

Abstract (Concept Paper):

Allensworth Rising: A Fight for Water

by Neenma Ebeledike and Isabella Marzban

In the town of Allensworth, California, residents join forces with Dr. Ashok Gadgil to fight for clean water and to preserve the town's historic legacy, continuing the work of their families who lived in the town for generations.

Allensworth Rising: A Fight for Water is a 21-minute documentary that follows Sherry Hunter, a lifelong resident and community leader, in her tireless effort to secure safe, clean water for the historic town of Allensworth, California. Founded in 1908 by Lt. Colonel Allen Allensworth, a formerly enslaved man turned visionary, the city was created as a self-governed utopia for Black families, a place where African Americans could thrive, free from systemic oppression. Over a century later, Allensworth's residents still fight for that original vision in the face of an arsenic water crisis that threatens their health, dignity, and future.

At the center of this crisis is Sherry Hunter, president of the Allensworth Community Services District. The film opens in her kitchen, where she prepares a pot of beans but explains how she cannot use the water to cook or brush her teeth. It's a quiet yet powerful moment that sets the tone for a story rooted in resilience. Allensworth's only two wells built decades ago, are the town's sole water source, and both are contaminated with dangerous levels of arsenic.

As the film unfolds, Sherry guides viewers through Allensworth's storied past. Through her voice, the history of a once-thriving town comes alive, from its founding by Black pioneers to its gradual decline due to institutional neglect, systemic racism, and diverted water access. In public meetings and private moments, Sherry confronts the failure of state agencies to deliver on their promises.

The film also features members of the Castillo family, who have lived in Allensworth since the 1950s. Carol Castillo shares how cancer has ravaged her family, an illness she suspects is tied to the water. Her husband Efrain shows the failing water system behind his house and takes viewers to the watershed, offering a glimpse into the broken infrastructure locals rely on. Their daughter, Karissa, is seen giving bottled water to her dog; while their son, Fernando, is seen driving 20 miles to refill their water cans at a water refill station which is a striking symbol of how deeply this crisis affects daily life.

Adding a spark of hope is Dr. Ashok Gadgil, a UC Berkeley environmental engineer who has developed an innovative piece of equipment capable of removing arsenic from groundwater. Viewers follow him as he transports and demonstrates the technology in Allensworth, offering a potential breakthrough for the town's future. His presence, and the town's hopeful reaction to the device, underscores the resilience and innovation being brought to bear on this long-standing crisis. Dr. Ashok Gadgil also explains the long-term health impacts of arsenic exposure and the challenges of implementing clean water technologies in rural communities like Allensworth.

Through sweeping shots of California's dry Central Valley and vibrant scenes of community events and cultural restoration projects, *Allensworth Rising: A Fight for Water* paints a picture of a town at once battered and vibrant. Sherry's determination anchors the film, embodying a community's fight not only for clean water but also for recognition, survival, and preserving its historical legacy. This is not just a documentary about a water crisis, it is a testament to what it means to fight for a place that history tried to erase.

Treatment:

Allensworth Rising: A Fight for Water A film by Neenma Ebeledike and Isabella Marzban



(Allensworth, California)

Logline:

In the town of Allensworth, California, residents join forces with Dr. Ashok Gadgil to fight for clean water and to preserve the town's historic legacy, continuing the work of their families who lived in the town for generations.

Summary:

This documentary explores the remarkable history and ongoing struggle of Allensworth, California, a town founded in 1908 by Colonel Allen Allensworth as a self-sustaining Black community. Despite its promising beginnings, systemic racism and environmental challenges led to its decline. Today, Sherry Hunter leads efforts to restore clean water to the town, confronting historical environmental injustices while fighting to keep the town's legacy alive.

Act 1 - The Problem Emerges

The film opens with a woman washing a bowl of beans, yet she only is using bottled water—not tap.

"I'm not comfortable with the water in this town," says the woman, "I will only use bottled water to wash these beans, even though the state says this tap water meets state regulations, but I am still not comfortable with the water."

The woman is revealed to be Sherry Hunter, the president of Allensworth's Community Service District.

