



Ms. Catarina de Albuquerque

*The Independent Expert on the issue of human rights obligations related to access to safe drinking water and sanitation*

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Dear Catarina:

I hope this letter finds you well.

Water For People is pleased to see the continuing development of policies, practices and norms related to human rights obligations to safe drinking water and sanitation. This is a critical issue and will have long-lasting impact on future programming designed to rid the world of water and sanitation poverty. Water For People is focused on just that – the eradication of water and sanitation poverty – through our operations in 11 countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America. In addition to my work with Water For People, I have over 23 years of experience in water and sanitation provision in Africa, and hope our inputs add to the constructive dialogue on this major issue.

I have consistently shuddered at the discussions that tend to surround water supply and sanitation as a human right because all sides tend to jump in with their ideological glasses, highlighting examples to make their cases and offering little in the way of compromise. The private sector is either all bad or all good, while others counter that the public sector is also all bad or all good. It is an exhausting debate that does not help poor people get better supplies. My experience is that people across the globe are not particularly concerned whether water is coming from a public or private operator, as long as the supply is reliable, affordable, of high quality and quantity, and predictable.

Water For People works extremely closely with both the private and public sectors and consistently finds that poor people are best served when both public and private are engaged in some way. In Blantyre, Malawi, for instance, we have watched the emergence of Vennings Kayuzga as the leader of the Nkolokoti-Kachere Water Association with admiration. He has worked as a private operator, linked with the publicly-operated Blantyre Water Board (BWB), and grown from managing one kiosk to 38 while paying off a massive debt (\$11,500) to the BWB. He is creating jobs (for women!) and has plans to extend water services to an additional 30,000 people. He has found that sweet spot between affordability, his business' viability, and the BWB's tariffs, to the benefit of thousands of people. What I love most about Vennings is that he has developed a lifeline tariff for people who cannot afford to pay, and reinvests the money made from existing kiosks into new kiosks without the need for further donor support. He is extending services in an area that was historically plagued by shut-offs and broken taps because there is simply not financing available in Blantyre to operate these kiosks and supply water for free. And I do not see a day when that will change.

What I would welcome is a rephrasing of the debate. Water For People is most concerned that people are sustainably serviced, and wants to move away from debates driven by ideology, towards debates driven by what leads to lasting and transformative impact on the ground. The truth is that the water

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and sanitation sector has seen far too much project failure to be saying that “people should not pay”, “governments **must** do X, Y, and Z....”, “the private sector **must** do X, Y, and Z” and other rhetorical points along these lines. A better way forward is to approach the water and sanitation challenge with humility and an openness to alternative approaches that eliminate water and sanitation poverty.

We need to find ways to protect poor people from abuses I see every day – taking photos and raising funds on great stories, but no transformation on the ground as water projects break and mothers end up back in the swamps fetching polluted water once again. That is a human rights violation in my mind, and not even on the agenda as far as I can tell. What we need is more accountability from all the sector role players who engage in people’s lives every day, more evidence of lasting results, and more honest debate on practical solutions.

My thanks for your support

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Edward D. Breslin". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of the first and last names being capitalized and prominent.

Edward D Breslin  
CEO

water for people

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