



WASH: A HIGH VALUE KINGDOM INVESTMENT

San Luis Obispo, California
June 2014

Equipping decision-makers committed to
serving the poor and building Christ's Kingdom.

ASHE
INSTITUTE
at Lifewater

Idea in Brief

Christians are called to “go and make disciples of all nations,”¹ and “love your neighbor as yourself.”² Understanding where human needs are the greatest and where peoples remain unreached with the gospel, the question of where best to prioritize resources toward these ends is a constant tension. Bringing safe Water Access, Sanitation, and Hygiene (often referred to by the acronym WASH) to the poor presents an outstanding opportunity to proclaim the gospel in the widest and deepest ways by strengthening the Church’s (local and global) ability to provide a tangible, sustained witness to the entire world.

Effective WASH interventions require establishing relationships with the people served, and out of these relationships emerge opportunities to effectively share the gospel. Prominent evangelical scholars such as Bryant Myers, Darrow Miller, Steve Corbett, and Brian Fikkert have traced the roots of poverty to broken relationships: with God, with self, with others, and with the rest of creation.³ That is why the Church is a vital element of an effective response to poverty – it is God’s instrument of reconciliation through Christ.

By redefining and refocusing the role of the local church as it ministers in water and water-borne disease alleviation, the Christian community can fulfill the great commission and the great commandment in a low-cost and highly sustainable manner.

Idea in Practice

- Effective Christian witness addresses the needs of the whole person, and WASH (Water Access, Sanitation, and Hygiene) is a crucial intervention in improving the lives of the poor.
 - The full WASH program (not water alone) should be utilized to maximize cost-effectiveness and impact.
 - WASH programs should be viewed within the context of the local church’s Christian witness and support it through provision of practical, life-saving skills and operations that include and dignify all people.
 - Investors in Kingdom-building efforts should look for areas where there is overlap between unreached people and the ability of local believers to meet the needs of their neighbors. Such overlap exists in WASH efforts and should be considered for scalable growth.
-

The WASH Crisis

The WASH crisis affects billions of people around the world in profound ways. Currently, approximately 750 million people live without safe water, and 2.5 billion live without improved sanitation.⁴ It is a situation that leads to more than 1,600 children under the age of 5 dying every day from preventable, water-borne diseases.⁵ It is only because this is a persistent problem that it is not universally identified as a crisis. The water and sanitation crisis not only affects a wide breadth of humanity, it also deeply affects human existence: when WASH is not present, all systems break down.

- Over 400 million school days are lost each year to water-related illness.⁶
- Over 40 billion productive hours are lost each year to fetching water in sub-Saharan Africa.⁷
- About half of the developing world’s hospital beds are occupied by people with water-related illness.⁸

The improvement in WASH among vulnerable children and families in the majority world is the vital foundation for all efforts to improve the lives of the poor. Without WASH, and the inherent gains in health, productivity, security, and opportunity it brings, all other development efforts are inhibited or short-lived. Micro-enterprise, education, and medical investments are compromised without first securing safe water and sanitation. For example, though a school may be built and teachers, curriculum, and educational tools secured, children - especially girls - often remain unable to

attend because they are ill, caring for ill family members, tasked with retrieving water over long distance, or unable to cope with the indignity of having no private place to go to the bathroom.

WASH is more than just water because water alone, even safe water, is not enough to prevent water-borne disease. In fact, providing safe water alone typically reduces diarrheal disease by no more than 25%, and often much less. However, when combined with sanitation and hygiene, WASH can reduce disease by 65% or more.⁹

“Achieving sanitation and water for all may not be cost-free, but it will set people free. Access to sanitation and water means a child free of disease, a woman free of the back-breaking chore to fetch water, a girl free to attend school without fear, a village free of cholera, and a world of greater equality and dignity for all.” – UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon (2014)