The film cuts to Sherry's office where she is surrounded by stacks of paperwork—water quality reports, grant applications, and legal documents. Her phone buzzes with messages from state agencies, officials, and concerned residents. As president of the community board, she shoulders the responsibility of navigating the bureaucratic hurdles to secure funding and resources to address the water crisis. Sherry's resolve is evident in every conversation. She is calm but firm as she speaks with state officials, outlining the community's desperate need for clean water. "We've been fighting for years," she says to one official over the phone, "and yet we're still here, with no real solution in sight. This is more than just paperwork for us. These are people's lives."

As the Sherry continues to fight, it becomes clear that this isn't just about water—it's about survival, dignity, and preserving the legacy of their mother and the town's founders. Sherry tells us about the town's current community plan, which was implemented recently. "The goal is to empower ourselves to learn how to cultivate our land, and educate our youth about our history and agriculture. They are our future." And part of the goal is to simply provide a hopeful future for children, who make up a third of the population.

Sherrys says, "We don't want to be completely dependent on outside individuals or companies anymore. We want to be self-sustaining. We are everything we need."

Act 2 - The Roots of the Struggle

The day begins with the Sotelos, a Latino family of Allensworth, loading up their truck, the sun already high in the sky, casting a relentless heat across the dry, cracked land of Allensworth. Dust clouds rise around Fernando Sotelo, the son of Carol Castillo Sotelo and Efrain Sotelo, brings a gallon hub into the back of his car where his sister Karissa enters from the side car door. Fernando speaks in a quiet, resigned tone: "Every week, it's the same. Load up the car, drive for miles, just to get enough water to last."

The road stretches endlessly ahead of her, a dusty ribbon winding through barren fields. The radio hums softly in the background, but Fernando isn't listening—his thoughts are focused on the countless trips he's made out of necessity. "Water shouldn't be something we have to fight for," he says, gripping the wheel tightly. The drive takes him to a neighboring town, where he pulls up to a modest water kiosk.

Back in Allensworth, Sherry, reflects on Allensworth's past. She says: "This town is a part of me. My mother lived here for over 40 years, and I'm here to fight for our town and its legacy."

Sherry recounts the founding of Allensworth with reverence: "In 1908, Colonel Allen Allensworth, a man born into slavery who rose to become an Army chaplain, led a group of African American settlers here. They had a vision, to build a self-sustaining town, free from the racial oppression that gripped the rest of the country."

Images from the early 1900s reveal the vibrant life that once filled the town. Families tend lush fields, children play outside schoolhouses, and the streets echo with the sounds of construction. For a time, the families had an overwhelming sense of hope and ambition—they believed Allensworth could be a refuge where Black Americans could govern themselves and own their future. But this came to a halt when they found arsenic in the town's water supply and soil.

The deception by the white farmers left Allensworth fighting with an invisible enemy, which didn't come to the surface for decades after the town's conception. Crops failed to take root, yet the town continued to try and create self-sustaining gardens. With a new bout of residents coming into the town during the 1960s, the problem of arsenic contamination rose to the surface, forcing residents to plead for help from the state government and utility companies. For years, these big institutions failed to offer any long term solutions.

Eventually, Sherry widened her scope, desperately searching for anyone in the world working on arsenic contamination. In this search, she became aware of Dr. Ashok Gadgil, a bio-engineer from India who had developed technology that could remove arsenic from groundwater in rural farms in India. Dr. Gadgil is always genial, smiling in his lab no matter the challenge at hand. Dr. Gadgil works exclusively in rural areas that he thinks have been forgotten. "Technological innovation has become so much about moving forward purely for the sake of moving forward. But my belief is that technology loses its importance if it is not being used to improve the lives of people."

When Sherry read about Dr. Gadgil, she knew they needed to get in touch with him. So five years ago, Sherry sent Dr. Gadgil an email, asking Gadgil if he might be able to participate if Dr. Gadgil began a project in Allensworth.

To Sherry's relief, Dr. Gadgil was on board. "Although I hadn't done any work in the United States before, I found that the arsenic levels in Allensworth were as bad as the ones I saw in India," says Dr. Gadgil. For the first time, the town began to learn of the danger of drinking arsenic water. "The town was unaware that arsenic in drinking water could cause serious illnesses," says Dr. Gadgil, "it wasn't until I began teaching classes about arsenic contamination that the community learned the long term effects of drinking arsenic water being cancer."

In response, the Gadgil Lab brought a research lab to the town that was set up in a small shed, gifted by a local farmer. The shed was filled with large water tanks, testing tubes, and a mangled bunch of wires connected to dozens of metal blocks, which became the temporary home for Gadgil's technology device. But after running out of grant money, the Gadgil team had to stop operations.

