



World Water Day 2010 and Beyond: We Can Solve the Global Water Crisis

Why World Water Day?

Billions of people worldwide lack access to safe drinking water and sanitation: one out of every six people lack safe drinking water and two out of every five people lack adequate sanitation.¹

World Water Day, on March 22, is recognized by the United Nations and global community to focus attention on the growing water crisis. This year, a coalition of nearly 30 diverse US-based groups from the water, sanitation, hygiene and health sectors has come together to raise awareness and call the US government and its citizens to action. By increasing US commitments, we could save hundreds of thousands of children's lives, improve education and assure healthier futures for billions around the world. **The crisis can be solved.**

What are the solutions?

Solutions exist. Many are simple and affordable: hand-dug wells, harvested rainwater for drinking, protected springs, water filtering and purification, hygiene education and latrine construction.

The most successful projects work in **partnership with local communities**, offering the skills and support needed to set up and manage practical, long-term solutions.

How does the global water and sanitation crisis affect people?

The impact is widespread – affecting every area of people's lives, from health and education to economic status. Worldwide, about 30 percent of people live in water-stressed countries, most are in Africa and Asia.

Lack of safe water, sanitation and hygiene puts everyone's health and chances of survival at risk – particularly children, the most vulnerable. This factors into nearly all of the major causes of child death and leads to more than two dozen diseases. Moreover, half of the developing world's hospital beds are occupied by patients suffering from diseases caused by inadequate or unsafe water and sanitation.^{2,3}

Diarrhea, directly caused by inadequate drinking water and sanitation, is the second leading cause of child death and the most common cause of illness in the world.⁴ It is also a major cause of malnutrition. The vicious cycle of malnutrition and repeated diarrhea during childhood can impair physical growth and cognitive function throughout life.⁵

¹ WHO/UNICEF. *Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply and Sanitation*, 2008. UNICEF, New York and WHO, Geneva: 2008. Available at: <http://www.wssinfo.org/resources/documents.html>.

² WHO and UNICEF. *Meeting the MDG Drinking Water and Sanitation Target: the Urban and Rural Challenge of the Decade*. Geneva and New York: WHO and UNICEF. 2006. Available at: http://www.wssinfo.org/pdf/JMP_06.pdf.

³ Watkins, Kevin. *Human Development Report 2006*. New York: UNDP: 2006. Available at: <http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/HDR06-complete.pdf>.

⁴ WHO. *The Global Burden of Disease, 2004 Update*. Geneva: WHO; 2004.

⁵ Guerrant, R L., et al. Early childhood diarrhea predicts impaired school performance. *Pediatric Infectious Disease Journal*. 2006;25(6):513-520.

Poor hygiene is a key cause of pneumonia, the leading cause of child death.⁶

Women and girls are the most likely to bear the economic and educational costs associated with lack of access. In many countries, they spend much of their time collecting and transporting water — sometimes over miles every day — and finding adequate sanitation. This prevents them from pursuing an education, maintaining households and earning income.

More broadly, more than half of all primary schools in developing countries do not have adequate water facilities and nearly two-thirds lack adequate sanitation.

Improving access to water, sanitation and hygiene can **save children's lives, increase education rates, reduce poverty and drive economic growth. Water and sanitation are key building blocks for development.**

Why now?

Addressing the global water crisis is critical to stable, sustainable development. Limited access to basic necessities will continue to destabilize the global community that we belong to.

The American people support prioritizing US government investment in safe water, sanitation and hygiene in low-income countries, as well as child survival.

Addressing water and sanitation are critical to successfully achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

The solutions are cost effective. For every \$1 invested in water and sanitation, \$8 is returned in increased productivity and decreased health care costs.⁷

The needs are staggering, but a great opportunity exists today. US investments in global water, sanitation and hygiene initiatives are already working. Around the world, successful, models for replication exist. While working towards long-term change in infrastructure and health systems, we should prioritize funding and implementation for programs that can deliver packages of cost-effective water, sanitation and hygiene interventions available today.

Visit waterday.org to learn more.

A diverse coalition of water, sanitation, hygiene and health organizations has come together for World Water Day 2010. Its goal is to raise awareness and call for stronger commitments and more robust action to ensure universal access to safe drinking water and sanitation everywhere they are needed. The global water crisis can be solved with solutions available today. The 2010 coalition includes Action Against Hunger, AED, Africare, CARE, Catholic Relief Services, charity: water, Church World Service, Earth Day Network, Global Water, Global Water Challenge, H2O for Life, InterAction, Institute for Multi-Track Diplomacy, Millennium Water Alliance, Natural Resources Defense Council, ONE, PATH, P&G Children's Safe Drinking Water Program, Project Concern International, PSI, US Coalition for Child Survival, WaterAid, Water.org, Water Advocates, Water and Sanitation Program, Water For People, the Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council and World Vision.

⁶ Pneumonia page. WHO website. Available at: <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs331/en/index.html>.

⁷ Hutton G, Haller L. Evaluation of the costs and benefits of water and sanitation improvements at the global level. WSH page. WHO website. Available at: http://www.who.int/water_sanitation_health/wsh0404/en/.

Note: the model asks what different regions might save if the entire population had access to basic, low-cost water and sanitation technology. Costs are through lost productivity, illness and death, and health expenses.