



R

Twice as Thirsty:

Women, Children & Water

A

W



CHURCH WORLD SERVICE

V

Water is an integral part of our ecosystem, preserving life, maintaining the natural forests, and nurturing flora and fauna. Yet its course is also a saga of degradation, deterioration, and diminishing resources, striking at the very roots of human existence.

In the struggle for life, women and children play a silent role in making water available to their families and loved ones. In both rural and urban areas of much of the world, collecting water is a woman's task.

Above: getting a drink at Shamshatoo refugee camp, Pakistan.

photo: Paul Jeffrey/ACT International-CWS

Right: drawing water at a pump in Orissa, India. photo: R. Waghay/CWS



According to a report of the United Nations' Development Program (UNDP), women and female children spend more than 10 million "person years" carrying water from remote sources each year.

With growing water scarcity, women and girls must travel longer distances to obtain water, a chore that often occupies several hours of the day. In some cases, women and children leave at dawn travelling miles to the nearest well, sometimes returning at midnight laden with containers of water. A woman might have to spend an entire night waiting at distant water pumps for her turn to fill her water container.

When urban water reservoirs dry up in the summer, children and women sit up the whole night waiting for supplementary water supply. Colorful plastic pots in parrot green, fluorescent pink, brick red and purple line each street, two pots for each family. Many wars are waged at the water pump, ranging from the simple 'I-came-before-you' assertions, to language fanaticism and communal disputes, creating disharmony and tension.

Many school-age girls spend more time each day carrying water for their families instead of pursuing an education. This early handicap prevents them from taking part, as adults, in more socially valued income generating areas of the local economy. "Of the 120 million school-age children not in school, the majority are girls and this lack of education early in life consigns them to poverty or dependence later in life," according to UNICEF.



Afro-Colombian child near Cartagena at her bath. photo: T. Abraham/CWS

Increased vulnerability to sexual assault and abduction is another serious consequence faced by young girls and women living without access to a safe water point. Little wonder that much folklore and film centers on the courting of lovely young girls and women on their way to the river or the distant water source, and their abuse and abduction by the villain.

The water fetched against all these odds is not always safe for human consumption and rarely enough for personal hygiene, washing clothes and cooking food.

According to UNICEF's State of the World's Children 2005, "21 percent of children in developing countries

continued next page



In Vietnam, children are the key to better health and sanitation

"I like the toilet in my school better than the one in my house," five year old Dong Ngoc Son told a Vietnamese newspaper reporter earlier this year.

Son won his preschool's first prize in a drawing competition to promote the use of new toilets that Church World Service is building in rural schools in Vietnam.

Over 60,000 students took part, submitting 90,000 entries. Son's winning drawing was painted on the side of the new toilet at his school in Thai Nguyen province. In 39 other schools in Vietnam, the

Nguyen Quynh Nga, a second grader at the Ba Trai primary school, Vietnam, washes her feet at a newly-installed tap.
photo: CWS Vietnam

bright colors of similar prizewinning drawings light up the facades of new toilets.

At home, Son's toilet is a wooden platform with a hole over a sand pit. Three quarters of the schools in his country don't have water in their latrines. As a result of inadequate sanitation facilities, safe drinking water and hygiene, many children in Vietnam suffer from malnutrition, worm infections and diarrhea.

"I will consider building a similar water closet for my children because they keep talking about what they have at school," said one parent.

That's the kind of change CWS Vietnam Representative Joanne Fairley wants to see.

continued next page

continued from previous page

are severely water deprived, living without a safe water source within a 15 minute walk of their homes. In addition, a staggering 2.6 billion people do not have access to basic sanitation. These deprivations cost many their lives and account for 1.6 out of 11 million preventable child deaths every year.”

The impact of unsafe drinking water, poor sanitation and inadequate hygiene on child health goes far beyond the 4,000 children dying daily from water-borne diseases like diarrhea and typhoid. Many millions more are pushed to the brink of survival by repeated bouts of illness. Roughly 60 percent of infant deaths worldwide is linked to water related infectious and parasitic diseases including the most common ailments like diarrhea, intestinal worms, trachoma, schistosomiasis and cholera.



Water-related diseases kill more than five million people each year—10 times the number of people killed in armed conflict.

Everywhere, meager availability of safe drinking water goes hand in hand with high child mortality rates. It is the responsibility of governments and of world bodies to adhere to guidelines adopted in The Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Millennium Development Goals to provide safe water and basic sanitation to homes, families and schools.