Yet, in early spring of 2024, the team was able to begin building a new device, specifically geared for the small town with plans to bring the technology back to the town for good. For now, the shed is a snapshot of the past: a constant reminder of how close the town came to experiencing clean water.

Act 3 - Resolution and Takeaway

This act emphasizes the scope and severity of the water crisis in Allensworth.

The road stretches on, flanked by barren fields that once thrived with crops.

As the well comes into view, its outdated structure stands as a stark reminder of the town's struggle. Sherry pulls over and steps out, walking slowly toward the rusting pipes. "This well was built in the 1960s," he explains, "but it has been neglected." Sherry explains that the state gave funding for a new well but has invested resources into removing arsenic from the groundwater, which is something that she feels the state should prioritize. "I feel with us being a disadvantaged community the state should help us remove arsenic from the water."

Back in her car, Sherry drives to another well, this one installed with the help of UC Berkeley's Gadgil Lab, where he's been in collaboration with for five years. "We're making progress, but it's slow," she admits. "There's a lot of red tape, a lot of bureaucracy. But we're not giving up." She explains how the lab's efforts to provide new technologies, like water kiosks, have brought a glimmer of hope to the town, though they're still a long way from a permanent solution. She discusses plans to revamp an old lab in the town with Dr. Gadgil.

"Those who suffer the most from arsenic contamination are often small farming communities and often struggle to get government funding," says Dr. Gadgil. He explains how the device can be attached to the remaining water wells in Allensworth, and how they will remove arsenic from water at 600 liters per hour. Dr. Gadgil's technology saw success in the rural communities in India and hoped that the smaller version of the technology could uplift rural agricultural communities in the United States. With a grant he received from the state of California in March of this year, he is now able to bring the technology into Allensworth. Dr. Gadgil explains how his research not only centers around innovation in water engineering but also using technology for social change and environmental justice for rural communities. "You cannot have technology for the sake of innovation. You make technology, so it creates social change in the most underserved communities," says Dr. Gadgil.

Dr. Gadgil shows some of the researchers from his team who are working with Allensworth to start a new lab and do a test run of the new technology in Allensworth. Graduate researcher Jay Madunga at the Gadgil team briefly explains the work they have been doing in Allensworth. "We currently have a new water treatment facility that we believe could completely remove arsenic from the water in Allensworth," says Jay, "the problem remaining is whether the community will have the funds to support the treatment facility. That's what we will be testing for the next two months."

As Jay and Dr. Gadgil unload equipment from their car, outside a farm where their revamped lab sits in a shed, Kayode joins the pair. For a moment, Dr. Gadgil and Kayode embrace in reminiscence, reflecting on the first time Sherry and Denise reached out to Dr. Gadgil for help in 2018. Dr. Gadgil and Kayode briefly share about the challenges it took for this day to occur and both in high spirits begin moving the equipment to the wooden, cramped shed that is concentrated by the silver sheen of Dr. Gadgil's water device: a symbol for the town retaining its identity whilst utilizing new technology that hasn't been in the town since the 1960s.

The film ends with the movement of the water treatment equipment, a tangible symbol of progress that leaves a lingering sense of hope for the town. Through this lens, Allensworth Rising captures a community's fight against environmental injustice, leaving viewers with a clear takeaway: Allensworth isn't a passive player in the fight for clean water; it creates its own solutions. The town's persistence to bring in new equipment, independent of government agencies or corporations, displays their independence and represents the possibility for any community to use its own will for environmental justice.

Final Script:

Film Title: Allensworth Rising: A Fight For Water

Filmmakers: Isabella and Neenma

Thesis Statement: In the town of Allensworth, California, residents join forces with Dr. Ashok Gadgil to fight for clean water and to preserve the town's historic legacy, continuing the work of their families who lived in the town for generations.

MUSIC BEGINS HERE

The film opens with shots of Allensworth CA, including a home that appears to be burnt down with a Mexican flag mounted on top of the ruins.

Two dogs behind a chained fence can be heard barking. Then, the camera cuts to a row of bottled water that is stacked in front of a residents' home and to an angel on the wall that says: "I have an angel watching over me, and I call her mom."

A woman begins speaking as the camera focuses on her hands as she is washing beans with bottled water.

