

# Water & Health

**We believe everyone has a right to life's essentials. Water, health and education are fundamental for living well.**

## Why Tearfund works in Water & Health

Currently, water shortages affect more than 40% of the world's population<sup>1</sup>. Shortages are caused by a number of factors including inconsistent rainfall and poor infrastructure. Water shortages aren't the only problem: poor water quality and lack of sanitation kill nearly 1000 children each day as a result of preventable diseases<sup>2</sup>. About half the developing world - 2.6 billion people - don't have access to proper sanitation measures such as toilets and 1.1 billion people don't have access to clean water.<sup>3</sup>

Persistent health issues and diseases that are rare in New Zealand, are still present through much of the world and are often compounded by lack of clean water and sanitation: diseases such as malaria, tuberculosis, polio and HIV/AIDS. Sadly, children born into poverty are twice as likely to die before they turn five, than children from wealthier families.<sup>4</sup> As well as this, women giving birth in a developing country are 33 times more likely to die in childbirth than women in developed regions<sup>5</sup>. Overcoming these challenges to health and well-being is essential to maintaining a livelihood and moving out of poverty.

There are obvious negative consequences for communities without clean water or health services. But beyond these, without the basic essentials, other components of well-being such as food security, livelihoods, educational opportunities and life expectancy can be compromised. The flow on effect is that people in these communities stay trapped in poverty, focusing only on survival. Until their basic needs are met, they are unable to achieve any further economic and social development.

**The wars of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century will be fought over water.**

**Ismail Seragledin**

<sup>1</sup> [unwater.org/statistics/statistics-detail/en/c/211807/](http://unwater.org/statistics/statistics-detail/en/c/211807/)

<sup>2</sup> [unicefusa.org/mission/survival/water](http://unicefusa.org/mission/survival/water)

<sup>3</sup> [who.int/water\\_sanitation\\_health/mdg1/en/](http://who.int/water_sanitation_health/mdg1/en/)

<sup>4</sup> [unicef.org/media/media\\_82345.html](http://unicef.org/media/media_82345.html)

<sup>5</sup> [who.int/gho/maternal\\_health/mortality/maternal\\_mortality\\_text/en/](http://who.int/gho/maternal_health/mortality/maternal_mortality_text/en/)



## **A Biblical Perspective**

The Bible consistently recognises the very real needs of the poor. In the book of Isaiah, as God talks of helping Israel, a special mention is made of the poor<sup>6</sup>. In those verses, focus is given to the desire for water. “When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue is parched with thirst, I the LORD will answer them...” The answer comes in the form of the provision of water.

Water, like healthcare, is a basic human need. The Bible sees adequate nourishing food and good water as basic human rights, consistently calling for justice - not only charity - for the poor through the provision of those basic needs. At times it talks of God meeting those needs as in Isaiah 41. At others the challenge is put to God’s people to make sure those needs are met, such as in James<sup>7</sup>.

In Matthew 25, Jesus tells the parable of the Sheep and the Goats and it is exactly these issues - the plight of the poor who do not have life’s essentials – that dominates. “For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink ... I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me”. Jesus makes it clear that to love these people whom he loves, is to love him.

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<sup>6</sup> Is 41:17-18

<sup>7</sup> James 2:14-20

## Our Approach

**Tearfund works to reduce basic vulnerability through fostering inclusive and improved access to essential services. Our partners support communities' access to life's essentials through education, health, resourcing and mobilising for change. Once in place, this creates a platform for economic, social and political development to spring up – people can better help themselves.**

We work with communities to have their basic needs met in a way that goes beyond a welfare approach.

In partnership, we work in this sector in a number of areas:

- We link in with and support existing government services, striving to ensure local communities we work with have access to these services.
- We engage with key individuals in each community and train them to become mobilisers to ensure the longevity of the work we do.
- We create and implement innovative technical solutions to health and water problems faced by our communities.
- We recognise that every situation and community is different and we adjust our working methods and responses accordingly.
- We use education to empower communities by providing access to information and vocational education.
- Our approach includes groups who are typically marginalised – the disabled, elderly and youth – and we ensure these groups have access, rights and dignity.
- Our approach is always forward looking and proactive – we would rather be preventative when it is possible.

We know we are being successful when communities have access to basic health services and education opportunities; when communities are proactively calling the government to account for services they should be providing; and when community members are involved in mobilising and providing these services for their communities.

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**Our goal:  
Communities' basic  
needs met with dignity**

# Your Response

**Our work to improve water and health needs your support. You can give to this work, learn about global movements to meet basic needs, advocate for better policy, and act on the links between your lifestyle and its impact on the poor.**

## Give

Tearfund's *Nourish* cause is the area of our work that tackles water and health. You can give financially to this cause.

## Learn

There is much to be learned about water shortages and health problems facing developing countries and how vulnerable communities are disproportionately affected. Research this online and share what you learn with friends and on social media.

## Advocate

- Take action and lobby the New Zealand government to increase its aid budget and make more of those funds available specifically for work in water and health.
- Check out the Sustainable Development Goals, a new set of priorities that governments across the world have committed to, and join the movement to hold governments to account.

## Pray

Pray that the struggles of vulnerable communities will be addressed and that efforts to grow access to clean water and health services will continue. Pray for Tearfund's partners who work daily in this area.

## Live

Check out Tearfund's lifestyle challenge resources including *The Good Lives Project* study booklet and *Living Lent*. These resources will help you learn about how closely linked your life is to vulnerable communities and how to take action to live more justly.