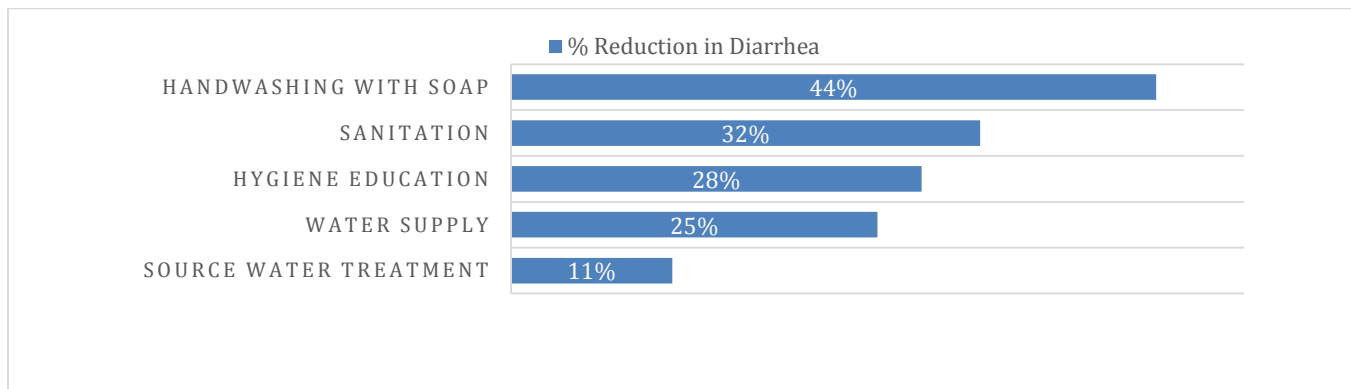


Figure 1: Percent Reduction in Diarrhea by WASH intervention

Figure 1¹⁰ shows that hygiene education has a greater impact than improvements made to water supplies and water quality. Handwashing with soap is the most effective means to reducing water-borne disease. Since handwashing and other hygiene behaviors can be learned, shared, and utilized inexpensively, local churches in a poverty context are able to deploy their congregations to teach these very basic but life-saving health practices. Looking beyond improvements in physical health to review financial impact, or the economic return on investment, WASH yields significant dividends.

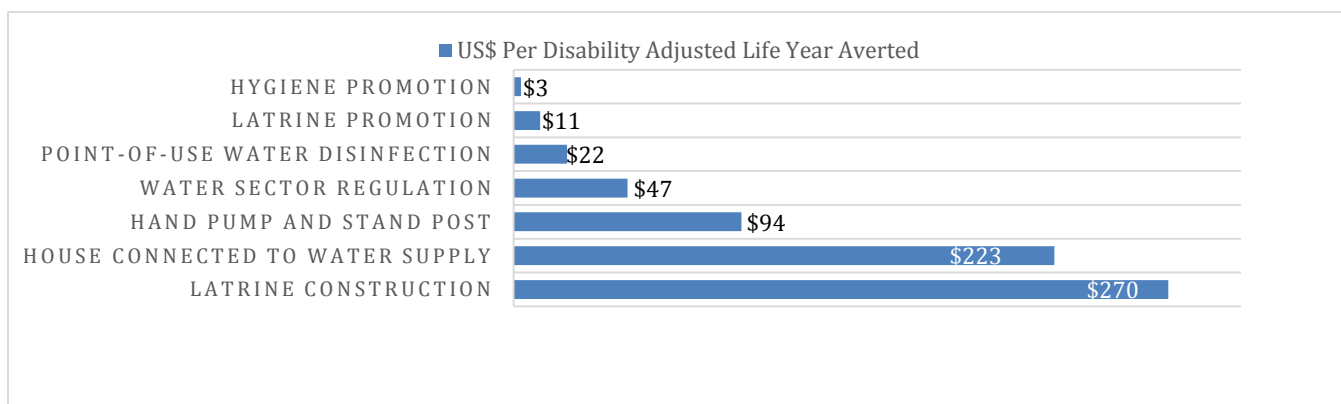


Figure 2: US Dollar per Disability Adjusted Life Year Averted

Figure 2¹¹ above shows that sanitation and hygiene are not only effective at reducing water-borne disease, they are also cost-effective ways to improve health when paired with access to safe water. All of the elements outlined in the figure below are critically important in successful WASH programs, but the first two can be done by local churches at a very low-cost with high impact (see Figure 1).