SHERRY HUNTER:

"I'm still not comfortable enough to cook with this water. I'm making these beans. I'm going to rinse them with this water because "quote on quote" is supposed to be in compliance with state regulation, but I will not cook with this water."

The woman's face comes into frame as she continues to clean the beans with bottled water.

SHERRY HUNTER:

"I will use this water to wash dishes, wash clothes, even take a bath. But I'm not comfortable brushing my teeth with it. I'm not that comfortable with the water yet you."

Sounds of birds chirping can be heard as the camera leaves the woman's home and is now behind her home. There is a shot of the back of the blue home and basketball hoop before cutting to a steel fence that is framing the sunset in the sky.

TITLE CARD: Allensworth Rising: A Fight For Water

MUSIC BEGINS TO FADE HERE

The camera is on the front porch of a home then cuts to the wind chimes hung outside the porch. The noise of the wind chimes can be heard as a new MUSIC TRACK ENTER.

LOWER THIRDS: SHERRY HUNTER, PRESIDENT OF THE ALLENSWORTH COMMUNITY SERVICE DISTRICT

SHERRY is sitting down in a traditional interview style with a close up on her face as she begins to speak underneath the fading sound of the wind chimes.

SHERRY HUNTER:

"My mother Nettie Morrison moved here in 1970 about 78, and I used to come up here to visit her all the time."

ARCHIVAL PHOTO OF NETTIE MORRISON

SHERRY HUNTER:

“And the water tastes so good that I used to take gallon bottles of it back home with me to West Covina.”

SHERRY HUNTER:

“And one day I was up here, and I was told, the good taste that you're tasting in that water is arsenic,”

TEXT CARD: Allensworth is the first and only historically Black-founded town in California. In the 1960s, the town's water supply was found to contain naturally occurring arsenic.

SHERRY HUNTER:

“And arsenic can kill you when ingested.”

ARCHIVAL PHOTO OF SHERRY COMING DOWN TO ALLENSWORTH WHEN SHE WAS YOUNGER

SHERRY HUNTER:

“And I said, What? And my mother said, yeah, it's a lot of work that needs to be done here, and you need to help.”

ARCHIVAL PHOTOS OF SHERRY WORKING AT THE WATER DISTRICT AND MEETING GAVEN NEWSOM

SHERRY HUNTER:

“And there was a position open, just an elected position, for the Allensworth Community Service District, which is the water district. And I said, well, maybe that's an avenue that I can help with, and I ran for the office in 2010, won the election, and I've been working toward getting better quality and quantity of water here in Allensworth.”

The camera cuts to shots of Allensworth's State Historic Park.

TEXT CARD: In 1908, Colonel Allen Allensworth, a former slave and Civil War veteran, founded Allensworth as the first town to be built, funded, and led by African Americans in California.

TEXT CARD: Pacific Farming Co., a wealthy white-owned company, sold Col. Allensworth cheap land that they knew was not fertile.

SHERRY HUNTER:

“Allensworth, to me, is part of my heritage, my culture.”

MUSIC ENTERS HERE

ARCHIVAL OF ALLENSWORTH IN THE EARLY 1900S AND 1960S

SHERRY HUNTER:

“Allensworth was created in 1908 to find a better source of where black people could go to be free, govern themselves, create a town where they could thrive, and they did. My sense of responsibility to this community is to keep that going.

ARCHIVAL OF COLONEL ALLEN ALLENSWORTH

SHERRY HUNTER:

“We tend to think things have changed a lot since 1908 but in reality, it hasn't. It hasn't. So it's my responsibility to continue the dream that Colonel Allensworth had when he came to the Central Valley in 1908.”

TEXT CARD: Allensworth wanted to build a self-sufficient community where Black could live free from Jim Crow laws and discrimination.

TEXT CARD: He envisioned a community where Black families could have economic opportunity, education, and self-governance.

MUSIC FADES HERE

The camera cuts outside to home and enters inside where a Christmas tree is set up and there are family photos hung on the walls.

ARCHIVAL PHOTO OF CAROL'S FAMILY

LOWER THIRDS: CAROL CASTILO, ALLENSWORTH'S RESIDENT

CAROL CASTILO:

“So my mom is from 15 kids, same Mom and Dad, no twins. They moved here in the 1960s, so I'm 52.”

