

Safe water for primary schools in Sierra Leone



Jenny Matthews/ActionAid

reallives:

Agnes' story

Agnes is seven years old and lives in Magboema village, Bombali province. Like most of the children in her village, she has never had access to safe water. She often gets up at 6am to fetch water for her family. Agnes does attend school but finds it hard to concentrate – classes are often interrupted as children leave in search of water.

“We don't have a well in our school and so we can't easily get clean drinking water. We hope that one day someone will help us. Our teachers always tell us to be patient – the time will come when we have our own toilets and running water.”

Introduction

Water is a basic necessity for human life, and yet over a billion people do not have access to safe water and 2.6 billion do not have access to proper sanitation. At any one time half the population of developing countries suffers water-related illness. The World Health Organisation estimates that 6,000 children die every day from diseases caused by dirty water and poor sanitation – diseases that could easily be prevented.

In Sierra Leone, only 34% of people have access to clean water and sanitation. More than ten years of civil war devastated many areas of the country, and hospitals, health centres and water and sanitation facilities were all badly affected by the conflict. Lack of water and sanitation have caused widespread disease, which has prevented families from working and children from attending school.

No water, no school

Over 430,000 primary school-aged children in Sierra Leone are out of school. Although many schools were rebuilt after the war, there is still a chronic lack of water and sanitation inside the schools. Without running water or toilets, children are forced to leave classes in search of drinking water, and are often forced to drink from contaminated streams. Nearby bushes are used as latrines, which increases the spread of disease. Girls often feel uncomfortable sharing toilet areas with boys, and so stay away from school. Many more children are too busy fetching water for their families to attend school.

Schools and communities in Sierra Leone desperately need access to safe water and sanitation, in order to ensure that children can access the education they so desperately need.

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how you can help

By supporting this project, you can help improve the lives of children like Agnes by providing their schools with clean water and proper sanitation facilities.

The project – water for life

This project will provide five schools in northern Sierra Leone with water and sanitation facilities that will help over 3,000 children return to school. Each school will be equipped with a well and latrine, so that children and their teachers can access water and toilet facilities easily, without interrupting their school day. This will help thousands of children in Sierra Leone have a happier and healthier future.

The project will also construct 20 household latrines across five communities, which will provide over 5,000 people with proper sanitation for the first time in their lives. Communities will receive training courses so that they can maintain the wells for the future, and workshops will be provided in health and sanitation awareness – this will help to permanently reduce and prevent disease.

What your support means to children like Agnes:

£30 could provide five children with access to safe, clean water

£80 could train two village caretakers to maintain the wells and latrines

£262 could mean that 250 people will have proper sanitation for the first time in their lives.

£902 could equip all five schools with hand pumps

£3,739 could fully construct a well for one school, which could provide enough safe water for 600 children



Sierra Leone today

- ◆ Life expectancy in Sierra Leone is just 34 years.
- ◆ The country is recovering from a ten-year civil war that killed 50,000 people and displaced about half the population.
- ◆ Although the war has now come to an end, the road to recovery is a long, slow journey.

The bigger picture

- ◆ Every year more than two million people die because of the unclean water they have no choice but to drink.
- ◆ Too often rich countries force poor countries to privatise their water companies in return for aid and debt relief – which decimates supplies to the poorest people.
- ◆ ActionAid also campaigns to end these damaging conditions, so that millions of people around the world are able to claim their basic right to water



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