



Environmental Health at the IRC



Inadequate Water and Sanitation is One of the World's Leading Killers

2.5 billion people lack improved sanitation facilities, and 768 million people still use unsafe drinking water sources, according to the latest estimates of the WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Program, released in early 2013¹.

1.6 million people die every year from diarrheal diseases attributable to lack of access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation. 90% of these are children under five².

How the IRC is Responding:

The International Rescue Committee is engaged in Environmental Health (EH) programs in 19 countries across the world. The programs are focused around five key EH activities:

Emergency response for disaster affected populations: The IRC responds rapidly to emergencies caused by war and natural disasters. For instance, the IRC is operating at scale within Syria in the midst of the ongoing conflict, providing life-sustaining services to 15 camps for displaced persons within the country, and supporting communities shattered by the conflict.

Ensuring access to essential EH services: IRC offers poor and vulnerable communities a range of essential EH facilities, activities and goods to prevent disease, increase personal safety, improve food security and provide minimum conditions for human development. Over the past year, we have provided 812,000 people with access to safe water, and 480,000 with improved sanitation.

Hygiene Promotion: IRC promotes hygiene practices that are consistent with good health, including hand washing at appropriate times, proper excreta disposal and safe methods for handling and storing water. IRC's hygiene promotion reached 1.3 million people over the past year.

Community Capacity Building: Strengthening local partner organizations' skills and capacity is essential to the sustained delivery of clean water, improved hygiene and sanitation. For example, in September 2008, IRC handed over 49 boreholes equipped with hand pumps to local communities in northern Uganda. The communities and local government feared that the hand pumps would eventually fail because the nearest spare parts were located over 180km away. With local government support, IRC established local spare parts depots and worked with Water User Groups to ensure the maintenance of water systems. They provided the groups with training on leadership and business development so that they could provide a profitable repair service at an affordable price, and ultimately transition into viable businesses. These communities continue to access water from their hand pumps.

The IRC EH Team:

The IRC's global EH programs are supported by a core technical unit consisting of eight technical advisors who have the responsibility of ensuring that high quality is maintained across all interventions. The technical advisors provide day-to-day support to country programs, and are engaged in improving the wider environmental health field. They play a leading role in the global WASH Cluster and other technical working groups, and in forming collaborations with research