ARCHIVAL PHOTOS OF CAROL'S GRANDPARENTS

CAROL CASTILO:

“They've lived here all my life, so I started coming here when I was a baby. My grandpa, he bought all 15 kids an acre of land, so when I was young, we had aunt, uncle, grandpa, grandma all on the street right here, from the corner all the way down to the other corner, was my whole family.”

MUSIC ENTERS HERE

CAROL CASTILO:

“I've had seven aunts, uncles, and my grandpa passed away of cancer, and they all lived here. I've had an uncle, his wife, and their daughter, all cancer survivors, and they lived here.”

ARCHIVAL PHOTOS OF CAROL, HER HUSBAND, AND TWO KIDS

CAROL CASTILO:

“We lived here for almost eight years. I've developed diabetes and asthma living here. As far, I did have cancer as well. I am an eight year survivor. I'm still currently taking chemotherapy pills, and for two more years.”

ARCHIVAL PHOTOS OF CAROL RECEIVING CANCER TREATMENTS AND FINISHING CHEMO

CAROL CASTILO:

“It's a little scary, because when my mom had cancer, she went like, seven or eight years, and then that's when I came back. So every six months, I get checked and just hoping, you know, everything is okay.”

Again, not saying it's the water, but you know, having this water issue, since we lived here and since my grandparents lived here, a little suspicious, I guess I could say I."

TEXT CARD: According to the World Health Organization, drinking arsenic-contaminated water over a long period of time increases the risk of lung, liver, kidney, bladder, and skin cancers.

MUSIC ENDS HERE

LOWER THIRDS: DR. ASHOK GADGIL, UC BERKELEY RESEARCHER

ASHOK GADGIL:

"The results of arsenic poisoning, chronic arsenic poisoning, long term, low doses of arsenic poisoning start with damage or lesions on the skin of the palms and on the soles of the feet, which turn into ulcers, which turn eventually into gangrenous ulcers, into cardiovascular circulation problems that lead to amputations of legs and hands and entire arms."

ARCHIVAL PHOTOS OF PEOPLE IMPACTED BY ARSENIC POISONING

ARCHIVAL PHOTOS OF GADGIL'S WORK IN INDIA, INCLUDING PEOPLE GETTING WATER FROM A PUMP AND DRINKING CLEAN WATER

ASHOK GADGIL:

"It also causes serious internal damage. It causes internal cancers. It also causes neurological damage. There are many, many, many harmful effects that are extremely serious."

The camera cuts outside to plants in Sherry's gardens along with the stacks of empty water jugs that are sitting on her porch couch.

SHERRY HUNTER:

"To remove arsenic from the water is very costly, and the state knew that. So the state came up with a different idea, which was to help us drill cleaner water. And, they did a test well, and they found out that the best water is east of town, so they end up going out there drilling a test well, and they found out that the water out there was better, and the state gave us funding to construct a new well three miles east of town.

Shots of the current water wells that are in Allensworth.

SHERRY HUNTER:

"As far as arsenic is concerned, I'm not quite sure it is productive."

TEXT CARD: In Allensworth, the maximum allowed amount of arsenic in drinking water is 10 parts per billion, meaning the water can have no more than 10 micrograms of arsenic per liter.

SHERRY HUNTER:

"The state says 10 parts per billion, but in my mind's eyes, trial and error. You know, it used to be 50, then it dropped down to 10, and nobody really knows was really safe. That's why a lot of people in this community to this day, do not trust that water, and they buy bottled water."

Shots of Allensworth's Water District, which is next to the first water well.

SHERRY HUNTER:

“With us being a disadvantaged community, I feel the state should try and help us with the funding to remove the arsenic from the water, because it's possible for it to be removed from the water, but it's costly, and I'm not quite sure, with us being a disadvantaged community and a small community the state wants to invest that type of money in Allensworth.”

MUSIC FADERS HERE AND ENTERS A NEW TRACK

LOWER THIRDS: EFRAIN SOTELO, ALLENSWORTH RESIDENT

Shot of a faucet with tap water pouring out of it then the camera cuts to bottled water packs next to a Christmas tree.

EFRAIN SOTELO:

“People usually just turn on the faucet, and for us here, we have to have bottled water. So if it runs out, you know, we got to refill our cans, our jugs. They did replace...they gave us, like a system that makes its own water, which we thought was cool. You know, we're like, alright, cool. It's gonna be nice. Sometimes it works. Sometimes it doesn't. It's like, hit and miss. And when that happens, well, obviously we gotta go into town to get water.”