Sector Response

Investment in WASH promises one of the highest rates of return of any development opportunity directed at alleviating poverty.¹² It offers the most significant single opportunity for change in the lives of those in extreme poverty, its effects reaching to all other activities and relationships. "In fact, no single intervention is more likely to have a significant impact on global poverty than the provision of safe water."¹³ A \$1 investment in WASH yields \$3-\$34 in economic return,¹⁴ but lack of WASH can cost up to 5% of a country's GDP.¹⁵

Despite the evidence that the more cost-effective investments in sanitation and hygiene are also the most effective in improving health, most NGO's engaged in water ministry focus primarily or exclusively on the provision of water alone. There are several understandable reasons for this:

- 1) The provision of clean water requires a shorter investment of time in a community because it does not require significant behavioral change by the benefitting community.
- 2) The cost of water points is more predictable and the beneficiaries are more easily calculated.
- 3) The enjoyment of the water point is more easily captured in media and communicated to donors.

"No single intervention is more likely to have a significant impact on global poverty than the provision of safe water."

Focusing exclusively on water, however, misses a significant part of the solution to end water-borne disease, neglects the role of the local church in the community, and underutilizes the more cost-effective pieces of this solution.

The WASH Opportunity

Working to end the WASH crisis provides the Church immediate opportunities to: create significant impact in meeting the physical needs of vulnerable people in a cost-effective and dignifying manner; open doors to the effective communication of the gospel; and bear witness to Christ's love in word and deed.

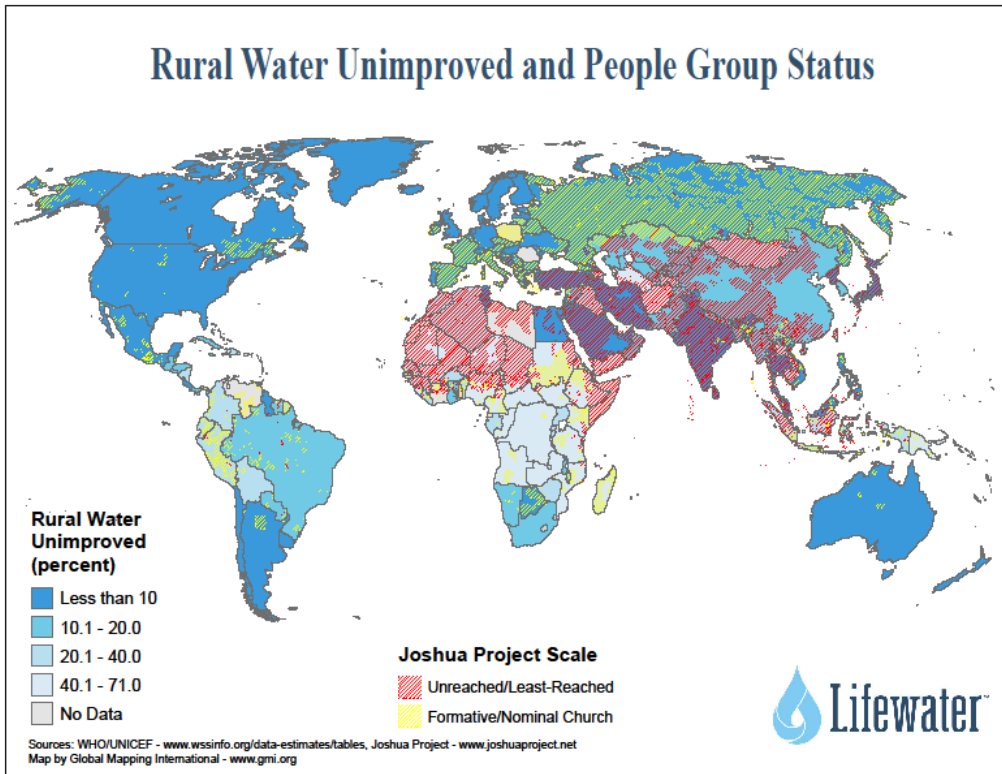
I understand Christian witness to include the declaration of the gospel by life, word, and deed. By *life* I refer to the fact that Christians are the message...People read our lives and our actions and listen to our words as their way of determining what being a Christian means. By *word* I refer to the need to say what the gospel story is and to invite others to make it their story. By *deed* I refer to the fact that the Christian faith, at its best, is an active faith, engaged with the world and seeking to make it more for life and for the enjoyment of life.¹⁶

