

# Water and sanitation



**Background Briefs**  
Development issues and efforts

How much water do you use? Humans need between 20 and 50 liters of water every day for their basic needs. However, the amount of water used by people in different areas of the world varies considerably. A person living in sub-Saharan Africa uses between 10 and 20 liters of water a day. A person in Canada may use as much as 326 liters of water every day.

In the developed world we take for granted that clean drinking water is readily available. In fact, even though our governments ensure that our tap water is safe to drink, many people rely on bottled water because they do not believe tap water is pure. The situation is very different in other parts of the world. In many developing countries there are few taps to deliver water – safe or otherwise. In fact, obtaining water requires considerable effort. Imagine having to walk several kilometers to a tap, well or river. Imagine having to carry home every drop of water you use for

drinking, cooking, cleaning and bathing. Imagine repeating this process several times a day. Often the water is not clean. Drinking it or bathing in it may lead to skin infections or other diseases.

Over 450 million people today in 29 countries, mostly in Africa and the Middle East, are suffering from chronic water shortages. That is roughly one-fifteenth of the world's population. By 2050, researchers estimate that as many as two-thirds of the people in the world will face water shortages.

As well as water shortages, water quality is a serious problem. In developing countries, unclean water and poor sanitation cause about 80 percent of all illnesses. In the developing world every year there are about 4 billion cases of diarrhea, a major water-related sickness. Weakened by diarrhea and associated diseases, 2.2 million

people die every year around the world—more than the population of Montreal. Most of the people who die are children under five.

Through the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), Canada supports a global commitment to provide access to safe, clean water and basic sanitation by 2015 to at least 50 percent of the people who do not have it now. Most of the 2.4 billion people who do not have access to basic sanitation facilities live in Asian countries. Asian rivers, important sources of drinking water, are heavily polluted, in large part by human waste. With CIDA's help, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are working to restore safe drinking water in many locations in the city of Kabul, Afghanistan. In Iraq, CIDA, CARE Canada, and CARE International are helping to restore water and sanitation systems by sponsoring a team of engineers, electricians and mechanics who make emergency repairs throughout the country.

In Africa CIDA supports the Nile Basin Initiative, a program that helps countries that rely on the Nile

River for water to better manage their water resources. By working together, the Nile Basin countries—some of the poorest in the world—are finding ways to protect the watershed that supports the lives and livelihoods of their citizens. In Ghana, CIDA contributed \$16 million to improve the health of rural communities affected by the lack of potable (drinkable) water in the arid northern region of the country. In an area where most people are engaged in subsistence farming, over 500 boreholes have been drilled and fitted with hand pumps and nearly 8000 household latrines have been installed since 1999. Each village had to provide a token sum to pay for its well and local men and women were trained to maintain the well. Also, people were educated in the importance of sanitary habits such as hand washing. Women now spend less time fetching water and can invest more time in their children and farms. Safe, clean water and good sanitation help people lead healthy and productive lives.



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