MUSIC ENDS HERE

Efrain and his daughter, Karissa, are seen walking over to a solar panel system that has a faucet attached to it. He turns on the faucet but nothing comes out.

EFRAIN SOTELO:

“Might be camera shy. It didn't produce any water today. Usually we'll get, like, maybe two gallons, two and half gallons, but every once in a while we'll get a full one. But today we're not not working for us today, so we'll just have to go out to town to get some water.”

Efrain and Karissa walk away with the empty water jug.

EFRAIN SOTELO:

“Come on baby.”

MUSIC ENTERS HERE

Karissa is seen holding her dog, Daisy, and playing with her.

EFRAIN SOTELO:

“You know, my daughter's an animal lover, my wife's animal lover. We all are. We love our animals, but it does make it a little difficult sometimes, you know, because normally, you know, just want to flip the water bowl, and you know, we can't do that.”

MUSIC FADES HERE

Karissa is seen filling up the water filter for Daisy's water dispenser. She stands by the sink as she watches as the filter water fills up the jug and then moves to place it back onto Daisy's water bowl.

EFRAIN SOTELO:

“It’s kind of like hey make sure you get the water, the filtered water and put it for them. But we just, we just over animals, and it just makes it that more, I don’t want to say difficult, but you see that more challenging?”

Efrain’s son, Fernando, is driving his car down to Delano. Fernando and his sister, Karissa, are seen filling up a water jug at a water dispenser.

EFRAIN SOTELO:

“Yeah, we used to have to drive into Delano to get water, which is like a 20 minute drive there and back. So that’s like, you know, 40 minutes and then with the gas prices right now, it’s kind of, you know, takes a little bit. “

Fernando picks up the full water jug and puts it back into the car.

EFRAIN SOTELO:

“We just got to be patient, because sometimes we’re out here and it feels like we’re all alone, you know. But there are people out there who care, you know. They want to help us, and they’re trying to help and our community is helping ourselves. And I understand the government takes a long time to make things happen. And if you’re not a thriving community, if you’re not, you don’t have equity, you know, stuff like that, it’s going to be, nobody’s going to really take notice. But like I said, we just have to keep, you know, doing stuff like this and bringing it up. And one saying, I always say, My wife always tells me I’m old. I say the squeaky wheel gets the grease. You know, we keep talking, keep bringing it there and put it in their face, and eventually they’re gonna get tired of you and maybe do something about it.”

MUSIC FADES AND ENTERS A NEW TRACK

SHERRY HUNTER

“We have had a conversation with Dr Galal, who’s from Berkeley, UC Berkeley, and he has come up with a technique to be able to take arsenic away from water, and we’re in the process of him coming out, setting up a lab, and kiosks for us to be able to go and get cleaner, safer drinking water.”

MUSIC FADES HERE

ARCHIVAL PHOTOS OF DR. GADGIL

ASHOK GADGIL:

“Folks in Allensworth first contacted me in, I think, 2017, and we first visited them in 2018 just trying to visit them, see what the community is like, talk to them, telling them what we have been doing.”

ARCHIVAL OF GADGIL’S FIRST LAB IN ALLENSWORTH

ASHOK GADGIL:

“In 2019 we were ready to write a proposal, to try to demonstrate that our technology will work in Allensworth, and then COVID came by the end of 2019. Funding also arrived in 2020, so in the middle of COVID, under quite complicated conditions, we set out to test our technology in Allensworth for the first time, at a flow rate high enough that we could have supplied water to everybody in Allensworth.

Sounds of birds chirping underlay Gadgil S final words and cuts to the outside of Sherry's home.

A picture of Sherry's mom from the 1960s is on the wall and has next underneath that says "We Love You, Mom." Sherry is seen flipping through a photo album of her mom.

SHERRY HUNTER:

"She moved on here in 1978 and immediately went to work. And every time she had a project she was working on, we all rallied here to help her to do whatever it was, whatever battle she was fighting at the time, you know life will throw many battles in front of you."

Sherry shows the photos of her mom when she was stepping down from her role in the and passing it on the responsibility to her children.

