

Simple, affordable solutions for clean water: a profile of CAWST

With World Water Day celebrated worldwide on March 22, *Connect* features Sehgal Foundation partner CAWST-Centre for Affordable Water and Sanitation Technology, Canada, and an interview with Suneel Rajavaram, International Technical Advisor (South Asia and Middle East), CAWST, on his role at CAWST, the organization's vision, the World Water Day campaign, and his own water story.

1. Tell us about CAWST and its mission?

CAWST's vision is a world where people have the opportunity to succeed because their basic water and sanitation needs have been met. Our mission is to provide technical training and consulting and act as a centre of expertise in water and sanitation for the poor in developing countries. CAWST is a Canadian centre with expertise that serves clients globally. We use education to catalyze action, helping people gain the skills they need to access clean water, sanitation, and hygiene for healthy homes. Established in 2001, CAWST has mobilized almost \$30 million and achieved the following results: 13.1 million people are using cleaner water and/or practicing better sanitation practices; 6.6 million people have been trained by our clients using CAWST's free, open-content education and training materials; and 1,091 clients have implemented WASH projects in 82 countries.

2. CAWST and Sehgal Foundation have been engaged in a longstanding partnership. You recently completed a training in Samastipur, Bihar. Why do you think it was important to engage with communities in that region, and how are they benefiting from the programs?

CAWST first provided training to Sehgal Foundation staff twelve years ago. Since then, we are delighted that Sehgal Foundation has successfully implemented a biosand filter (BSF) program, and developed a stainless steel body design for biosand filters. Additionally, Sehgal Foundation has promoted the concept of household water treatment and safe storage (HWTS) along with biosand filters in India. CAWST has provided further training and technical support to Sehgal Foundation and collaborated to deliver three workshops in the last year. As a result, a couple of organizations are now implementing BSF projects, with the prospect of more organizations implementing them in the near future. Certainly, our trainings and efforts will have a snowball impact so that more people will have access to safe water in places like Bihar, Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, and the northeastern states of India.

3. Tell us about the Paint It Blue campaign initiated by CAWST?

World Water Day, celebrated on March 22, was incepted by the United Nations to draw attention to global water issues. CAWST's Paint it Blue campaign is to celebrate what we've created together by helping 13.1 million people around the world access safe water or sanitation. We are humbled that landmarks across Canada are lit blue on March 22 in support of our cause, including Niagara Falls, the Calgary Tower, Reconciliation Bridge, the Galleria of Trees on Stephen Avenue, High Level Bridge in Edmonton, and B.C. Place in Vancouver. A free admission event in Calgary showcases action projects by local youth to tackle water issues in our communities, and Calgarians learn about how CAWST leads through education and training to help those in need around the world access safe drinking water and sanitation. Anyone in the world can support World Water Day each year by sharing images with the hashtags #WorldWaterDay and #PaintItBlue, and painting their Facebook profile picture blue. Find out more at www.cawst.org/wwd and the UN-Water site worldwaterday.org

4. With World Water Day this month, what one message do you want to give to everyone?

Empowered with knowledge and information, everyone in the world can learn how to access simple, affordable solutions, and access clean water that is safe to drink.

5. In your role as International Technical Advisor (South Asia and Middle East), you must travel a lot. Are water use and consumption habits different across regions? Which part of the world is a good example when it comes to effective water laws and water harvesting practices?

I have worked in 13 countries around the world, spanning Asia, Africa, and North America, and what stands out for me is how countries such as Nepal, Cambodia, and Afghanistan have adopted household water treatment (HWT) as a viable option to provide safe water to vulnerable communities in dire need. Thousands of biosand filters are built and installed every year in the Terai region of Nepal. This is improving the health and quality of life in the area, providing safe water and much-needed livelihoods to entrepreneurs who have adopted a market-based approach to the demand for safe water and sell affordable household filters. In Cambodia various technologies and options of water treatment at the household level have been adopted. A research paper by Rosa, Ghislaine, and Clasen (2005) found that 2.1 percent of the population in Cambodia uses household filters for their safe water needs. A very reputable nongovernmental organization, DACAAR based at Kabul, estimated in 2015 that forty thousand biosand filters were deployed in Afghanistan in the previous five years.

6. What is your own water story? If you could share any incident or experience from your life that taught you the importance of water?

Until the early nineties, my family in India had never used a water filter at home. We used to drink tap water directly without treating it. After falling sick a couple of times due to drinking contaminated water, we started using a candle ceramic filter at home, and later on moved to reverse osmosis treatment. Looking back, I wonder why people who can afford clean water usually take it for granted, while many families are chronically sick because they are drinking contaminated water. Providing safe water to people in need is not that difficult, and it is not expensive, either. Affordable and appropriate household water treatment technologies such as the biosand filter can improve the lives of the poorest people around the world. Household water treatment is an inexpensive, viable, and sustainable option that offers hope for healthier communities.

(Interview by Arti Manchanda Grover, program leader, Communications)