

Barrels and Buckets: Access to Water in Kenya
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Narrative Stories From Kenya

The people of the village of Kericho in Kenya enjoy a lot of rain. In fact, it rains every day in Kericho, usually during the afternoon. Kericho Town gets its water from one of the local rivers. From the river, the water is pumped to a modern treatment facility to clean the water and make it safe to drink. Kericho is one of the only towns of its size in Kenya to have such a treatment facility.

My house, located near Kericho Town, is supplied with piped water from the treatment system. The water flows clear and cold and tastes great. Despite the good water quality at my home, I boil water for drinking to make sure it is safe and won't make me sick.

Kericho District has many places to get water. Some people get their water from rivers, wells, springs, and rainwater.

David Frommell
Bagoo, Rift Valley Province, Kenya

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Mombasa is an island in the Indian Ocean of the coast of east Africa and has about 700,000 people living on it. As it is so close to the ocean, the water has a lot of salt in it. Because the water has so much salt, we cannot drink it. All of our water comes through pipes from our neighbors on the mainland. While the water is clean and good, many people—like me—make sure to boil the drinking water. People sell water by pushing a cart around town, selling 20 liters of water (usually tap water) for between five shillings (seven cents) and fifty shillings (67 cents), depending on how scarce water is at the time.

I am one of the lucky Peace Corps Volunteers who has running water in my house, although it is not always reliable. In fact, as I write this I have been without water for two days. This is common throughout Kenya, so people find other ways to get water. The building I live in, for example, has tanks on the roof that fill when the water is working, and we store it for use when water is not coming through the pipes for whatever reason. However, if the water does not come back on within a few hours, the tanks are empty, and the residents of the building are left to find their own sources of water until the piped

water returns. Many of the people—me included—have plastic barrels that we fill when the water is on. We can then use that water when the piped water is off.

Patrick Campbell
Mombasa, Kenya

Although my house in Kenya has pipes, this does not guarantee that water comes through them. I live in western Kenya, which has a lot of people. The pipes here are very old, and too many people need the water, so some days I don't have any water at all. I only have water on Wednesday and Friday mornings.

On a “water morning,” whether water is scheduled to come that day or not, water trickles slowly out of one tap in the backyard. I must remain at home these mornings and collect as much water as possible to store in plastic containers, for I have no way of knowing when it will come again. Tap water looks, smells, and tastes clean, but still I boil and filter it before drinking, just to be safe.

If the tap stays dry much longer than a week, I must resort to collecting rainwater. Luckily, Vihiga gets a lot of rain. I have spent many evenings eagerly watching the sky, hoping that the rains will come to fill my basins. Rainwater that runs off the overhanging roof is noticeably dirtier than the tap water, but after boiling and filtering, I can drink it. During the dry season (December to February), both tap water and rain are difficult to come by. My plastic containers run dry. Some days I don't have enough water to cook or wash dishes or clothes. I have to keep the water to drink, brush my teeth, and wash my face and hair. Sometimes I must buy water from the mamas who fetch it at the river. This water can be used around the house, but I will not drink it. One time the water I received from the river smelled like gasoline.

Barbara Hinsman
Vigeze Village, Vihiga, Kenya