SHERRY HUNTER:

"This picture right here was when my mother decided to step down and when she decided to step down the County Board of Supervisors gave her a proclamation."

Shots of the Castile's home and backyard.

CAROL CASTILO:

"This was my, this is my, my parents house, so I was drawn to it. Like, I don't want to leave it like, there are many..I don't know. It's just a lot. How do I say? A lot of..like, I feel emotionally attached, maybe? I like the little...I like it...I like our little town. Little town, you know, we have just like, a close knit community."

Carol sits on the couch with her husband and her two children.

CAROL CASTILLO:

"I don't think I would move. I think we would stay here, even when my kids, when, whenever I'm gone, I would like them to keep this land, and, you know, don't sell it, just keep it, whether they want to live here or not, do something with it. How do you feel?"

Shots of Allensworth's Water District building. Underneath the footage of the building, audio from a grainy phone call can be heard and cuts to Sherry flipping through office papers.

MUSIC ENTERS HERE

SHERRY HUNTER:

"I have thought many times, why? Why? Why are you struggling to do things for people?"

Sherry can be seen holding a phone while she listen in on a meeting call.

SHERRY HUNTER:

"Some appreciate it. Some don't."

Sherry begins to grow frustrated and begins to have a heated conversation with the other person on the end of the phone.

SHERRY HUNTER:

“No one has ever come into this office and said, hey, you guys told us we need a water meter. Do you have a suggestion to someone that we may be able to go to that's never came up at this office.”

Shots of Sherry's co-worker along with Sherry flipping through office papers.

SHERRY HUNTER:

“The harder you fight to get things done or corrected here in Allensworth, you see no progress, and my sister always say that they always given us projects or things that are designed to fail.”

MUSIC FADES HERE AND CUTS TO SHOTS OF GADGIL'S LAB EQUIPMENT

TEXT CARD: In March, Dr. Gadgil and his lab brought down the equipment to install in Allensworth.

TEXT CARD: Dr. Gadgil and his team are in the process of testing the equipment in Allensworth for three months.

TEXT CARD: When successful, the town will be able to use the equipment.

TEXT CARD IN LOWER THIRDS: (TOP) Gadgil Lab| (BOTTOM) Allensworth CA

Footage of Dr. Gadgil and his lab assistants tinkering with the equipment that has finally been brought to Allensworth and is ready to be tested.

ASHOK GADGIL:

“So the idea is to test and demonstrate, if successful, that you could operate all this machinery and remove arsenic with very little human intervention, very, very little human presence. Somebody needs to be there one hour a day at that level of effort, and that person is paid, still the water will be affordable after we remove arsenic. So, that's the second next step now.”

ARCHIVAL PHOTOS OF GADGIL'S LAB

ASHOK GADGIL:

“There are two reasons why I care about it. One is that when there is a hard problem that people have been struggling with, and you think you can solve it, and when you do solve it, there is great joy in solving hard problems. It's just the intellectual pleasure of solving problems. It's like you're trying to do crossword. That gives you a bit of joy. Think of a very hard crossword or a very hard Sudoku, right? So, there is pure intellectual joy in saying, Wow, I cracked this, or we crack this. That is one. And the second side of that same coin is there is a deep satisfaction in saying, we made the world slightly better.”

MUSIC ENTERS HERE

Shots Allensworth's cemetery sign.

Sherry can be seen cleaning off dust from her mother's tombstone.

SHERRY HUNTER:

“Okay, girl.”

Sherry, still bending over the grave, can be seen holding a bag with Christmas decorations.

SHERRY HUNTER:

“Okay, cleaned you off. Took that old Christmas stuff off.”

Before standing up, Sherry takes a moment to look at the picture of her mother that is plastered on the tombstone.

SHERRY HUNTER:

“I miss you. A lot.”

Sherry moves over to clean another tombstone, which belongs to her brother who she calls L.G.

SHERRY HUNTER:

“Okay L.G.”

Sherry stands over her mother’s grave and reflects on her mother’s relentless determination to not give up on Allensworth.

SHERRY HUNTER:

“There are so many days when I get frustrated, full, all the above, and I come out here, and I just sit. I let it all out, cry, and then I tell her, you weren’t a quitter, and I’m not gonna be a quitter. But I do get tired, it is not easy. But she put within us, if you see something that needs to be done, do it. Don’t wait for the next person to do it. You do it yourself, if it’s within your power...so just cry it...cry it out and keep going.”

