

H2O 4 All invests in water filtration in Dominican

by Rachel Browne
Special to the Beaver

An Oakville charity is one of 65 organizations from around the world to receive a major grant from the Canadian government to help save the lives of mothers, children and babies in developing countries.

H2O 4 All, which has implemented sustainable water filtration systems in nine developing countries since it started in 2008, received a \$112,000 seed grant to deploy a water filter system in the Dominican Republic using specially treated clay pots.

In a country where 50 per cent of children live in extreme poverty and struggle to find safe drinking water, the Dominican Republic desperately needs a solution.

And because people there often drink from muddy puddles and contaminated streams, Timothy Muttoo, executive director at H2O 4 All, said children are getting sick from unclean water, which causes diarrhea, the No. 1 killer of children under five.

“We have a beautiful piece of technology,” Muttoo said in an interview with the *Oakville Beaver*. “We take the natural elements of the Dominican Republic and we create this low-cost filter that is then used for the public.”

Their filtration system, composed of a simple clay pot and bucket, may not look like anything special, but it turns dirty water into 99.9 per cent clean drinking water. After treating the pot with silver nanoparticles and baking it in a kiln, it becomes porous, so that after it cools and dries it becomes a filter.

Muttoo said his group will use the grant to bring the system to three needy villages in the Dominican over the next 18 months and monitor the progress. But it won't necessarily be an easy feat.

“You can have the best drinking water technology, but if no one knows how to use it, it's useless,” he said. Other charities have tried to



Timothy Muttoo, executive director of H2O 4 All, with the clay pot filtration system in the Dominican Republic. | photo courtesy of H2O 4 All

bring other filtration technologies to the country before, he said, but they haven't solved the problem.

“When we think of charitable work, it's not just giving things to people. At some point we have to stop giving things to people. And I don't mean that in a harsh way.”

He said it's important for his group to go beyond merely providing the system, by interacting with and teaching people how to use and clean the system so it will be a lasting solution that's part of their culture.

“The best way to break the poverty cycle is to change what's always been done,” he said. “When we go into a community, what we're trying to do is change what's always been done, in a long-term way. Not be Santa Claus.”

And this can be done only with the help of local women.

“We believe we should raise up women to be the leaders, involved in every step of the way,” he said. “If you ever go to a developing country, you will realize right away that... it is the women who are caring for their families, it's the women who are the livelihoods of their communities.”

A few years ago, Muttoo, an engineer who studied chemical engineering at Ryerson University, had many overtime hours stored up from his previous job at a major engineering corporation. He took time off to travel the world, which opened his eyes to its harsh realities.

“I had no idea what was going on in the developing world. Not even a clue,” he said. “There's so many people dealing with so many issues. They're living such a hard life. But many of their problems are solvable. The issues around (clean) water are solvable.”

He was inspired to start his own non-profit and marry his love of technology with his desire to help others. He hopes to eventually expand this filtration system beyond the Dominican Republic.

“I want to present to the world how we can use this technology in communities all over the world. Let's see it affect millions of people.”

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