

The weight of the world: Engineers Without Borders campaign for international development

Students bring public awareness to the streets of Toronto

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by Nicolle Wahl

Imagine carrying the minimum amount of water that your family needs for an entire day in a bucket balanced on your head. The average North American would stagger as the weight first settles and would struggle to stay upright, let alone keep the vessel from spilling. But for millions of people around the world, fetching water is a daily and arduous task, demanding that heavy loads be carried for miles.



On March 2, students from the University of Toronto chapter of Engineers Without Borders shouldered that burden, at least symbolically, to raise awareness about international development issues. More than a dozen students started the day at 6 a.m. in the Great Hall at Union Station, speaking to the day's commuters about Canada's role in international development. Then at 7:30 a.m., 15 students hoisted heavy buckets of water onto their heads and took a four-kilometre trek north to the St. George campus via Bay Street.

"We hope that this event will provide a message of unity of people across the world," says William Li, vice-president (public relations) of the U of T chapter. "We all live in this world and we're all human beings. But there are many human beings who face major challenges just to sustain themselves that we, in the developed world don't even think about. So we want to bring this image of people carrying water, which millions of people have to do, right to the heart of Toronto and show that there are people who have to do this as part of their daily lives."

The buckets that the students carry weighed as much as 10 kilograms. A member of U of T's chapter was in Ghana last summer and brought back stories about how communities would only have

running water once every few days. To survive, people -- especially women -- would have to walk for miles to get water, Li says. But they would carry containers weighing 20 or 30 kilograms, sometimes several times a day.

Engineers Without Borders promotes human development through access to technology and participates in development projects overseas, particularly in sub-Saharan and West Africa. Formed in 2000, it is Canada's fastest-growing development organization and also focuses on promoting development and sustainability at home.

This year, the campaign's theme is Canada, Play Your Part and calls on Canada to commit to 0.7 per cent of its gross national product on foreign aid, ending tied aid and supporting developing countries in international trade negotiations. The Union Station event was part of National Engineering Week.