

# The Case for Clean Water

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Recently I had a bout with intestinal flu that left me feeling wrung out. As I trudged back and forth from the bathroom, I tried to look at the bright side: I had a flush toilet, running water to wash my hands, and a warm bed to rest in. My wife brought me refrigerated Pepto-Bismol to ease my discomfort. If things got really bad, I could call the doctor. Compared to many of the people in Haiti and other developing countries, I have it pretty good.

You might argue that I was trying to rationalize away my own discomfort. But what should really make me uncomfortable is the fact that worldwide, diarrhea is the leading killer of kids under 5. Let that sink in for a few minutes. Kids are dying from diarrhea. Imagine you child, little brother or sister, or neighbor becoming dehydrated, wasting away to the point of death. Surely you would do something.

Providing clean water is fairly straightforward—we have the technology and it doesn't cost much. Most of the childhood cases of diarrhea come from drinking contaminated water. I'm not talking about pesticides or some exotic chemical—I'm talking about feces in the water. Scoop a bucket of water out of a stream, open well, or spring, and chances are there things living in it that can kill a kid, if not an adult. But many people—over a billion people worldwide—don't have access to clean water.



*Spring capture box.*

I also said that providing clean water is cheap. To build a spring capture system in Fondwa costs about \$1600 and serves 300-400 people. The money buys concrete, stone, and pipe. The people of the community do the work. Frankly, I can't imagine worrying about \$1600 if Ananda or Tess were really sick. We've probably spent close to that on diapers. But the median income in Haiti is \$60 per year. Yes, I said *per year*. There's not a lot of excess cash floating around.

Haiti is an extreme example of poverty, but there are other parts of the world as bad. For a little bit of money, we could make a big difference. Ultimately, I'd love to see Haiti move to self-sufficiency, beyond the need for charity. I hope Ananda and Tess will support themselves someday, too. That won't happen simply saying it ought to. I've got to invest in their lives for years to come. However, I don't know anyone who is willing to tell me to my face that it isn't worth it.



*Buckets used for carrying water to homes.*

I said that correcting this is simple. An example from Haiti makes my point. Fondwa, Haiti, is hilly, with springs near the tops of most ravines. Pigs, chicken, and people wade in the water, and I didn't see any pigs with diapers. If a simple concrete and stone capture box is built over the spring and water is pipe by gravity flow to a nearby faucet, then contamination of this water source is largely eliminated. As long as each person keeps her bucket clean, the family has clean water.



*Faucet where water flows by gravity from the spring-capture box.*