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**Abstract:** The article presents information on the problem of drinking water in various parts of the world. Like any other developed country, the U.S. has safe and plentiful water, but for millions of people from developing countries, finding clean water remains a major problem. Unclean or unsafe water is dangerous to health and leads to infection. Countries with the least access to safe water are among the poorest in the world and are located in Asia and sub-Saharan Africa.

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### **A World Thirsty for Clean Water**

The water in the village where Maria and her family live is bad. Her younger brother got so sick from drinking it that he almost died. Maria's job is to collect clean water, and her family depends on it. She walks six miles to the river and back — twice a day! Seven-year-old Maria no longer attends school. She has no choice.

Can you imagine missing school because you had to spend all day collecting water? You probably don't even think about water. In the United States, as in any other developed country, water is safe and plentiful. But for millions of people from developing countries, finding clean water remains a major problem.

Unclean or unsafe water is dangerous to your health. Unlike clean, potable water that doesn't contain any pollutants, unsafe water has not gone through a purification process. It carries contaminants — bacteria, viruses, fungi, minerals, or man-made chemicals — that can cause serious disease. Countries with the least access to safe water are among the poorest in the world and are located in Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. These nations visually lack the means to build or buy specialized machines that purify water. As a result, their populations are left with no other choice but to use unsanitary water.

Unsafe water remains the most common cause of sickness and death in poor countries. Illnesses due to bad water are called "water-related diseases." Diarrheal disease is the most serious one. It spreads through water infected with human or animal feces. Individuals become sick by drinking such water or eating food washed with it.

Diarrheal diseases affect mostly children, particularly children under the age of five. Every year, more than a million children die after being exposed to water infected with feces. In general, children are more vulnerable than adults to water-related diseases because children's bodies are not fully developed, so they have less resistance to serious illness. Also, in proportion to their weight, children eat more, drink more, and breathe more than adults do, making the contaminants swallowed or breathed in more dangerous.

What happens when children get sick? They miss school and the opportunity to learn. Later on, when they are grownups, they may have difficulty finding a good job. They'll get poorer, their families will get poorer, and their country will get poorer. And so on it goes.

But there is some good news. The world is now taking action. International aid organizations, including the United Nations and the World Bank, are lending money for projects that clean water in some of the poorest areas of the world. Aid groups have pledged to cut the number of people living with unclean water in half by 2015. One important way to achieve this objective is through education. Everyone needs to be aware of this worldwide problem, and everyone can be part of the solution. This includes you. Don't wait: Start spreading the news today.

PHOTO (COLOR): Clean water — plentiful here in the United States, but a rarity in too many places throughout the world.

PHOTO (COLOR): Dirty water carries diseases and is a primary source of health problems in many places.

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By Brigitte Aftalo-Calderon

Brigitte Aftalo-Calderon divides her time between the United States and France. Before becoming a writer, she worked for the World Bank, an international organization that specializes in lending money to poor countries.

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