

## The Big Picture: Basic Needs, Basic Rights\*



**LIBERIA: A young boy fetches water from a UNICEF-provided water pump**

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Clean water is a necessity for life. Also, everyone needs basic sanitation. These things are essential to health and human dignity, and they are your right.

But ...

More than a billion people do not have access to safe drinking water. More than 2.5 billion people do not have a sanitary way of getting rid of urine and feces. Up to one-third of disease globally is thought to be caused by environmental factors such as polluted water and air.

Children are very vulnerable to disease. This is because children's bodies are not fully developed, so they have less resistance to illness. Also, in proportion to their weight, young children breathe more air, drink more water, and eat more food than adults do, so they take in bigger doses of any contaminants.

### Environment, Education, and Poverty

Water and sanitation problems can disrupt your education and stop you from reaching your full potential. When you are sick from contaminated water, you cannot go to school or learn well. Many children—particularly girls—miss or stop attending school because they have to spend so much time and energy collecting water at home or caring for sick relatives, or because they have their period and their school does not have clean water or sanitation facilities. One in four girls does not complete school compared with one in seven boys.

It is the world's poorest people who have no sanitation and safe water, so it is the poor who are most at risk from water-related diseases. Illness may prevent people from working, making families even poorer. It may also disrupt children's education, so they have fewer chances to learn, lower performance, and fewer opportunities for employment.

### Some Good News

But there is good news. Improved sanitation and water sources, combined with information about hygiene and how to prevent infection, can dramatically improve the health of communities.

Another piece of good news is that although children are at greater risk from water and sanitation hazards, they can also be a powerful voice against them!

\*Source: UNICEF Voices of Youth [http://www.unicef.org/voy/explore/wes/explore\\_1847.html](http://www.unicef.org/voy/explore/wes/explore_1847.html)