When it comes to making disciples and meeting needs, we are not doing one well if we are not also doing the other well. The effort to bring WASH to the poor demonstrates this reality. This responsibility, however, does not rest solely on the shoulders of the western NGO community. Local churches are ready and able to serve, given the task as part of an intentional program strategy.

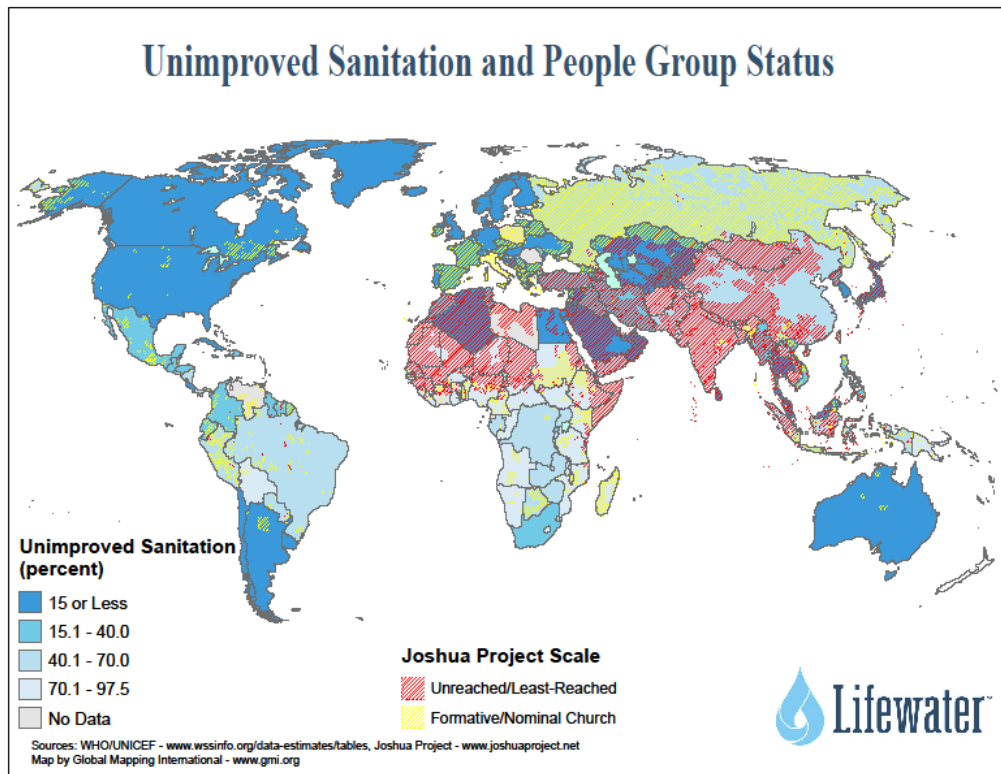
Reaching the Unreached

Significant overlap exists between those underserved with WASH and those unengaged with the gospel. Countries with the lowest rates of water and sanitation coverage are found in Sub-Saharan Africa and Oceania, as well as Central, South, and Southeast Asia.¹⁷ Furthermore, those in rural and more remote areas have less access to basic WASH services.¹⁸ Providing WASH leads us directly to those who are unreached and unengaged.

