



CASE FOR SUPPORT



Why Invest in Water & Sanitation in the Developing World.

Today, nearly one billion people - about a seventh of the world's population - do not have access to safe drinking water. Some 2.6 billion people still lack access to improved sanitation, including 1.2 billion who have no facilities at all. This means no toilets, no latrines, and no separation of human waste from daily life. For the many Canadians who take these basic services for granted, it is perhaps difficult to fully grasp the impact of dirty water and unhygienic living conditions on vulnerable communities.

Each year more than 2.2 million people die from diarrhoeal disease caused by dirty drinking water and poor sanitation; 90% of these deaths are children under five years of age. The water and sanitation crisis isn't glamorous, but it is the most fundamental crisis affecting people living in developing countries. It is a crisis that reaches across sectors. But it is also a crisis to which there are cost-effective solutions, and these solutions are life-altering.

WaterCan's Case for Support provides information on the global water and sanitation crisis and how the provision of these basic services is critical to supporting poverty alleviation efforts in developing countries. This document concludes with suggestions on how the Canadian government can support progress in this area.

WATER AND SANITATION—A GLOBAL SNAPSHOT

The lack of safe drinking water and adequate sanitation is the world's single largest cause of sickness. Over four billion people are made sick each year and 2.2 million killed. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that around 10 percent of the total burden of disease worldwide could be prevented by water and sanitation improvements.

The most recent WHO and UNICEF estimates indicate that during the period 1990-2008, the proportion of the global population using improved drinking water sources increased from 77 percent to 87 percent. In the case of people's access to improved sanitation, global coverage increased from 54 percent to 61 percent. However, these figures hide important regional disparities. For example, in sub-Saharan Africa, water and sanitation coverage pres-

ently stands at 60 percent and 31 percent, respectively. Put another way, 4 out of every 10 people in this region continue to rely on polluted sources such as surface waters, and unprotected wells and springs, while 7 out of 10 people do not have access to improved sanitation facilities.

Also, significant disparities in coverage rates exist between urban and rural areas. In developing regions, only 24 percent of rural dwellers have access to improved sanitation compared to 44 percent of urban dwellers. In the case of drinking water, 47 percent of rural dwellers have access to improved water sources compared to 83 percent of urban dwellers.

“We shall not finally defeat AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria, or any of the other infectious diseases that plague the developing world until we have also won the battle for safe drinking water, sanitation, and basic health care.”

Kofi Annan, former UN Secretary General



Water, Sanitation and the Millennium Development Goals

Development Goals (MDGs), a series of targets aimed at fighting global poverty in its many dimensions. The MDG target for water and sanitation is halving, by 2015, the number of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation. At the current rate of progress, the water supply target is on track to be met in all world regions except for sub-Saharan Africa and Oceania. The sanitation MDG target, however, is not on track to be met worldwide. At the current rate of progress, the sanitation target will be missed by a billion people.

HOW WATER AND SANITATION CONTRIBUTE TO FIGHTING GLOBAL POVERTY

WaterCan supports increased investments in water supply and sanitation services because of the compounding health and development benefits they bring to poor communities in the developing world.

Access to water and sanitation reduces child mortality

Infants and young children are particularly affected by the lack of safe drinking water and basic sanitation services. Combined with poverty, this lack of basic services, and resultant filthy living conditions, expose children to many health threats. Because they do not possess the physical and economic means to combat them, diarrheal diseases are the number one killer of children under the age of five. Improvements to drinking water and sanitation services can dramatically reduce the occurrence of diarrheal diseases, and correspondingly, the rate of child mortality.

Access to water and sanitation supports primary education

Children in developing countries are missing school because they are sick from water- and sanitation-related diseases or engaged in fetching water for their families. An estimated 272 million school days would be gained for children each year if the MDG water and sanitation targets were to be met. Today, some 500 million school-aged children are without access to improved sanitation and 230 million are without improved water supply.

Access to water and sanitation is vital for economic growth

Hundreds of millions of poor people in the developing world lose income because of the lack of access to improved drinking water and sanitation services. People sick from water- and sanitation-related diseases cannot work, while the time and effort required to collect buckets of water from distant sources means sapped energy and lost productivity for many.

Access to water and sanitation empowers women and girls

Inadequate water and sanitation services affect all family members, but not equally. For women and girls, the impacts are severe. As they are primarily responsible for fetching the water needed for drinking, cooking, bathing, and other household uses, the lack of local access to an improved water source means they spend much of their day fetching water. Caring for ill family members also consumes a lot of a mother's time—time which could otherwise be spent in pursuing adult education, empowerment activities and much-needed leisure.

Access to water and sanitation alleviate the effects of HIV/AIDS

Development efforts of all kinds are being undermined by the rapid spread of HIV and AIDS. This is particularly true in Africa and Asia. Individuals affected by HIV/AIDS have weakened immune systems and are more severely affected by, and more frequently die from, infections caused by water- and sanitation-related diseases. In sub-Saharan Africa, more women than men are infected with HIV/AIDS. This high rate of infection of primary caregivers has devastating consequences for the health and well-being of entire families.

