**Forum:** World Health Assembly

**Issue:** Develop strategies in combatting lack of access to clean water and sanitation in rural and less economically developed areas

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Introduction

 On August 14th, 2021, an earthquake of magnitude 7.2 occurred in Haiti. Thousands of houses collapsed, and those who lost their homes also lost access to clean water and sanitation. Moreover, the earthquake greatly affected the central departments that provided clean water. As a result, over 500,000 Haiti children are at risk of “acute respiratory infections, diarrhoeal diseases, cholera and malaria”. A nation without proper hygiene facilities, shelter and drinking water is a nation at risk of deadly diseases. In Ethiopia, 60-80% of all diseases are due to the inability to access hygienic and clean water. In India, annually, 200,000 individuals die from sickness in unsanitary waters.

The lack of access to appropriate sanitation and clean water poses threats to health and well-being and threatens a nation’s overall development. This includes factors such as education and the economy. The absence of sanitation and clean water hinders children’s “physical and cognitive development”, resulting in their inability to attend school. In some rural parts of South-East Asia and Africa, over 440 million school days are missed because of illnesses caused by unclean water. On the other hand, nations are dealing with an apparent water quality problem that endangers human and environmental well-being, removing the well-being of potential economic development in highly contaminated places. It is evident that the clean water crisis is a significant issue worldwide. Not only that, but the lack of these necessities is severely impacting third world nations due low economic conditions, financial setbacks, etc. Hence, despite organizations taking action to assist Less Economically Developed Countries (LEDCs), one must understand that the issue is not just clean water and sanitation but the ongoing harmful effects it brings with it.

Definition of Key Terms

Clean Waters

Clean water is defined by the US Geological Survey as "water that will not harm you if you come in contact with it." In addition to being drinkable, the word "clean water" also refers to water used for indoor and outdoor household activities, including dishwashing, clothes washing, house cleaning, food preparation, bathing, tooth brushing, watering crops, and swimming.

**Sanitation**

Establishing services and infrastructure for the safe management of human waste, from the toilet to containment, storage, and treatment on-site or transportation, treatment, and eventual safe end-use or disposal, is known as sanitation. The safe disposal of human and animal waste was included in the broader definition of sanitation.

**Infrastructures**

The buildings and mechanisms required to gather, process, and securely dispose of waste and gather, filter, and distribute clean water are called infrastructure. There are many different forms of infrastructures, including sanitation, hygiene, and water infrastructures.

**Water Quality Standards (WQS)**

Water quality standards are sections of federal, state, territorial, authorized tribe, or territory law that have been recognized by the EPA. They outline the intended state of a water body and the procedures that will be followed to protect or attain that state.

Background

**The Development of Providing Clean Water in Rural Locations**

Nearly half of the people on Earth live in low-income rural areas, mainly in Asia and Africa. In addition to the severe health and financial consequences, the impoverished rural population's lack of access to good sanitation and an essential water supply (900 million) leads to gender and other socioeconomic disparities. The bulk of people living in rural areas of developing nations are illiterate, unskilled, and mostly old, female, and kid populations who lack the means to sustain themselves or deal with the effects of natural variability.

Due to the majority of rural communities being located in ecologically sensitive locations, development patterns characterized by diverse cultural values, low economic conditions, and related cost recovery issues, providing water supply and sanitation support in rural areas is more complicated. Dispersed communities, an agro-based economy, and few water supplies frequently hamper infrastructure supply. Decentralized systems make up the majority of the water infrastructure that is currently in place (e.g. community water collection points, public stand posts, pit latrines and, in some cases, septic tanks). These infrastructure systems have also deteriorated due to administrative, budgetary, and technical constraints. Rural residents frequently rely on their local water supplies, which are frequently polluted (rivers, hand pumps, and wells).

**The Impact of Lack of Access to Clean Waters on Education**

Many places in developing nations still need widespread access to schooling. The absence of adequate water and sanitary facilities in these locations is one of the biggest obstacles to improving education in these communities. Many kids in impoverished, water-scarce locations cannot finish their education due to the absence of water and restrooms in schools. Children's learning outcomes and attendance rates are adversely affected by the scarcity of clean water. This is because children who do not have access to good drinking water struggle to remain healthy from water-borne illnesses, become dehydrated, cannot focus for extended periods, and cannot maintain adequate cleanliness standards since they cannot get clean water.

