Water for All: Making it Happen

Water is the essence of life and human dignity. As a fundamental human right "sufficient, safe, acceptable, physically accessible and affordable water for personal and domestic uses" is vital for all. Governments are responsible for ensuring that this human right is progressively fulfilled. As a result of their action, in collaboration with partners, 1.2 billion more people have gained access to an improved water supply from 1990 to 2002.

Yet 1.1 billion people in rural areas and urban slums still rely on unsafe drinking water from rivers, lakes and open wells. Children, in particular, suffer from water-related illnesses. Each episode of diarrhoea sets back a child’s growth by lowering their appetite and reducing their caloric and nutrient uptake. Persistent diarrhoea and severe diseases, such as typhoid and dysentery, jeopardize children’s healthy development. Every year, 1.6 million children under five do not survive this struggle.

Continued progress towards providing everyone with access to protected wells and, ultimately, piped water supplies will radically reduce childhood illness. In the meantime, disinfection and filtration at home are simple and cheap measures that make an immediate difference to the lives of the worst affected.

• Water is essential for hygiene, especially for hand-washing after defecation
• Pools and marshes are breeding sites for malaria-carrying mosquitoes
• Arsenic and high levels of fluoride in drinking water cause severe illness
• Women and children often spend many hours collecting water
• During daily water collection, women face the risk of drowning and injuries

http://www.who.int/water_sanitation_health/en/