In Southeast Asia, for example, small, minority Christian communities in several countries are finding new opportunities to witness among their neighbors through WASH work, particularly to people living in rural and peri-urban areas still suffering from water-borne diseases that can be prevented with improved access to water and sanitation. Moreover, in areas that are essentially closed to Christian witness, local Christians are often able to gain access because they are filling a human need unmet by government.



Figures 3 & 4: Overlap between those without safe water and sanitation and those least reached with the gospel



It is difficult for people to believe in the goodness of God when something bad, and preventable, continues in their life. It is simply unconvincing to tell a bereaved mother about a good God that loves her, especially when the messenger does not share that suffering, or is in a position to help prevent it but does nothing. For millions of people each year, this is the preventable suffering and death caused by water-borne disease. In those unengaged with the gospel, the Good News meets open minds and hearts when accompanied by a tangible demonstration of Christ's love. WASH offers the opportunity for the Church to gain credibility as well as the chance to establish relationships that lead to effective gospel communication.

Providing WASH gives a tangible, credible witness to the Truth about God's love and human dignity. WASH programs can equip the local church with the tools to engage their neighbors, providing the opportunity to effectively and sustainably make disciples among them. In doing this, the local church begins to live out the gospel in ways it has not before – without the need for significant resourcing. Where there is no church, WASH can open doors that are otherwise closed to evangelists or church planters, who can now serve as WASH promoters and educators.

Furthermore, the contributions of the local churches make WASH programs cost-effective, sustainable, and complete. Even in poor communities, local believers have two very important resources that can improve the health of community using preventative means: time and people. Training local church leaders in WASH allows the Christians in communities to reach out to other neighbors with knowledge that improves their health and well-being. Faith-based relief and development NGO's that strategically incorporate local churches and ensure appropriate integration with program activities maximize these assets while strengthening the church in its community. When executed within the context of an ongoing program, church engagement with the community can be monitored and evaluated for lasting and transformational impact.

Witnessing in Word and Deed

WASH provides an opportunity to speak the truth about God's intention for creation and each person created in His image.¹⁹ The Biblical narrative of brokenness, sacrifice, and redemption offers a uniquely effective witness to people living in communities broken by poverty. The metaphor of spiritual thirst and living water is especially salient to those for whom physical thirst is a constant reality.²⁰ Water is used as a symbol pervasively in scripture: provision for the Hebrews in the wilderness²¹; prophecies for Israel's rescue²²; the symbol of life and change²³; a symbol of God's presence²⁴; and Jesus' repeated, specific instruction to provide the thirsty with drink.²⁵ Jesus says that when we give "the least of these" water, we are serving *Him*, fulfilling the Great Commandment.²⁶ In turn, WASH efforts become sustainable solutions when the people acquiring these tools recognize their own worth and responsibility to love their neighbor.

The WASH Challenge

Since 1990, the number of people around the world without safe water has been halved, and the proportion of people without sanitation has gone from one-half to one-third. Experts set a goal for universal coverage in water, sanitation, and hygiene by 2030.²⁷ The Church is uniquely positioned, in both timing and resources, to effectively address the water and sanitation crisis and be a significant part of this movement to meet the whole needs of people around the world.

WASH demands a long-term investment in the local Church. It is an investment that pays huge dividends in improved health, but it also facilitates the relationships of trust and respect through which the gospel can be shared much more effectively. Water alone cannot do that.

The need for WASH is prevalent in areas unengaged with the gospel, and because of the global momentum behind providing safe water and sanitation, the Church has a short window to reach the unengaged with a tangible gift of water, sanitation, and hygiene. Not only is this the single greatest step to improved health and livelihood that can be made, but, in helping to take this step, doors will be opened to share the gospel as the whole person is cared for.

