



# NATURE AND HUMANS STRIKE A BALANCE

The Global Nature Fund (GNF) is a non-profit, private, independent, international foundation for the protection of nature and the environment registered in Germany. The organization has offices at Lake Constance, Bonn and Berlin in Germany.

TEXT: KLAUS STRIXNER, ASTRID SCHNEIDER  
PHOTO: GLOBAL NATURE FUND, FOTOLIA

- > Founded in 1998, GNF's work and objectives focus on initiating and implementing specific and tangible projects for preserving and protecting nature, the environment and biological diversity, chiefly concerning migrating species, their habitats and their migratory routes. Furthermore, GNF develops model projects aimed at promoting a sustainable economy. In order to achieve this, GNF organizes events dealing with the protection of nature and the environment and promotes international conventions on species protection.
- In 1998, GNF launched the Living Lakes network. Living Lakes is a global partnership of environmental organizations striving to protect lakes and wetlands worldwide. Since its first distinction in

2006, the global Living Lakes network has been permanently recognized as an "Official Project of the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development 2005-2014." In November 2013, the National Committee of the UN Decade "Education for Sustainable Development" even awarded Living Lakes the title "Official Measure of the World Decade."

Since 2008, Sika has been supporting drinking water projects in Africa realized by GNF. As a result of these actions, in Burundi more than 5,000 people, especially children, now have access to clean drinking water in the villages of Kagwema and Rukaramu, north-west of Burundi's capital Bujumbura. In Kenya, residents of the village of Kandara, about 30 km north of the town of Thika, have had access to clean water since 2014.

In addition to these activities, four more water projects are currently being realized in Ivory Coast. In 2010, the first water projects were carried out in the regions of Man and N'zi Comoé: the villages in need of pump repairs were selected in close cooperation with the local project partners.

By the end of 2012, a total of 24 wells had been repaired and by the summer of 2013, another 20 wells had been put into operation. With 26 wells in a further 18 villages being fixed in 2014, access to clean and fresh groundwater has now been provided to the residents of 44 vil-



Access to clean and fresh groundwater has now been provided to the residents of 44 villages in total in Ivory Coast.

lages in total. More than 24,000 Ivorians are currently supplied with fresh water as a result of the projects, and can thus hope for a better future.

The residents of all villages have been ac-

tively involved in the projects. They have established water committees involving women and men with specific functions and areas of responsibility and thus manage the water distribution in the commu-

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## SINCE 2008, SIKA HAS BEEN SUPPORTING DRINKING WATER PROJECTS IN AFRICA



Udo Gattenlöhner.

> nities themselves. Technicians, trained in the technical maintenance of the pumps at the beginning of the project, are responsible for maintaining the wells. Others take care of hygiene education in the village; still others are in charge of financial management. The inhabitants of the villages have agreed that each pump user will pay a small annual fee in order to cover future maintenance costs for the installed facilities.

To learn more about the projects and the people behind them, we jumped into our car and drove to Lake Constance, which is only one hour away from our offices in Zurich, to meet Executive Director Udo Gattenlöhner.

**Mr. Gattenlöhner, could you tell us how the idea first came up to create an NGO like GNF?**

GNF was founded in 1998 as a kind of international sister organization to the German environmental NGO "Deutsche Umwelthilfe" (Environmental Action Germany). At that time, GNF had the opportunity to launch a global Lake Net-

work with financial support from the private sector, namely from companies such as Unilever, Lufthansa and Daimler.

**What was your professional life like before GNF? Have you always worked in the NGO scene? And what drove you to choose this field?**

Even while still at school I was fascinated by nature and wanted to work in the environmental sector. I did my compulsory community service with an environmental NGO and chose my degree (Agricultural Sciences) with this goal in mind. After graduating from university, I was lucky enough to be given the opportunity to work for an NGO.

**Sadly the world today has many areas, both natural and human, that are in need of improvement. How do you decide which projects you take on?**

GNF's main competence lies in the field of water ecosystems and international cooperation. A major orientation is provided by our statutes, defining the will of the founders. However, there is a certain amount of positive opportunism that plays a role in project selection as well, as one can only select and realize projects that are financially feasible.

**How many employees do you have who work directly on the projects? Are there also local people on site who support the work or carry it forward after you are gone?**

GNF has 14 permanent staff. Networking is in our DNA – so to speak – and it is part of our philosophy to realize all our projects in close collaboration with local partner organizations, building on their experiences and expertise.

**Your "Living Lakes" project has a mandate from the United Nations. What does that change for the project?**

It is a great honor and "morale booster" for GNF and all Living Lakes partners that the network has been recognized as an "Official Project of the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development" from 2005 to 2014. As environmental education plays an important role in almost all our activities, this designation means a lot to us and has helped promote our projects.

**What, for you, is special about the drinking water projects in Africa?**

Despite UNESCO's 2015 "Water for a Sustainable World" report stating that progress has been good on providing improved access to clean drinking water, 748 million people still lack access to safe and clean water. Especially rural and poor regions in Sub-Saharan Africa face various drinking water and sanitation problems, as they are economically unattractive in terms of government or private water company investment due to low income, poor education and poor infrastructure. As limited access to clean drinking water must be seen as the major cause of health problems and poverty for millions of people in these parts of Africa, GNF tries to focus on these most vulnerable regions and communities. <

## DESALINATION PLANTS



# GETTING THE SALT OUT OF WATER

About 70% of the earth's surface is covered with water. However 97% of the water on the earth is salt water. Salt water is filled with salt and other minerals, and humans cannot drink it. Less than 1% of all the water on earth is fresh water that we can actually use. We use this small amount of water for drinking, transportation, heating and cooling, industrial, and many other purposes.

TEXT: ASTRID SCHNEIDER  
PHOTO: SIKA AG, FOTOLIA

> Most of the modern interest in desalination is focused on developing cost-effective ways of providing fresh water for human use. Along with recycled wastewater, desalination is one of the few rainfall-independent water sources. Due to the relatively high energy consumption involved, the costs of desalinating sea water are generally higher than the alternatives (fresh water in the form of surface water such as rivers and lakes, groundwater, water recycling and water conservation), but alternatives are not always available and rapid overdraw and depletion of reserves is a critical problem worldwide. >