Not only that, but a lack of clean water has harsh effects on girls in school and their ability to attend school. Due to schools not having clean water sources and latrines, not only do girls not have privacy, but they are more susceptible to sicknesses and diseases. Collecting water from wells also takes time; hence, having a clean and sanitary water source close to home and school allows children to focus on their education and live their childhood.



***Caption #1: Statistics of lack of clean water on education***

Furthermore, schools need to be able to supply water to staff, students, and their families to be able to conduct activities. Due to its restriction of growth and development options, this has further effects on the educational system. The community's sanitation facilities—or lack thereof—and the school's sanitation facilities are essential considerations regarding access to proper hygiene in the educational sector. Due to open defecation on the highways, children in impoverished and water-scarce communities are frequently exposed to high amounts of coliform while travelling to school.

**The Impact of Providing Clean Water on the Economy**

Unsanitary waters significantly decrease productivity. This is because of the diseases the water spreads and the time taken just to be able to take water. A WaterAid (an international aid agency) report shows that having clean, hygienic, and sanitary water stations (water points) at a 15-minute walk would significantly return on investment for that nation. Making sure everyone has access to a safe place to dispose of waste will result in increased productivity and lower health costs of $86 billion annually, as well as the prevention of 6 billion cases of diarrhoea, three billion more days of work and school attendance annually, and the unlocking of $420 billion in productive value. Moreover, ensuring everyone has access to a sink for washing their hands with soap and water will save up to 20% of the transmission of diseases in an epidemic such as COVID-19 and produce $45 billion annually. Having a tap in every home will save time and money—roughly $37 billion annually—and improve health, particularly for women and girls.



***Caption #2: Statistics on the benefits of clean water services***

Major Parties Involved

United Nations Water (UN-Water)

The UN-Water is a body in the United Nations that focuses on ensuring that the 30+ organizations of the UN carrying out programmes on clean water and sanitation work together as one conjunct entity, and was created to focus on tackling the UN Sustainable Development Goal 6 (SDG 6) from a vast multitude of perspectives. Due to the magnitude of the work the UN-Water oversees, diverse approaches are taken to achieve a world in which everyone has access to clean and sanitary water as SDG 6 states, with some approaches being: informing policies and educating people on facts surrounding water, monitoring and reporting information to plan for effective coordination, and inspiring action through the celebration of the World Toilet Day and the World Water Day, which focus on sanitation and clean water respectively.

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

The UNDP works in over 170 countries to implement through various measures the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that act as a universal call to action to guard the planet and ensure that everyone can experience peace and prosperity, with goals such as eliminating poverty, providing quality education to all, gender equality, and more. Since SDG 6 states for there to be clean water and sanitation for everyone, the UNDP actively engages in achieving this goal through partnerships between both governmental organizations and non-governmental organizations. Similarly to other UN bodies, the UNDP receives funding entirely from voluntary contributions, acting as a non-profit organization that relies on member states and multilateral organizations for financial support.

 French Republic (France)

France remains as the largest exporter of mineral water globally, with the country exporting around $790 Million worth of water in 2022 alone. In addition, France stands fervently in support of the SDG 6, shown by campaigning for the UN to recognize access to clean water and sanitation as a human right, and stands among the top five global providers of aid towards the water and sanitation development sector. Due to an abundance of freshwater resources, the people do not suffer from water insecurity, yet, France still takes the issue of water security seriously.

People’s Republic of China (PRC)

China is the world’s largest consumer of water currently and suffers water insecurity due to poor environmental regulations and weak enforcement by the government, compounded by the drying of the Yangtze and Yellow river resulted from the melting of glaciers caused by climate change. As such, the government of China has undertaken drastic projects aimed at reducing water scarcity such as undertaking a massive project called the South-North water diversion with the goal being to create waterways that carry excess rainwater from the south to the north and building numerous dams to control flooding. However, as the world’s largest contributor to climate change, China’s water problems will undoubtedly compound as global temperatures continue rising.

Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

The United Nations first defined access to clean water and water sanitation as a human right, bringing the pressing issue of global water shortage onto the international stage in 2010. In 2003, the UN-Water was founded, bringing together 35 members from the UN system and 44 international partners in an effort to combat the lack of access to clean water in less economically developed countries. Following the establishment of the UN-Water organization inside the UN came “the International Decade for Action ‘Water for Life’”, starting on 2005 and ending at 2015, which had the primary goal of fulfilling international commitments on water-related issues by 2015. This movement helped around 1.3 billion people living in developing countries to gain access to clean drinking water by addressing the issue from a holistic approach of international cooperation, regional communication, education on the adverse effects of uncleanliness. Currently another movement called the “Water Action Decade”, starting on 2018 and ending at 2028, also serves to combat the issue of global water depletion, with some strategies being: investing in adequate infrastructure, providing sanitation facilities, and encouraging hygiene through collaborating with local schools educating people about the importance of proper sanitation. Overall, providing people in developing countries with access to clean, sanitary water requires immense collaboration and communication with diverse organizations and groups of people, whether it’s collaboration between governments and international bodies like the UN, or collaboration between local organizations and civilians. Such a multitude of collaboration fosters an environment that focuses on solving the issue of water scarcity and improving the livelihoods of the people and ensures effective integration of sanitation into their lives and access to clean water. Listed below are various UN resolutions that focus on water sanitation, health, and access to clean water as an innate human right.

* The human right to water and sanitation, July 28th, 2010 (**A/RES/64/292**)
* Human rights and access to safe drinking water and sanitation, October 6th, 2010 (**A/HRC/RES/15/9**)
* Drinking-Water, Sanitation and Health, May 24th, 2011 (**WHA64.24**)
* Human rights and access to safe drinking water and sanitation, March 28th, 2008 (**RES/7/22**)

Possible Solutions

* Increase financial support towards the UN and other organizations that specialize in providing less economically developed countries with access to clean water and provide human resources. Financial support directly increases the scope of the UN’s work as more funding means more resources and more people being able to benefit from the work of the UN or other similar organizations, and increasing human resources means that the work can be done in a larger scale which benefits more people. Since the water crisis is an incoming catastrophe, the more people work on it the faster it can be resolved, potentially saving many lives.
* Incorporate lessons in education systems that teaches about sanitation, water waste, and pollution, and the importance of clean water for healthy functional people. Education on sanitation is important as it teaches people to build proper sanitary habits that directly reduce the chance of children catching potentially life-threatening diseases from living in unsanitary conditions. In addition, the access of clean water brings the importance of teaching them proper usage of water such as why wasting water is bad and how to avoid pollution in the clean water.
* Advocate for policies that are eco-friendly and spread awareness for the dangers of climate change on freshwater depletion and other adverse environment effects such as droughts. Advocating for eco-friendly policies creates an environment where pollution is punished. Additionally, the danger that climate change poses for freshwater depletion must be spread so that people can vote against policies that directly or indirectly support climate change.
* Encourage more developed and economically wealthy countries to support developing countries by providing funds, human resources, or technology that help in combatting lack of clean water and unsanitary conditions. Developed countries have more resources to help and would benefit greatly economically by supporting developing countries because access to clean water is a barrier for some people preventing them for going to school and living life with better conditions. Furthermore, the premature death that the access to clean water will prevent will greatly benefit the economy as there would be more economically valuable people as more developed countries are facing a demographic fall.
* Invest money into water filtration technologies to make them more efficient and easier to implement and increase funding for desalination plants and other similar water filtration systems. Investing money into water filtration technologies will help scientists develop more effective models of filtration systems, but the current water filtration systems should not be neglected. Since freshwater depletion is such a pressing issue with the UN putting it in the top 3 incoming disasters, it is essential for people to fund these water filtration systems.

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Appendix or Appendices

1. <http://media.transparency.org/imaps/cpi2009/> (Transparency International’s annual CPI)