WASH presents one of the highest values in return on investment for those seeking to serve the poor and build Christ's Kingdom. It reaches to all people (and peoples) and affects the immediate, core needs of human health and dignity. The WASH crisis is one that the Church is positioned to meet, not only to alleviate suffering, but to build the opportunities, credibility, and relationships that lead to the effective witness of the Kingdom of God.

¹ Matthew 28:19 NIV.

² Matthew 22:39 NIV.

³ See Bryant L. Myers, *Walking with the Poor* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2011); Darrow L. Miller, *Discipling Nations* (Seattle: YWAM, 1998); and Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts* (Chicago: Moody, 2012).

⁴ WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Program for Water Supply and Sanitation, *Progress on Drinking Water and Sanitation* (2014), 8, available at <http://www.wssinfo.org>.

⁵ UNICEF Division of Policy and Strategy, *Committing to Child Survival: A Promise Renewed*, Progress Report (2013), 25, available at http://www.unicef.org/publications/files/APR_Progress_Report_2013_9_Sept_2013.pdf.

⁶ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), *Human Development Report 2006*, Beyond Scarcity: Power, poverty and the global water crisis, 45, available at <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/human-development-report-2006>.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 45.

⁹ WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Program for Water Supply and Sanitation, *Global Water Supply and Sanitation Assessment* (2000), v, available at http://www.who.int/water_sanitation_health/monitoring/jmp2000.pdf.

¹⁰ Lorna Fewtrell, Rachel B Kaufmann, David Kay, Wayne Enanoria, Laurence Haller and Jr, John M Colford, 2005. "Water, sanitation, and hygiene interventions to reduce diarrhoea in less developed countries: a systematic review and meta-analysis." *The Lancet Infectious Diseases* Vol. 5, Iss. 1 (Jan 2005): 48.

¹¹ Jamison et al., *Disease Control Priorities in Developing Countries* (Washington: World Bank, 2006), 791.

¹² In 2012, development economists ranked getting clean water to rural villages as *number one in greatest estimated impact* among strategies to fight global poverty. Bruce Wydick, "Cost-Effective Compassion," *Christianity Today*, February 2012, 24.

¹³ Schuster-Wallace et al., *Safe Water as the Key to Global Health*, United Nations University (UNU-INWEH) (2008), 8, available at http://inweh.unu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/SafeWater_Web_version.pdf.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 6. When operation and maintenance costs are included, a more conservative estimate is \$2-\$5.50 in return (globally) for water and sanitation investments, respectively. Guy Hutton, *Global costs and benefits of drinking-water supply and sanitation interventions to reach the MDG target and universal coverage* (WHO: 2012), available at http://www.who.int/water_sanitation_health/publications/2012/globalcosts.pdf.

¹⁵ UN Water, *The UN World Water Development Report 3: Water in a Changing World* (UN Water: 2009), 8, available at <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/natural-sciences/environment/water/wwap/wwdr/wwdr3-2009>.

¹⁶ Bryant L. Myers, *Walking with the Poor* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2011), 4.

¹⁷ WHO/UNICEF, *Progress on Drinking Water and Sanitation* (2014), 13-17.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 26.

¹⁹ Trainings in communities offer the opportunity to present WASH alongside Biblical passages and principles, combining physically and spiritually relevant materials. Lifewater's training curricula, for example, help local churches do this.

²⁰ See Psalm 42:2; Matthew 5:6; John 4:14

²¹ See Exodus 17:6; Numbers 20:6-13; Isaiah 48:21

²² See Isaiah 41:18; Isaiah 43:19-20; Ezekiel 36:25

²³ See Psalm 23:2; Psalm 107:35; Isaiah 12:3; Ephesians 5:26

²⁴ See Jeremiah 2:13; Jeremiah 13:17; John 4:10,14; John 7:37-38

²⁵ See Matthew 10:42, Matthew 25:35-40

²⁶ See Matthew 25:35-40

²⁷ WHO/UNICEF, *Progress on Drinking Water and Sanitation* (2014), 40.