



YES Campaign Newsletter

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A Monthly Newsletter Devoted To
Highlighting Critical Concerns

This Month's Theme

Water, Health
and Human
Rights

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World Water Day

Help make the difference



Back Ground Info -Water, Health and Human Rights



Water is one of the earth's most precious and threatened resources. Health is one of each person's most precious resources. We need to protect and enhance them both. Water for Health

That which is now a horse, even with a thought
The rack dislimns, and makes it indistinct,
As water is in water

William Shakespeare (1564–1616)

Antony and Cleopatra. Act iv. Sc. 14.

Where women and children spend hours each day walking to streams and other sources to collect water for their families, they have little time or energy left to pursue an education and other gainful activities. The heavy loads they carry may cause skeletal deformation and accelerate the deterioration of joints.

Everyone benefits from good sanitation. But girls are among those who benefit the most. Girls often miss out on an education because they have to help with the household chores and, when money is scarce, it's usually the boys who get chosen to go to school. An important reason why girls drop out of school in developing countries - mainly in Africa and Asia - is because of lack of sanitation facilities.

Studies show that school attendance by girls increases when separate latrines for girls and boys are installed. In a school in Bangladesh, where UNICEF began promoting separate facilities in 1992, girls' school attendance has risen by an average of 11% a year.

The gap between rich and poor becomes all too apparent in regard to the lack of water for drinking, irrigation and sanitation, and in their inability to maintain the integrity of ecosystems on which people depend. Time and again, poor people everywhere - in Bangladesh, Viet Nam, Kyrgyzstan, Malawi, etc.- cite lack of safe drinking-water as one of their most important problems. Good water, good health and better living are worthy goals in and of themselves. But, basic services for the needy are also a moral and human-rights obligation. This view is too often overlooked by those in control of the developmental purse-strings and by the poor themselves. Because deprived people are frequently unaware that they have a right to properly functioning basic services - to good water and to good health - they have been unable to obtain them

Understanding Water As A Precious Asset

From outer space, the earth looks like a “blue” planet because most of its surface is covered by water. But only 2.5% of that water is fresh, and most of that lies frozen and inaccessible in the icecaps and Greenland, leaving less than 1% of fresh water accessible in lakes, river channels and underground.

Hydrologists estimate that the average annual flow of all the world's fresh water ranges from 35 000 Km³ to 50 000 Km³ . Due to a mix of geographical, environmental and financial factors, as well as to increased pollution from municipal and industrial waste, the leaching of fertilizers and pesticides used in agriculture, only about one-third of the world's potential fresh water can be used for human needs. As pollution increases, the amount of usable water decreases.

Water contributes much to health. Good health is the essence of development. However water's protective role is largely unseen and taken for granted in the wealthier countries. More attention is paid to it's role in disease transmission than health protection. Water contributes to health directly within households through food and nutrition, and indirectly as a means of maintaining a healthy, diverse environment. These two precious resources - water and health - together could enhance prospects for development.

The transmission of disease is also rife among vulnerable communities because they live in environments receptive to the breeding of insect vectors that carry parasites such as malaria, filaria and trypanosomes. Most of these need water for part of their life-cycle. 300 million people suffer from malaria and in sub-Saharan Africa alone malaria kills an estimated 1 million people per year, the large majority are children under five. Other malaria hotspots are South and South-East Asia, and parts of South America.

Early diagnosis and treatment, as well as personal protection through the use of low-cost insecticide-treated mosquito nets continue to spearhead malaria control programmes. However, the ability to treat the disease effectively is being jeopardised as a result of growing problems of drug resistance and counterfeit drugs, while the use of mosquito nets meets with problems of affordability and social acceptability.

In many areas, particularly those with less intense transmission patterns, environmental management as part of integrated vector management can significantly reduce the spread of disease. Water management, which is key to this approach, should be based on a proper assessment and understanding of local vector ecology.

WATER AND HEALTH LINKS

Consumption: Most people drink around 2 litres of water each day. Contaminated water can transmit diseases such as typhoid, cholera and hepatitis.



The use of soap and water for personal hygiene helps prevent trachoma and scabies.

Water-based diseases like guinea-worm remain problematic. Improving water supply is a cornerstone of the global effort to eradicate guinea-worm.



