Saving the world a drop at a time

By Bhekumuzi Mdakane

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Imagine taking a bath anywhere at any time without using the traditional method of water. A young South African entrepreneur has developed a product that will allow people who have limited access to water to maintain their standards of hygiene.



Conveniently packaged in single-use sachets, DryBath saves up to 80 litres of water per use. (Image: HeadBoy Industries)

Ludwick Marishane hails originally from Motetema on the border of Limpopo and Mpumalanga, a town located not too far from the small Kwaggavoetpad Nature Reserve. He's just completed his fourth year as a commerce student at the University of Cape Town.

His product, called DryBath, is a clear germicidal and moisturising gel that's applied to skin in the manner of waterless hand cleaners, although it has a sweet aroma rather than the distinctive alcohol smell of the latter.

DryBath does the work of water and soap and it earned Marishane the 2011 Global Student Entrepreneur of the Year Award, with a US$10 000 (R86 000) prize to boot.

The product has positive implications for millions of people in Africa and other parts of the developing world where lack of regular access to clean water leads to reduced basic hygiene and a lower quality of life. Children, for example, often have to walk for hours to fetch clean water, which detracts from the time they can spend at school, doing homework or just playing.

To show solidarity for and raise awareness of the millions of affected people, Marishane is organising a no-bath weekend from 5 to 7 July, which will coincide with the fourth anniversary of the invention of DryBath. More details are available online.

His main goal is to get 10-million people to hygienically skip a bath once a week during 2013, even if they don't use

DryBath, and save the precious resource of water.

DryBath is manufactured by Western Cape-based gel cosmetic specialists BioEarth Labs for HeadBoy Industries, the company started by Marishane to develop and market the product.

Laziness leads to inspiration

Marishane grew up in rural Limpopo, where as a 17-year-old he was chatting one day with a close friends, discussing typical teenage topics and sunbathing in the winter sun.

Full of imagination, the friend asked: "Why can't they invent something that you can just apply to your skin so that you don't have to take a bath nor shower?"

Marishane felt the same way, and that planted the seed that would germinate into DryBath.

"I came up with this idea all because I didn't feel like taking a bath!" he joked.

Although he only had high school science knowledge, Marishane got onto the internet via his mobile phone and researched statistics on water access, as well as the composition and manufacture of lotions and creams. He finally came up with a formula. Some months later and after much experimentation, he held a bottle of DryBath in his hand and went on to obtain a patent through his company.

One 20ml DryBath sachet can do the work of one bath, and Marishane claims it saves about 80 litres of water on average with every use.

Access to water is crucial

During his research he found out that over 2.5-billion people in the world live without access to clean water - 450-millon of them are in Africa and five-million live in South Africa.

Continued research revealed that sanitation-related diseases are often found within these poor areas and the lack of water is one of the main causes of the infections.

Saving water is a job that everyone needs to focus on. But there are many areas around the world that have no access to safe water, or water at all, and people often have to walk long distances to get fresh water.

Living without water can also lead to death, as waterborne diseases such as cholera, dysentery, typhoid and schistosomiasis are found in areas that lack clean water. Trachoma, a disease caused by dirt getting into the eye through agents such as flies or towels, affects 350-million people and leaves eight-million of them permanently blind through recurring infection.

According to Water.org, nearly 10% of the global disease burden could be reduced through improved water supply, sanitation, hygiene, and water resource management.

Getting the product out there

Marishane first approached charity organizations for support, but says he was turned back because of his age and because of doubt that his concept would ever work.

Back at the drawing board, he put together a lengthy and detailed proposal - all done on his trusty Nokia.

With paper in hand he approached the corporate world in search for sponsors, endorsements and investors. At the moment

he has struck up partnerships with WaterAid and Oxfam.

DryBath is now manufactured commercially for clients such as hotels, music festival organisers, major global airlines - one of which is British Airways - and governments for soldiers in the field. It's not yet available for consumer use but Marishane says it will soon be sold online.

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