

Citizens Shaping Their World

Rachel, sitting in her suburban home outside of Washington DC, heard about the water crisis in India and could not believe that women were walking four hours a day for life's most basic necessity. She thought about how long her walk for water was, counting the steps from her bedroom to the bathroom—12 steps covered in six seconds. No bucket to carry, no heavy pot balanced on her head. She simply needed to turn on the faucet, and safe drinking water flowed. The more she thought about it, the more it felt magical compared to the over two and a half billion people who lack access to sanitation and clean drinking water.¹

Rachel decided to do something about it. She had never given money to a community overseas and knew nothing about “international development.” As so many of us do when we don't know something, she went online and Googled “water India.” A project to build a well in Sanganguna Village on CitizenEffect.org appeared.

... Dan Morrison
... CitizenEffect.org



Rachel brought together her community with the goal of raising enough money to build a well for a community halfway around the world.



A child walks for miles in order to get water for his family. Rachel (above, dark grey t-shirt) helped his community build a well.

Sanganguna Village is a rural community in Gujarat, India. Women not only needed to walk long distances for water, but the trek left them with no time to work, run a business or earn an income.

Rachel was determined to partner with Sanganguna Village and build that well. But Rachel had a problem. She did not have the \$2,700 that Sanganguna Village needed. After all, she was only seven years old.

However, Rachel had the only things that really mattered—the passion to help a community in need and the desire to bring her friends and family together to help. She walked into her principal's office and said she wanted to organize Walk4Water Day at the school. On a beautiful spring day, Rachel brought together her community with the goal of raising enough money to build a well for a community halfway around the world. Her classmates came, learned about the water crisis in India, carried water jugs across a field, and together, they raised \$3,700, \$1,000 more than Rachel's goal.

Now Sanganguna Village has an accessible, sustainable source of clean water. Women have time to start businesses and earn an income. Children are attending school in greater numbers and for longer periods of time. Community health is improving. All because Rachel decided she had the power to act and be the change she wanted to see in the world.

Rachel was flexing her muscles as a citizen. She acted locally to organize her community to have an impact on a community in need of water. She defined herself much broader than just as a consumer and rejected the concept that the only duty of a citizen was to vote (even though she can't vote for 11 years). She, like so many of her peers and elders in the Millennium generation, took an active role in creating the society she wants to live in.

No governments, no politics, no multilateral organizations and no corporations necessary. Rachel and Sanganguna Village are an example of citizens connecting with citizens to solve small but critical problems. Rather than focus on large unmanageable problems, Rachel and others are unlocking the potential of communities by completing small projects that empower people to be more self-reliant and in control of their own destiny. That is how the growing citizen effect movement works: small efforts and projects with direct visible impact.



Photo is courtesy Citizen Effect, citizeneffect.org

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Rachel's classmates (top) partnered with Sanganguna Village, raised the funds and built the well that the community needed.



Photo is courtesy Jeremy M. Lange

Today, citizens of all ages are not only looking to government, non-profits and international organizations to mitigate global water and food crises, stop genocides, fight HIV/AIDS and halt climate change and save the environment.

They are seeking ways to do it themselves.

Brother Ray Eurquhart (left) and Paul Reickoff (right) are two citizens changing the world around them.



Photo is courtesy Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America

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A lifelong resident of Durham, North Carolina, Ray Eurquhart has been a community activist for more than 40 years. Now in his 60s, the Air Force veteran and former city employee known as Brother Ray “is on a crusade to clean up the crime, replenish affordable housing and restore vitality” in his neighborhood. From picking up litter to running the local community center, Brother Ray is also a member of the community’s redevelopment steering committee and is involved in a project to turn abandoned properties into livable, affordable homes. “Everything starts from self-interest,” said Brother Ray. “I live over here, and so did my mother and father and father’s mother. It was the village that brought us up. It taught us the value of community.”²

In 2005, Dwight Owens suffered life-threatening injuries after being hit by a drunk driver. Although now confined to a wheelchair, Dwight is dedicated to serving others. Working with AmeriCorps’ Linking Individuals into Neighborhoods and Communities project, he supports over 1,200 individuals with disabilities. He also works to ensure accessibility and independence by conducting Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) site surveys and providing life skills training sessions. Dwight helps individuals transition from public institutions to their own homes and facilitates a support group for men with disabilities to encourage independence and leadership.³

