

# Safe water in Afghanistan



Jenny Matthews/Network/ActionAid UK

Clean, safe drinking water is a basic right. A right which over 1.2 billion people around the world are denied. A lack of clean water affects sanitation, health, food supplies and preparation and economic development. ActionAid helps people claim their right to clean water by building sustainable safewater supplies – encouraging local people to maintain them – and by holding awareness campaigns on sanitation and good health.

## Introduction

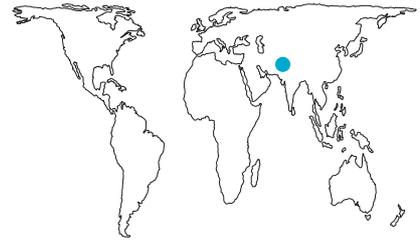
Afghanistan has a population of 22 million people, 70% of which is undernourished and one in four children die before the age of five. Only 13% of people have access to improved water sources and the situation has worsened due to inadequate rainfall over the last two years causing the government to declare 12 districts drought-affected.

Kandahar province is particularly badly affected, currently experiencing one of the worst droughts since 1991. Since rain and snowfall have both been minimal, water levels of the river Arghandab, the main water source for Kandahar, have dropped. Both the drought and the recent conflict have played significant parts in damaging shallow wells and the traditional 'karez' (underground water sources). Local people do not have access to much water at all let alone safe drinking water.

## The problems

- People in the areas of Maywand and Khakrez traditionally rely on water from the karez and shallow water wells, but both these sources have been severely damaged during the current drought and conflict over the last two decades. As many as two thirds of all wells have lower levels of water or have dried up completely.
- The lack of safe drinking water has also caused many water-borne diseases resulting in diarrhoea and dysentery. Low local awareness of good sanitation and general health practices also contribute to the spread of disease.
- Water scarcity also impacts on food production in the area, as there is little water to irrigate crops, causing crop failures and a lack of food.

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**real lives**

At the health centre on the outskirts of Kandahar town, up to 20 children a day can be brought in from the local village of Khugiani for treatment for diarrhoea and dysentery, a direct result of the contamination of the local stream – this extremely arid area’s only source of water.

The stream is used by animals both as drinking water and for bathing, with the result that, by the time the children stand in the water to collect what they need, it is full of dirt and disease. Hundreds of children can become ill in this way at the height of the summer months. The greatest wish expressed by local people is simply to have a safe, reliable source of water for their village.



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**ActionAid’s response**

- Consult with local communities and district authorities to identify the most advantageous locations for wells for local villages.
- Construct bore-wells (shallow water wells) with hand pumps in communities to increase access to water. Each well will provide safe drinking water to an average of 120 individuals on an ongoing basis.
- Conduct training courses for local communities on maintaining the wells in the future as well as general health and sanitation awareness to permanently reduce and prevent disease.

**Unit costs**

- **£4** could buy gravel sufficient to build one well.
- **£12** could drill an 8’ or 6’ diameter well.
- **£24** could install one hand pump.
- **£790** could pay for the complete construction of one well for 120 people.

Project code: XUKOR05001  
 60% of the donations will go towards the projects and 40% will be distributed internationally in order of greatest need.  
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