Water-related insect vectors cause one million deaths per year through malaria alone. Basic water management helps control malaria carrying mosquitoes and minimizes the consequences of pesticide and drug resistance.

Forty-five per cent of the world's food production comes from irrigated agriculture. This form of cultivation will have to expand to keep pace with population growth.

Food safety: Washing fruit and vegetables with water is a recipe for good health.

Mismanagement of irrigation fosters schistosomiasis but can be controlled through good water management.

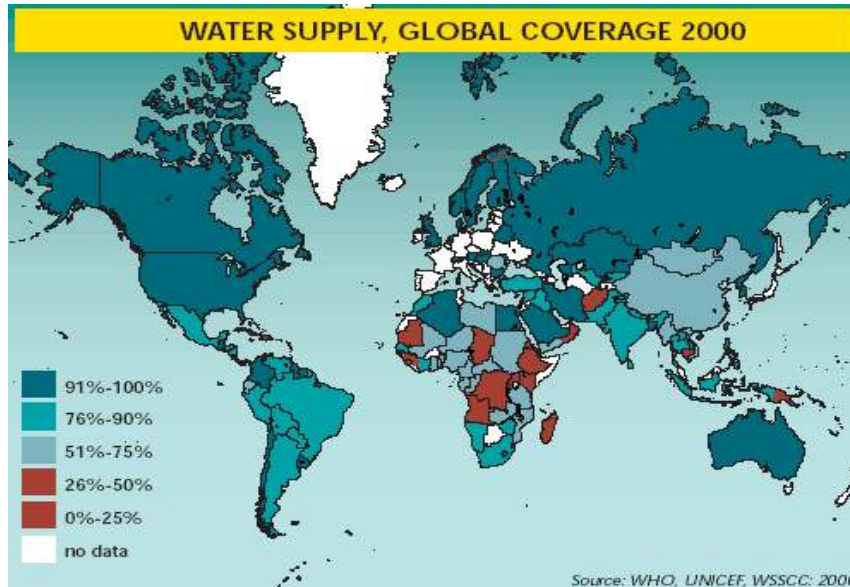
Water supports the ecosystems and biodiversity that contribute to drug development.



People worldwide enjoy water for rest, relaxation and exercise.

Species harmful to humans thrive where ecosystems are disrupted.

Water: A Global Issue



Long before the advent of modern medical care, industrialized countries decreased their levels of water-related disease through good water management. Yet, even in these countries, outbreaks of water-borne disease continue to occur, sometimes with lethal consequences. In developing countries, preventable water-related disease blights the lives of the poor. Diseases resulting from bad hygiene rank among the leading causes of ill-health.

Much of this suffering is needless. Health provides an effective gateway for development and poverty alleviation. Improving water management is a powerful tool that can be used by individuals, communities and households to protect their own health.

3.4 million people, mostly children, die annually from water-related diseases. Most of these illnesses and deaths can be prevented through simple, inexpensive measures. For instance, trachoma remains the leading cause of preventable blindness, accounting for 146 million acute cases around the world. But the disease is almost unheard of in places where basic water supply, sanitation and hygiene prevail.

Safe water supply and adequate sanitation to protect health are among the basic human rights. Ensuring their availability would contribute immeasurably to health and productivity for development. "Business as usual" is no longer an option. We don't have enough time to just wait for large infrastructure investments to provide these basic services to all who need them. Several simple interventions are available, such as improving the quality of water in the home as well as improving hygiene education at the household level. Poor people can take charge of their own destinies and improve their lives by applying some of these measures. But they need to know what works and how such interventions can be exploited.

World Water Day, celebrated on 22nd March, became an annual event after the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, and brought home to millions of people the importance of cherishing a valuable resource which affects our very existence. The theme for 2001, Water and Health, highlights the opportunities for promoting health and development through safe water. People everywhere can use this day to raise awareness of the high level of disease and misery that results from bad and inadequate water sources. People can learn that they need not be victims, but can take matters into their own hands to create good, clean water for better health.