CREDITS

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Source List:

Name	Description	Role in Film	Relationship to Allensworth
Sherry Hunter	Sherry Hunter is the president of Allensworth’s Community Service District and is a leading figure in reporting the quantity and quality of water in Allensworth to her district. Sherry’s mother was a leading member in the fight to not only preserve the town’s legacy but also get cleaner water in the town. After her mother died, Sherry took over her role as a leading member to fight against arsenic contamination and neglect by the state. Through her	She is the primary subject of the film. She is the primary subject of the film.	Sherry’s mother lived in Allensworth during the 1960s when arsenic was discovered to be contaminated. Sherry has been working in the town ever since her mother passed to get better quantity and quality of water in Allensworth.

	work in Allensworth, Sherry is honoring her mother's legacy and the history of the town.		
Carol Castillo Sotelo	<p>Carol Castillo Sotelo is a lifelong resident of Allensworth, California, and a member of the Castile family, one of the multigenerational families featured in Allensworth Rising: A Fight for Water. She grew up in the town surrounded by extended relatives, many of whom have since passed away, several from cancer. Carol represents the deep familial and historical roots within Allensworth, offering a quiet but powerful testimony about the emotional and health toll the town's water crisis has taken on her community. Her reflections connect the past and present, showing how environmental injustice intersects with memory, family, and place.</p>	<p>She is a secondary subject of the film and a representative of the Latino voice in the town.</p>	<p>Carol's family has lived in the town during the 1960s, and her grandparents have provided an acre of land to all the children, which included Carol's mother who passed on the land to her. She continues to live in the town despite the water crisis and wants to pass down the land she owns to her children.</p>
Dr. Ashok Gadgil	<p>Dr. Gadgil is a civil engineer and researcher at UC Berkeley who acts as an expert voice in the film that discusses not only the impacts of long term consumption of arsenic contaminated water but also the solutions to the problem. Throughout the film, Gadgil discusses his technology that he has created for Allensworth and is seen setting up his lab in Allensworth and getting ready for the next phase of testing.</p>	<p>He is a secondary subject of the film and an expert voice on arsenic contamination in the groundwater.</p>	<p>Dr. Gadgil has been working with the residents in Allensworth since 2018 and has developed technology, specifically for the town, to remove arsenic from their groundwater. He is also the first person to explain to residents that long term consumption of arsenic contaminated water can lead to higher rates of cancer in impacted communities.</p>
Efrain Sotelo	<p>Efrain Sotelo is a lifelong resident of Allensworth and the husband of Carol Sotelo. He represents the quiet strength and deep-rooted commitment of the town's families. In Allensworth</p>	<p>He is a secondary subject of the film and a representative of the Latino voice in the</p>	

	<p>Rising: A Fight for Water, Efrain shares the daily challenges of living without reliable access to clean water and reflects on the emotional and physical toll it takes on his family and community. His presence underscores the personal cost of environmental injustice and the resilience of those who choose to stay and fight for their town's future.</p>	town.	
Karissa Sotelo	<p>Karisa Sotelo is the daughter of Carol Castillo Sotelo and Efrain Sotelo. She offers a poignant perspective as a younger member of the community who has grown up witnessing the water crisis firsthand.</p>	<p>She is the daughter of Carol and Efrain and shows the impact of the arsenic contamination on the youth in the town.</p>	<p>Karissa lives in Allensworth alongside her mother and father. She is a member of Allensworth's cross country team and is also a soccer player for a local club in the town where she competes across the county. Karissa has to live in Allensworth as a child and deal with the consequences of having limited access to clean, safe drinking water.</p>
Fernando Sotelo	<p>Fernando Sotelo is the son of Carol Castillo Sotelo and Efrain Sotelo, and the brother of Karisa. Fernando represents the next generation of Allensworth residents determined to stay rooted in their community despite ongoing hardships.</p>	<p>He is the son of Carol and Efrain and shows the impact of the arsenic contamination on the youth in the town.</p>	<p>Fernando lives in Allensworth alongside his mother, father, and younger sister. Fernando works in Delano, a neighboring town to Allensworth, and often after his shifts at work has to fill up jugs of bottled water to bring back home to his family. Delano is a 20-minute drive from Allensworth, and Fernando finds it tedious to have to drive so far at times to just have access to clean water.</p>