

Water in the Developing World



Take a moment to think about how easy it is for you to obtain clean water—you simply turn on the tap. “Not having access” to clean water is a polite way of describing a form of deprivation that endangers life, destroys opportunity and undermines human dignity. Not having access to water means that people resort to ditches, rivers and lakes polluted with human or animal excrement. It also means not having sufficient water to meet even the most basic human needs, like drinking and bathing.

Use this fact sheet to get the numbers on the water crisis in the developing world. Then take action to create change by fundraising to bring clean water to schools in Tanzania through *Drop of Hope* (<http://www.janegoodall.ca/project-blue/fundraise.html>).

- More than 1.1 billion people lack access to safe water. In other words, one fifth of the population in the developing world, and one sixth of the entire world’s population lacks access to clean water.
- 2.6 billion people— almost half the total population of developing countries—don’t have adequate sanitation. That is one third of the entire population of the world.
- In many parts of the world, unclean water is a greater threat to human lives than violent conflict.
- International norms set out by agencies such as the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) suggest a minimum requirement of **20 litres of fresh, clean water a day** from a source within 1 kilometre of the household. This is sufficient for drinking and basic personal hygiene. Below this level people are constrained in their ability to maintain their physical wellbeing and the dignity that comes with being clean. Factoring in bathing and laundry needs would raise the personal threshold to about 50 litres a day.
- Most of the 1.1 billion people categorized as lacking access to clean water (i.e. who live more than 1 kilometre from a water source) use about 5 litres of unsafe water a day—one tenth of the average daily amount used in developed countries to flush toilets.
- The crisis in water and sanitation is—above all—a crisis for the poor. Almost 2 in 3 people (660 million people) lacking access to clean water survive on less than \$2 a day, with 1 in 3 (385 million people) living on less than \$1 a day.
- The poorest people not only get access to less water, and to less clean water, but they also pay some of the world’s highest prices for water.
- The second biggest killer of children worldwide is the combination of dirty water and lack of sanitation (second only to acute respiratory infections). Diarrhea kills 1.8 million children each year, which is 4,900 children each day, or one child every 3 minutes. Diarrhea caused by bacteria and viruses in polluted water kills more people than HIV/AIDS or malaria.
- 443 million school days are lost each year due to water-related illness.

- According to the United Nations, the underlying causes of scarcity in many cases are institutional and political, and are not necessarily due to a physical deficiency of water. In many countries, scarcity is due to public policies that limit poor people's access to water, and/or encourage overuse of water through subsidies and under pricing.
- The Human Development Report's Global Plan calculates that \$10 billion US is needed annually to drastically improve access to clean water and sanitation all over the world. To put that figure in perspective, \$10 billion represents less than five days' worth of global military spending and less than half of the amount developed countries spend each year on mineral water.