.org](http://www.millenniumcampaign.org)



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Church World Service is a cooperative ministry of 35 Protestant, Orthodox, and Anglican denominations providing sustainable self-help and development, disaster relief, and refugee assistance in some 80 countries.

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