



Philadelphia Global Water Initiative

4,900 CHILDREN WILL DIE TODAY FROM UNCLEAN WATER

This is not unusual. Every day, lack of clean water and basic sanitation kills 4,900 children in developing countries around the world, according to reports by the United Nations. That is 1.8 million children dying each year, mostly from diarrhea caused by unhealthy conditions. It doesn't have to be that way.

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At the beginning of the new millennium, the UN and the world community developed the Millennium Development Goals to address the most important problems in poor countries. These goals included reducing by half the percentage of the world's population that does not have access to clean water and basic sanitation. The goal is to accomplish this by the year 2015. With over 1.2 billion people without clean water and 2.6 billion, or 40 percent of the world's population, without basic sanitation, this is a great challenge. Some progress has been made but much more needs to be done.

This is not an unsolvable problem. There are no great technological mysteries - what is needed is political will and leadership in both the developing countries and the developed world. As we celebrate World Water day on March 22, it is worthwhile to remember that less than 150 years ago Philadelphia, London, New York and other cities had water-related death rates similar to current rates in the developing world. Through good governance, innovative financing, and creative use of technologies, these cities virtually eliminated water-related deaths. Now, few people in the developed world have to think twice about a ready supply of clean water. Contrast this with many developing countries where women walking miles to fetch water and people defecating in the streets is a way of life.

Students and environmental leaders in the Philadelphia Region are doing their part to address this problem. Students in several schools have formed chapters of "Engineers Without Borders" and are visiting developing countries to help local communities find solutions to water and sanitation problems. University of Pennsylvania students with advice from Pennoni Associates professionals, for example, have supplied water to a village of 300 people in Honduras. Also in the Philadelphia region, water providers, consultants, academics, students, and others have recently formed the Philadelphia Global Water Initiative [PGWI] to help the developing world with these issues. Through partnerships with the UN, the US government, and many others groups, PGWI members look forward to helping these poor countries address the basic human need for clean water and sanitation.

For more information on these efforts and how you can help, contact niva@sas.upenn.edu.

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