The Economic Case For Investing In Water And Sanitation

Beyond the immediate humanitarian and health benefits, water and sanitation investments also make good economic sense. According to a 2004 World Health Organization study evaluating the costs and benefits of water and sanitation at the global level, achieving the MDG target for water and sanitation would produce substantial economic benefits. For example, in developing regions every US \$1 invested in water and sanitation yields an economic return ranging from US \$5 to \$28.

Achieving the MDG target for water and sanitation, using the most basic standards of service and technology, will require an estimated additional investment of about US\$ 11.3 billion per year, above and beyond current investments, resulting in an annual economic benefit of US \$84 billion.

Conversely, failure to adequately invest in the MDG water and sanitation target will cost US \$84 billion each year in lost lives, economic productivity, health care and educational opportunities. Developing regions are especially hard hit by inadequate investments to the sector. Africa alone loses 5 per cent of its GDP and 12 per cent of its healthcare budget annually as a result of death and illness attributable to poor sanitation and unsafe drinking water.



Conclusion

The Canadian public has expressed a growing expectation that Canada's foreign aid delivers cost-effective and concrete poverty-fighting results. WaterCan believes that investing in water and sanitation is one of the best ways to meet those expectations.

Given the critical contributions that access to safe water and sanitation makes in the areas of health and development, access to safe water and basic sanitation should be at the heart of the international community's, and specifically Canada's, efforts to reduce poverty.

By reducing labour, health and caregiving burdens, local access to clean water and sanitation services allows poor people more time, energy, and financial resources to pursue productive activities such as growing nutritious food, running small businesses and community development.

Water, sanitation, and education about good hygiene practices make other key facets of sustainable development possible. Without them, progress towards achieving universal primary education, promoting gender equity and reducing child and maternal mortality rates will stall.



How Can Canada Support Progress Towards The MDG Water & Sanitation Target?

WaterCan encourages the Canadian government to support further progress towards the MDG water and sanitation target in the following concrete ways:

Recognize the importance of sanitation to poverty alleviation efforts

The importance of access to improved sanitation services cannot be overestimated. One of the main reasons the MDG sanitation target is dangerously off-track compared to the MDG water target is that many developed country governments do not fully recognize the important role of sanitation in their own development history. Readers of the BMJ (British Medical Journal) recently identified sanitation as “the most important medical advance since 1840.” Sanitation’s significant contribution to the alleviation of poverty should be better reflected in Canada’s foreign aid priorities.

Increase aid to the water and sanitation sector

The Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) presently spends less than 2.5 percent of its annual budget in the water and sanitation sector (approx. \$69 million in FY 2008/09). WaterCan recommends that this amount be increased to at least five percent of CIDA’s annual budget, with a particular emphasis on investments that help provide low-cost, locally appropriate, and locally sourced, water and sanitation services.

One way that Canada can immediately and substantively increase funding to the sector is to be among the first countries to donate to the Global Sanitation Fund (GSF), a new initiative launched by the UN’s Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council (www.wsscc.org).

“This is a crisis to which there are sustainable, cost-effective solutions that deliver real results in the fight against global poverty.”

Gary H.J. Plum, Executive Director, WaterCan.

Focus on the poorest countries

The poorest countries – especially those found in sub-Saharan Africa – are the least likely to meet the MDG water and sanitation target without external help. Perhaps even more significant than the actual amount of funding Canada gives to the water and sanitation sector is the fact that the majority of such investments have not been directed towards countries that are considered the poorest of the poor. Canada can play its part to assist these countries to develop credible national plans to provide sanitation and water for all, and invest more in their implementation.

There is an urgent need for CIDA to develop a water and sanitation action plan that places clear emphasis on contributing specifically toward the water and sanitation needs of the world’s poorest countries. Such an action plan would further provide CIDA with a clear roadmap for how best to engage its civil society, bilateral and multilateral development partners in order to support Canada’s contribution towards achieving the MDG targets for water and sanitation in the world’s poorest countries, especially those with credible national water and sanitation plans.



Behind The Statistics - A Community In Africa

For a typical rural African community with a population of around 1,000 people, less than 500 have access to a latrine. This means that for 500 people, the only option is open field defecation. The resultant filthy living environment leads to high rates of diarrheal disease in the community. Acute diarrhea can cause death by dehydration, while chronic, or repeated episodes, can result in malnutrition. On any given day, 20 or more villagers will be suffering from a diarrheal disease, and because small children are particularly susceptible, about 15 of those will be under the age of five. Many mothers in this village will lose a child to diarrheal disease.

Also, for a family of six, collecting enough water for drinking, cooking, and basic hygiene means hauling heavy water containers from a distant source. On average, this activity takes about three hours a day. These time and health burdens condemn community members to a constant struggle for survival at the subsistence level.



WaterCan EauVive

Give Water. Give Life.

WaterCan is a leading Canadian charity dedicated to providing clean drinking water, basic sanitation, and hygiene education to the world's poorest people. Working with local partner organizations in eastern Africa, WaterCan supports small-scale, community-driven projects that dramatically improve the quality of life of poor people living in rural and urban communities.

Since 1987, WaterCan's programs have reached more than one million people, breaking the cycle of poverty and disease, and increasing opportunities for health, education, gender equality, and economic growth. To learn more about our work visit www.watercan.com

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