Successful Projects

Clean Water Delivery: Solar PV for Health UV Waterworks Water Purification Unit Installed in Colonia Villaneuva, Honduras in the Dominican Republic

Enersol is working with the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) to provide health, sanitation, and potable **water** improvements in the Dominican Republic as part of the U.S. Government's reconstruction efforts in response to the impact of 1998's Hurricane Georges.

His project co-funded by a \$421,000 USAID grant will require Enersol to raise another \$130,000 during the next 13 months. This project is part of Enersol's health focus which aims to bring **water** to unelectrified rural populations in the Dominican Republic and Honduras in a manner that maximizes the impact of scarce capital resources and better the quality of life through improved health, especially for children. This initiative includes the development of technical **delivery** and financing approaches that will enable replicability by providing examples of well-executed charitable **projects** which positively impact human health and the environment.

Enersol is implementing the USAID co-financed project with its affiliate Dominican organization, ADESOL, an NGO committed to working with families in rural areas who do *not* benefit from national electrical networks, and with COTEDO (Dominican Ecumenical Work Commission, Inc.), an NGO with 15 years of experience providing health and sanitation services for people in the area of Monte Plata. Enersol's approach is to collaborate with grassroots organizations such as ADESOL and COTEDO, ensuring maximum impact. ADESOL's local technical capacity and COTEDO's long-term relationship with the beneficiary community members both strengthen our project. The **delivery** of clean **water**, when combined with latrine construction and health education, constitutes a significant improvement in a community's health status. This project includes monitoring the health benefits derived by the communities from the new **water** systems. Dr. Tim Frey, a medical doctor with public health experience, has recently returned from a visit to the five communities that are part of this project. He will monitor the changes that occur as the **water** systems are put into place, noting not only direct health benefits but also the effects of the time saved for the women and children of the villages. Determining objective health benefits will help make the systems more economically sustainable by establishing their value to recipient communities and to future funders. This project exemplifies the natural progression from Enersol's earlier focus on introducing simple PV systems and catalyzing the PV market through training independent technicians and assisting NGO-based financing programs to Enersol's current focus on using PV to improve levels of health and education. "Technician training and system financing [for residential electrification] is now done routinely by several commercial enterprises so there is no longer a reason to spend precious charitable funds for this in the Dominican Republic. In fact, over 1% of the rural population now gets its electricity from PV systems," said Enersol's Executive Director, Philip Covell. Enersol will continue to include the participation of solar micro-

Relevant Questions Young People Should Be Thinking About

Legal Recognition of the Right to Water

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognises the inherent dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of all human beings. Human rights standards and international humanitarian law are essentially an elaboration of this statement. There are certain basic needs that are essential for a dignified life, indeed for life itself. Water is one of these essential human needs and a clean environment is also increasingly recognised as a fundamental human right.

Water scarcity, water and ground contamination and lack of access to water by the poor are among the main obstacles to full enjoyment of the right to water. The Special Rapporteur for the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities identified obstacles to the realisation of the right of access to drinking water supply and sanitation services. The obstacles include:

- ✎ bad management of freshwater;
- ✎ the lack of planning;
- ✎ the unequal distribution of drinking water and sanitation services;
- ✎ the privatisation of state enterprises linked to water services;
- ✎ the regular increase in the cost of drinking water supplies.

Under *international human rights law*, water is implicitly and explicitly protected as a human right. In the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the two 1966 International Covenants on, respectively, Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), and Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), water is not mentioned explicitly, but it is regarded as an integral component of other recognised rights, such as the rights to life, to adequate standard of living, to health, to housing and to food (Box 1). Access to water enjoys explicit protection under the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women and the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Under *international humanitarian law* applicable in armed conflicts, in particular the 1977 Protocols to the Geneva Conventions, starvation of civilians as a method of war is prohibited, and drinking water installations and supplies as well as irrigation works benefit from explicit protection.

Under *international environmental law instruments*, the right to a healthy environment has received increased recognition. Such right includes various substantive elements, such as the right to food and water, and the right to preservation of soil and water. Similar developments occurred in the area of freshwater management. The 1992 International Conference on Water and the Environment adopted a Statement acknowledging “the basic right of all human beings to have access to clean water and sanitation at an affordable price”.

Human rights and environmental provisions relevant to the right to water can also be found in the *national constitutions* of several countries.