Iraq War veteran Paul Rieckhoff wanted to improve the lives of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans and their families. After returning to the US from Baghdad in 2004, Rieckhoff created the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA). IAVA helps veterans become leaders in government, business and communities. The result is not just better care for veterans, but also a population

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that understands the causes and consequences of war. By 2015, IAVA expects to have 175,000 veteran members and an additional 400,000 supporters.⁴

Rachel and others are ensuring that citizens will be the defining factor for 21st-century philanthropy. Micro-philanthropy sites like Citizen Effect, GlobalGiving, Crowdrise and microfinance sites like Kiva are allowing citizens to partner with communities in need around the world and see the direct results of their efforts without the bureaucracy of large foundations and non-profits. You give directly to a project and have a direct line of sight into the impact you have on the community. This was impossible 20 years ago; today Rachel can send money to Sanganguna Village, and a woman in Sanganguna can take a photo of the well with her phone and send it to Rachel.

Technology is a major reason why citizens are retaking control of society. You no longer need millions of dollars to connect with and support an entrepreneur or

help a community in need. Technology, the Internet and mobile communication are connecting people of all income levels from all over the world to fund projects, solve problems and raise the voices of those that are oppressed and fighting for their rights and lives.

Recognizing the absurdity of wasted food, Jonathan Leung began recovering otherwise wasted food from his school cafeteria and delivering it to a homeless shelter in Philadelphia. He turned to technology to involve more students in the process of transporting food to those in need. Using a Google application, he created a volunteer sign-up form, which is exported to a spreadsheet and then to a map, allowing him to quickly determine how to best match volunteers with businesses for food pickup and shelters for deliveries. As the project expanded, Jonathan created Helping Hunger, a student-driven organization that has “rescued” nearly 7,500 pounds of food from caterers and restaurants, and transported it to soup kitchens and homeless shelters.⁵

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High school students from Sugar Land, Texas partnered with their local supermarket to host a food drive.

Global problems are being redefined. Statistics that say “1.4 billion people live below \$1.25 a day and 2.6 billion lack access to sanitation” are being replaced with “110 people in Sanganguna Village need \$2,700 to build a sustainable well to access clean water.” The first statistic is abstract and unsolvable for even the wealthiest philanthropist. The second is tangible and doable for a group of friends that get together and leverage their social network to raise the money and to transform the lives of a community.

Citizens will by no means replace the role of governments, political parties, venture capitalists, USAID or the Gates Foundation. These established organizations address crises and provide funding that large-scale problems require. However, citizens are beginning to take back control of these organizations that once worked for them, not on behalf of them like they do today. At Citizen Effect, we estimate that, in a few years, \$1 spent on empowering citizen philanthropists will

result in \$15 raised for small but critical projects in the field. Citizens are force multipliers, and large organizations can leverage them to have a much greater impact at the community level where large programs are not as effective.

When Rachel set out to help Sanganguna Village, she did not know what “development” was. She did not have a master plan for Sanganguna and how to “lift them out of poverty.” But she did have the passion to help people in need and wanted to do her part to be a positive change in the world. At the end of the day, she was just a citizen who decided she had a responsibility to others, and she could bring together other citizens to make a real difference and help build a more self-reliant and sustainable world. Rachel is a leader in the citizen effect movement that is transforming politics, entrepreneurial markets and philanthropy.

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Dan Morrison is the CEO and founder of Citizen Effect (www.citizeneffect.org), an entrepreneurial non-profit that empowers anyone to be a philanthropist. After a career as an innovation and brand strategy consultant, Morrison went to the University of Chicago and received a master's in Middle Eastern Studies. In 2006, Morrison was invited to India by the Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA), where he met a woman who needed to walk four hours for water. Morrison went home, sent a holiday card to friends and family and raised \$5,000 to build a well in her village. Ever since, Morrison has been helping everyday citizens connect directly to communities in need around the world to build a more self-reliant and sustainable life.

