

We Believe in Clean Water for All!



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“Questions and Answers” with George Yap, WaterCan’s New Executive Director

What excites you most about your new position?

I look forward to working closely with our great team in Canada and Africa to take the organization from strength to strength, programmatically, financially and institutionally. In the past year, especially, we have been working on a number of new initiatives. I look forward to making some exciting announcements in the near future as part of WaterCan’s 25th Anniversary year-long celebrations in 2012 – stay tuned!

What is your previous experience with WaterCan?

I joined WaterCan in 2001 as its International Program Director. For the past decade I have been responsible for directing the organization’s strategy and operations in Africa, and policy and advocacy efforts in Canada. As a member of WaterCan’s management team, I offer in-depth and hands-on knowledge of the organization’s other areas of operations, including public engagement and communications, fundraising, and finance and administration. Prior to WaterCan, I worked for a number of wonderful international development organizations including CPAR and CARE Canada, among others.

What attracted you to WaterCan?

I sincerely believe in WaterCan’s development model of supporting and strengthening the capacities of African partner organizations and local communities to develop sustainable solutions for meeting local water and sanitation needs. This ranges from training members of a village water committee on how to operate and maintain their new hand-pump, to organizing technical workshops for our local African partner organizations.

I am also attracted to WaterCan’s singular focus on water and sanitation. When it comes to addressing basic human needs, there are few things more fundamental than clean drinking water, or having a safe and dignified place to relieve yourself. Also, the opportunity to work with a committed and knowledgeable International Program Team comprising Canadian and African development specialists is both professionally and personally satisfying.

How will you bring your skills and knowledge to bear on WaterCan’s operations?

WaterCan’s operating environment – programmatically and fundraising-wise – is evolving rapidly. One of my key roles is to work with the staff team to identify and navigate these important trends so that as an organization we will continue to be well-positioned to effectively address and communicate the water and sanitation needs of vulnerable communities in Africa. For example, the rapid emergence of social media presents us with incredibly exciting and innovative ways to engage and interact with our supporters, whether they live on the West Coast, the Prairies, or in the Maritimes. I also see developing strategic partnerships with

businesses, government, and other aid organizations, as welcome opportunities for enhancing WaterCan's contributions to broader efforts aimed at combating global poverty.

Where do you see WaterCan in 5 years?

With additional resources, I see WaterCan working with more African partners organizations and in more sub-Saharan African countries to directly meet the water and sanitation needs of vulnerable communities. At the same time, I feel it is important that WaterCan redouble its efforts to communicate the health and development benefits of water and sanitation investments to the general public, donors, and government officials.

What makes a "great" charity?

Since WaterCan's creation in 1987, we have been able to assist more than 1.2 million people in the developing world. This tremendous accomplishment, however, is tempered by the fact that today nearly 900 million people still do not have access to clean drinking water.

In my opinion, a "great" charity is one that recognizes that delivering services alone is not enough, that advocacy plays an important and vital role in supporting systemic change. For example, WaterCan is a founding member of the Canadian non-governmental organization coalition *Sanitation and Water Action Network Canada*, which is united in the belief that water and sanitation needs to be a foreign aid priority for the Canadian government. A letter endorsed by 18 organizations to senior government officials will always carry more weight than a letter signed by a single organization.

What was your "finest moment," the thing you're most proud of?

Since joining WaterCan in 2001, I have had the privilege and deep satisfaction of knowing that I have been a key contributor to the continuing evolution and growth of the organization. Over the past decade, the international program budget has more than quadrupled, and these additional resources have allowed us to introduce a number of important initiatives. I am particularly proud of the *Clean Water for Schools Program*, which to date has assisted over 100,000 students and teachers in East Africa. Another is WaterCan's *Capacity Building Fund* created in 2009 which provides small grants to individual African partner organizations to address specific training needs such as financial management and monitoring and evaluation.

If you weren't working with WaterCan, what would you be doing?

I would be working with another international development organization addressing some basic human need, but it would be important that it subscribes to values and approaches similar to WaterCan's. For me, the value of an organization like WaterCan goes beyond the number of wells or latrines built. I think it is more important to understand how these things *change* people's lives for the better, such as healthier children, or local residents now spending more time growing nutritious foods instead of spending half a day fetching water. WaterCan's means to effect positive change differ from, say, an agricultural or education development organization, but we all have the same destination – a more equitable and just world.
