

HIGH-IMPACT

Giving Opportunities

PHILANTHROPY
THAT MAKES
A DIFFERENCE

Global Health: Providing Safe Water and Sanitation to Save Children's Lives

FACT: *Unsafe water and lack of basic sanitation lead to the yearly deaths of about 1.6 million children under the age of five worldwide.¹*

THE PROBLEM

Globally, 1.1 billion people, or approximately 17 percent of the population, lack safe water; and 2.6 billion people, nearly 40 percent, lack basic sanitation.² Most live in impoverished rural areas, predominantly in developing nations in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. The consequences are dire. Without access to safe water or basic sanitation, infectious diseases spread quickly. Specifically, widespread diarrheal disease causes nearly 5,000 child deaths each day.³ Persistent illness caused by unsafe water and poor sanitation leads to the loss of educational and economic opportunities and eventually to adult poverty and weak national economies.

THE URGENCY

Improved water quality and basic sanitation reduce child mortality. Water-related illnesses affect children disproportionately. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), children under five account for 90 percent of the deaths associated with unsafe water and sanitation.⁴ Four times as many children die from diarrheal diseases than from HIV/AIDS,⁵ although pediatric HIV/AIDS receives greater attention.

Access to safe water and basic sanitation alleviates global poverty. Access to both improves health status, reduces health care costs, and increases available time for education and work. According to a report from WHO and the Stockholm International Water Institute, such improvements contribute to an average 3.7 percent annual per capita GDP growth, while countries without access to these basic services show 0.1 percent growth.⁶

The United Nations General Assembly in 2005 announced the International Decade for Action with a "Water for Life" campaign to reduce by half the proportion of people without access to safe drinking water and improved sanitation by 2015.

THE OPPORTUNITY

Donors should keep in mind these guidelines when evaluating funding opportunities:

- **Look for organizations that work to improve water and sanitation simultaneously.** Poor sanitary conditions pose a serious threat to the cleanliness and safety of local water resources. A representative from the United Nations

Children's Fund (UNICEF) states that efforts to improve access to water cannot succeed without also making efforts to improve sanitation.

- **Seek opportunities to fund small-scale, community-based projects.** Recent funding trends indicate that the majority of aid goes to large-scale infrastructure projects that don't necessarily benefit the rural communities most affected by water and sanitation problems. Fund projects that offer more direct results.
- **Provide support for improving water-storage technology to further opportunities for women.** Women and young girls are often responsible for seeking and gathering water and must spend many hours and travel long distances to do it. Improved technology for gathering and storing water will help provide women and girls more time for education and work opportunities.

For additional information, consult:

- The **WHO Water, Sanitation, and Health website** is an informative site that frames the water and sanitation crisis in the context of overall global health and development (http://www.who.int/water_sanitation_health/en/).
- The **Global Water Challenge**, a coalition of business, government, non-profit organizations, and private funders, provides a resources section on the topics of potable water and sanitation (<http://www.globalwaterchallenge.org/resources/resources.php>).

1. World Health Organization and United Nations Children's Fund, eds., Meeting the MDG Drinking Water and Sanitation Target: The Rural and Urban Challenge of the Decade. (Geneva: WHO Press, 2006), http://www.wssinfo.org/pdf/JMP_06.pdf.

2. Watkins, Kevin, Summary: Human Development Report 2006. Beyond Scarcity: Power, Poverty and the Global Water Crisis. (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006), http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/hdr2006_english_summary.pdf.

3. Watkins, 2006.

4. Haller, Laurence, and Guy Hutton, Evaluation of the Costs and Benefits of Water and Sanitation Improvements at the Global Level. (Geneva: World Health Organization, 2004).

5. Stockholm International Water Institute (SIWI) and World Health Organization (WHO), eds., Driving Development by Investing in Water and Sanitation. (Stockholm: Stockholm International Water Institute, 2005).

6. SIWI and WHO, 2005.