According to the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child, States should take appropriate measures “to combat disease and malnutrition, including within the framework of primary health care, through, *inter alia*, the application of readily available technology and through the provision of adequate nutritious foods and clean drinking water, taking into consideration the dangers and risks of environmental pollution.”

We owe it to our children to act now. As Khalil Gibran said, “We do not own this earth; we have only borrowed it from our children.”

Above: drawing water in north India.
photo: R. Waghray/CWS



Ghanaian child
photo: WaterAid/Caroline Penn

The WATER FOR ALL campaign: **what CWS is doing**

- **Enabling** access to, and provision of, potable water through local and global partnerships.
- **Supporting** community-based water projects and building local community capacity to inform national water and sanitation policies.
- **Providing** a collective ecumenical voice in global public debate on water and sanitation issues.
- **Advocating** for access to, and provision of, water as critical to achieving the Millennium Development Goals.
- **Building** grassroots support for Senate resolutions and House bills that support universal access to water worldwide.

continued from previous page

“Part of our goal is to have these ideas translated back to the family at the basic health level,” said Fairley.

The drawing competition was part of a \$671,150 water and sanitation program that CWS has been carrying out over the last three years. The program is bringing better toilets and water for drinking

to 165 kindergarten and primary schools, while teaching them, their teachers and the community at large the importance of good hygiene. Overall, some 580,000 people in disadvantaged rural areas of Ha Tay, Thai Nguyen, Long An and Bac Lieu provinces benefit from the program.

CWS also funds and installs water filter systems in hospitals and district health centers. Staff engineers supervise local builders in drilling wells and erecting water towers, and train beneficiaries to monitor construction.

“We show them how thick the pipes should be and the correct ratio of sand to cement,” Fairley said.

CWS trains school and hospital officials to manage newly installed water systems.



Nguyen Dinh Hung, grade 4, and schoolmates from Ba Trai primary school, paint the wall of a newly built toilet with a picture that won the CWS Health and Sanitation art competition.
photo: CWS Vietnam

continued



Collecting water at Nueva Esperanza, a community of displaced people in Colombia's Tierra Alta region. photo: T. Abraham/CWS



CHURCH WORLD SERVICE

Church World Service is a cooperative ministry of 36 Protestant, Orthodox, and Anglican denominations providing sustainable self-help and development, disaster relief, and refugee assistance in some 80 countries.

PO Box 968
Elkhart, IN 46515
1-800-297-1516 www.churchworldservice.org

YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Protect everyone's access to safe, affordable water:

- **LEARN MORE** at the Church World Service website www.churchworldservice.org
- **CONTACT** your elected officials and join the CWS Speak Out network to receive legislative alerts: www.churchworldservice.org/Educ_Advo/index.html
- **CONSIDER** and **CELEBRATE** the importance of water using CWS educational and worship resources on water: <http://www.churchworldservice.org/worship-resources/worship-water.html>
- **CONTRIBUTE** to the work of Church World Service by calling your CWS Regional Office toll-free at 1-888-297-2767. CWS is helping local communities meet their water and sanitation needs in self-reliant and sustainable ways that represent positive alternatives to water privatization: www.churchworldservice.org/Development/water.html
- **CONSERVE** water by repairing all leaky fixtures and by turning off the water in sinks, baths and showers when you are not using them.
- **CAMPAIGN** with others to advocate for the implementation of the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals that include reducing by half the number of people without clean water and adequate sanitation by the year 2015: www.millenniumcampaign.org

You can download this and companion resources from: www.churchworldservice.org
To order printed copies of this resource, call 1-800-297-1516 and ask for resource EA 0521

Vietnam, continued

Training on how to use the newly-installed toilets and water taps is equally important.

"This is where the fun starts," said Fairley. "A lot of kids are unfamiliar with septic latrines and running water. Many kids are afraid to go to a dark room with a hole in the floor."

In Vietnam, CWS has been active in humanitarian assistance, development and reconciliation for over 50 years. It chairs a group of international non-governmental organizations active in water supply and sanitation in the country.

In a recent review, the group found that the country was close to meeting its national targets for household access to clean water. But sanitation lags far behind: only 25 percent of Vietnamese households have hygienic latrines.



Minh Phuong Dong's prize-winning artwork for CWS Vietnam's Water and Sanitation art competition. photo: CWS Vietnam