



Equitable access to water for young people

KEY QUESTIONS

- What barriers prevent equitable access to water by households headed by young people?
- How can we assist children and youth to have equitable access to water?

Africa has the youngest population in the world. Sixty per cent of Africans are under 25 years old. One of the challenges these young people face is the difficulty of accessing water, an entitlement enshrined in the Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

In Africa, the prevalence of HIV/AIDS, conflict and ineffective, overloaded foster systems mean that households headed by young people are common. These households generally fare worse than mixed-generation households. In addition to domestic responsibilities, these young people face the challenge of overcoming economic, human and social barriers to ensure their families have sufficient water.

BARRIERS YOUNG PEOPLE FACE IN ACCESSING WATER

Households headed by young people are likely to be in informal settlements and rural areas lacking water infrastructure (Mogotlane et al., 2010). Regulations, cultural and traditional age restrictions on loans and ownership raise barriers to young people seeking connections to piped water. The demands of providing for siblings can also force young people to take poorly paid jobs. Young people often find it hard to obtain micro-credit loans that would enable access to water because of their poor earning potential and limited education. Where water can be purchased from water points, young people can seldom afford to buy wheelbarrows to transport water containers meaning they have to make more trips.

Although social norms may assign the job of collecting water to children, older people take priority in using the water. Children use what water is left, which at times means they must fetch more water. Social barriers intersect with gender, race, caste and socioeconomic barriers (UN Water, 2015) presenting children with multi-faceted, simultaneous challenges in accessing water.

Tasks such as housework and fetching water are traditionally given to women and girls and take priority over education, meaning girls stop going to school (Shahidul and Zehadul Karim, 2015). Because of their household duties, girls are generally less educated than boys and less able to secure decent work.

Social barriers to accessing water faced by children are mirrored in schools. Many schools, even in developed countries, do not provide enough access to water for the number of pupils enrolled (Hecht et al., 2017). In Southern Africa, many schools have no water supply (Shahidul and Zehadul Karim, 2015). In some cases, children must go outside to the community water supply, which they can only do after school. Water supplies in some schools also serve communities, which interferes with lessons (Voss Foundation, 2014).



Many children in Mawoneke Village in Zimbabwe live in informal settlements that lack developed water infrastructure

Image: CRIDF

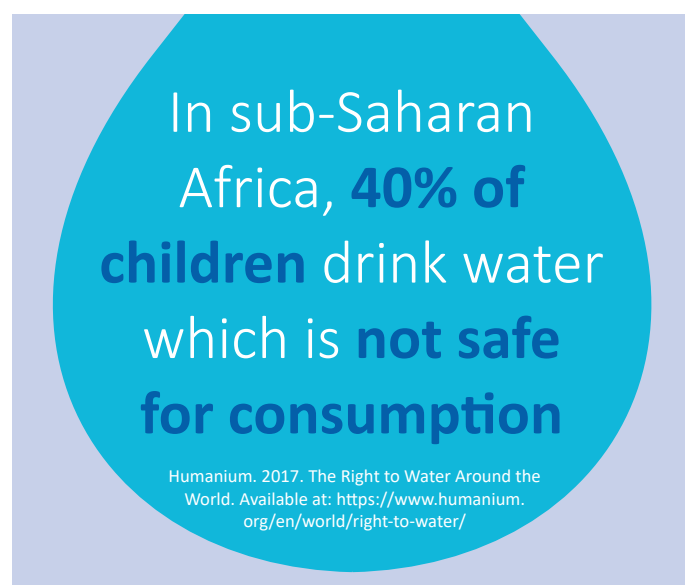
Social and human barriers in school toilets affect hygiene. Studies show more diarrhoeal infections in children attending schools with limited water access (WaterAid, 2017). Frequently, water and sanitation facilities provided for pupils are substandard and less hygienic than those provided for teachers (Steward, 2014).

OVERCOMING BARRIERS

CRIDF works with institutions and communities to help to build awareness of the ways in which young people suffer from inequitable access to water. We aim to leave no one behind and to this end aim to better understand the issues that will lead to more informed decisions about water infrastructure, ensuring all groups in society are included.

Further reading

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ABOUT CRIDF

The Climate Resilient Infrastructure Development Facility (CRIDF) is a DFID (UK Aid) supported programme working to provide long-term solutions to water issues that affect the lives of the poor in Southern Africa. Our focus is to work together with organisations to show them how they can better build and manage their own water infrastructure to improve people's lives. Because rivers, lakes and river basins cross borders, CRIDF is working with 12 different countries in Southern Africa that share water resources. In so doing, CRIDF aims to improve the lives of over 200 million people, many of them extremely poor.



The CRIDF **Water for All** series highlights cross-cutting themes related to water infrastructure that CRIDF would like to explore with partners and interested parties.

Contact us

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