

Lucy Beauchamp

Changemakers

Research Paper

Water is very infrequently cherished in our country. When doing the dishes you expect the water to be hot, using the toilet you expect it to flush, and when making dinner you expect your pot to be filled with crystal clear drinking water. This is how daily life in the United States runs, but it is not the same everywhere in the world. There are seven hundred fifty million people living right now without access to clean water. On average, a person in the United States uses more than twenty seven times the amount of water a person in Africa uses every day. Water is a second thought for so many people, yet life-changing for so many others. Access to water influences health, economic standings, and even education. Water impacts and connects every aspect of life, including quality. So why is this not a more commonly talked about issue?

From birth a person's health is impacted by the water *with which* they have access to. "...A lack of access to clean water causes water borne illnesses that kill more than 1.6 million young children each year" (Unicef). An American would never dream of giving birth without running water, yet it is extremely common for other communities. Simple illnesses such as diarrhea are life threatening in a place where dehydration is not easily treated. Parasites are also a terrible reality for families without access to water. School aged children are the most infected population (Unicef). Parasites from dirty water devour nutrients which makes malnutrition even worse for poor families. Physical and cognitive growth are then disturbed. A child cannot grow healthily without water. The treatment of such illnesses is also much more difficult when hospitals and medical professionals do not have clean water either. Equipment cannot be washed,

neither can hands, and waste cannot be disposed of properly. People are also forced to recover from such illnesses while eating food prepared with dirty water from nearby streams and rivers, wearing clothes that cannot be properly cleaned. Every aspect of human health is soiled by dirty water.

The beautiful water you see running through rural streams is rarely as clean as you might think. A person washing their family's clothes, towels, and bedding in a brook seems to simply be completing their chores and a herd of animals drinking upstream appears to be in their natural habitat. Water in rural communities is shared - meaning the feces from the cattle mixes with the soap from the laundry and every person is touched by the same water as they go to take a drink. However, even this water which we might now view as dirty is essential for life. Water must be brought every day to livestock and for watering plants when farming. Peoples' livelihood depends on water. If it is a struggle to retrieve water from the nearest source, which may be miles away from some people, the cost of buying water is often unreasonable. US News reports in the Lomo de Corvina neighborhood of Villa El Salvador, "the trucks pass daily through the neighborhood, selling water at around 20 sols (just over \$6) per cubic meter - compared to the 1.3 sols per cubic meter that SEDAPAL, the Lima water utility, charges more-affluent consumers for potable tap water." Water purchased in such fashion often are not even treated. A person's entire day's income could be spent on water that is not even safe to drink, because they do not have access to any other water. The same people are then faced with the decision as to whether they can afford to clean this water. Gas for making a fire to boil untreated water costs money, and if gathering firewood is an option it costs a person hours of their day. The question of whether someone can really afford good water is asked far more than most people think.

Families lacking clean water are left with even more questions, including who will gather the dirty water and the firewood? More often than not, young girls are forced to leave school to help their families, since boys' educations are seen as more necessary. Children are sent to carry gallons of water up from streams multiple times a day. Instead of learning or playing they are trying to support their siblings and parents. Young ladies who are able to continue their education often struggle when they go through puberty because without running water even public institutions such as schools do not have real toilets. Unicef explains that a, "lack of separate and decent sanitation facilities at schools often force girls to drop out of primary school. Of the 120 million school-age children not in school, the majority are girls." A lack of water is perpetuating negative gender roles, sexism, and in the end the cycle of poverty. Education is the best known way to end poverty. When girls are kept from an education, half of a community is kept from success. Girls kept in school are less likely to get pregnant early and tend to have fewer children, are more likely to contribute financially, and given more respect and often even rights in society. In order for a community to thrive all people must be educated so water must be accessible.

The community south east of Lima mentioned above is not an uncommon example, and Peru as a whole is a lot like other countries struggling to give their people access to clean water. Peru has a population of thirty two million people, three million of which do not have access to safe water and eight million of these people do not have access to improved sanitation (water.org). People living in rural areas of Peru and nations like it are the least likely to have good water. WaterforPeople.org estimates that in Peru fifty five percent of rural communities have access to basic water services and only fifty six percent of rural communities have access to

basic sanitation services. Basic services are not reaching millions of people around the world, meaning that basic necessities for life, including water, are not reaching people. In Peru the lack of clean water has widened the gap between the rich and poor. The country has been forced to accept help from organizations such as Unicef and Water.org in an effort to change this.

Water.org has reached two and a half million people in Peru alone using eight hundred twelve million dollars from loans disbursed through their partners. The money these non-profit organizations use in Peru and across the world builds infrastructure such as wells and pipes to give communities running water and proper sanitation. They also provide small loans to families working to put similar necessities, toilets and showers, in their own homes. These loans, often referred to as microloans, give people immediate assistance while allowing them to pay for their needs over a longer period of time, usually with less interest than their community would charge them.

Water insecurity may seem far away from your own life, but you can help. Anyone can be a part of the efforts of these nonprofits. The easiest way to make a positive impact on the lives of those in need is through a donation. How much money would you give to communities without access to water if you donated a dollar for each bottle of water you buy instead of drinking out of a tap? If you have the funds to buy individually packaged waters you are capable of donating to people that do not. Water.org, WaterforPeople.org, and CharityWater.org all take donations online through their websites. Another option is to fund a microloan for someone in a country still working towards accessible water. I have begun to help fund family's projects as gifts for others. You can make a donation in someone's name and when the small loan is repaid you can invest it in someone else's great cause. Through Kiva.org you can find donations

working specifically towards water and sanitation. Maybe you cannot afford to fund an entire project but you can help with a portion of it. Lastly, awareness does make a difference. A positive course of action is simply sharing what you know. Inability to have clean water can seem so unreal when we have three spouts in each of our apartments alone. By talking about the issue more people are likely to get involved and do their part in spreading clean water.

The global water crisis is a real issue today. Even though an urban environment may be thriving, its rural counterpart may be struggling. Every person's life without access to clean water is at risk. Water brings safety and security to an entire family, in addition to health, education, and financial stability. Water brings all of our aspects of life together. Communities cannot thrive without good water. Every one of us is capable of helping to make positive change.

Sources

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