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Press Centre

Press Release

UNICEF says lack of clean water & sanitation robs children of good health and education

NEW YORK, 10 March 2003 - Lack of clean water in households causes millions of children in the developing world to suffer needlessly from disease, UNICEF said today, adding that millions of girls are deterred from getting an education because of a dearth of sanitation facilities in schools.

UNICEF said that a lack of access to clean water causes waterborne illnesses that kill more than 1.6 million young children each year. Lack of separate and decent sanitation facilities at schools often forces girls to drop out of primary school. Of the 120 million school-age children not in school, the majority are girls.

"This lack of education early in life often consigns girls to poverty or dependence later in life," said UNICEF Executive Director Carol Bellamy.

Millions of children suffer intestinal infections caused by parasites. Each year 19.5 million people are infected with roundworm and whipworm alone, with the highest rate of infection among school-age children. Also, each year, an estimated 118.9 million children under 15 suffer from schistosomiasis (bilharzia), a disease caused by parasitic flatworms. Parasites consume nutrients, aggravate malnutrition, retard children's physical development and result in poor school attendance and performance.

"The money it takes to provide water and sanitation services is so small when compared to the payoffs," Bellamy declared, urging governments to invest more in clean water and in the protection of scarce water sources.

UNICEF said that studies show that for every \$1 invested in children - including money to improve access to clean water and sanitation - \$7 will be saved in the cost of long-term public services.

"By providing clean water and sanitation to the poorest people on the planet, we can reduce poverty and suffering and ensure education for all children," Bellamy said.

Links

- More on UNICEF's work to [bring water](#) to children

- Read Carol Bellamy's [speech to the Symposium](#)

- From Cuba to Kuwait, Pakistan to Peru, read the [State of the World's Children, 2003](#) stats on women and children

- **Note to Broadcasters:** Video B-roll showing the impact of clean water and sanitation on schools in Malawi (August 2002) [More](#)

Bellamy will attend the Third World Water Forum, which will bring leaders, technical experts and children together for a series of conferences in Japan from March 16 through 23. World Water Day falls on March 22.

During the conference, UNICEF will work to ensure that children have a voice in solving these problems: it is co-hosting the Children's World Water Forum from March 20 to 21 in Shiga, Japan. Approximately 100 children from developing and industrialized nations will discuss their role as driving force for change on water and sanitation issues. Representatives from this forum will present their findings to decision-makers attending the Ministerial Conference on March 22 and 23. The Netherlands and the Japanese NGO Network are funding the Children's World Water Forum.

The Third World Water Forum is also a step towards accomplishing the goals. World leaders outlined at the 2002 World Summit for Sustainable Development (WSSD), to halve the proportion of people without access to basic sanitation by 2015.

"We all know that fresh water is a scarce resource in many places, often a highly politicized commodity," Bellamy observed. "That's why it's crucial that we think of these resources in terms of our children - not only for our own children's health, but for future generations."

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UNICEF & WATER AND SANITATION

UNICEF has built relationships and gained trust through its long history working in the water and sanitation projects over the last 35 years. In the 1960s UNICEF responded to drought emergencies with rapid drilling and installing boreholes with handpumps. In the 1970s UNICEF provided larger-scale national water programmes of drilling rigs, gravity-fed systems, protecting springs and wells, and upgrading traditional water sources in rural areas. During the 1980s, UNICEF emphasized the need for sanitation, hygiene education, improved community participation and a greater role for women in water and sanitation projects. In the 1990s UNICEF moved beyond merely supplying services and added a new emphasis on utilization, operation, maintenance and sustainability.

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