

water advocates

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A glance at the impact of safe drinking water and sanitation on children

A child dies every fifteen seconds due to diseases caused by unsafe water and inadequate sanitation. Many children in the developing world also miss educational opportunities due to their never-ending task of hauling water for their families. They often essentially “lose” their childhoods. The statistics linking safe water to children’s health and educational opportunities are stark:

- Over 2.2 million children die each year from mostly preventable diarrheal diseases. Four billion people are sickened each year by those same preventable diseases.
- The task of collecting water causes many children to miss school enrollment, and if they are enrolled they are frequently absent due to water-related illness.
- Schools without water fail to attract new teachers, and current teachers are not able to spend their time teaching but must join their students in water collection.

What is the answer?

The world’s biggest killer of children is diarrheal disease. The solution to this preventable illness is safe, sustainable supplies of drinking water and improved sanitation and hygiene. Proven, effective and sustainable solutions to the world’s water problem exist today. *The World Health Organization estimates that 90% of these deaths (1.98 million children) are preventable now.*

Simple, inexpensive measures, both individual and collective, are available that will provide clean water for millions and millions of people in developing countries - now, not in 10 or 20 years. It makes no sense, and it is not acceptable, to ignore the immediate priorities of the most needy.

Dr. Gro Harlem Brundtland, former Director-General of the World Health Organization

Children are the primary victims of unsafe water but are also an important part of the solution: they are an effective vector to transmit good sanitation and hygiene practices to their communities. Kids learn more quickly, they are often more uninhibited in addressing hygiene practices, and rarely hesitate to correct their parents’ poor habits.

Benefits:

When safe water and sanitation facilities are in place, children’s health improves markedly, child and infant mortality rates decrease, and household income rises. This affords families the financial ability to send their children to school more frequently.

By using proven, effective solutions to ensure that all children have safe water, fewer children die or sicken and more children will enroll and stay in school. Additional international development goals are also more likely to be reached and sustained, including poverty reduction, food security, gender equality, environmental stability and more stable global security.

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