



# A CLOSER LOOK: WATER & EDUCATION

BY STAN PATYRAK

It's 8 a.m. Do you know where your kids are?

If your kids are between the ages of 5 and 17, chances are they're sitting in a classroom—unless your kids go to Lorenzo Gorvie Memorial Secondary School in Sierra Leone.

On a good day, 700 kids attend this school, which was built just after the civil war ended in 2002. Gabriel Jonathan Kamara started teaching that first year. Gabriel is not only a teacher—he also runs the health and sanitation program at the school. He and the other teachers here have a problem that is poison to any educational system.

They can't keep the kids in class.

It's not that these kids skip school or that they get sent home for misbehavior. "Since our pump spoiled, we have no water at all," Gabriel says. "All day the kids look out the window looking on the busy road. When they see a street vendor selling water, the kids run out to buy and beg for water. We can't get them to stay."

The kids get water from vendors in 100 or 300 ml plastic baggies, each with its own price. Gabriel fears the traffic on the road, but more than that, he fears the water the kids are buying.



ABOUT HALF OF AMERICAN SCHOOL KIDS WILL MISS 1-5 DAYS OF SCHOOL A YEAR.

IN THE DEVELOPING WORLD, WATER-RELATED DISEASES REDUCE SCHOOL ATTENDANCE OVERALL BY NEARLY 20 PERCENT.

## DISEASE

This water is the other reason that the classrooms at Lorenzo Gorvie are never full. Diarrhea and typhoid take more kids out of school than any other cause. The kids don't know the source of the water they beg or buy. Based on the sickness he sees in the kids, Gabriel suspects the nearby river.

When this school had a working hand pump, every classroom had clean water. Without clean water, the school is losing students. Gabriel's school is not alone.

Children who suffer constant water-related diseases carry the disadvantages for the rest of their lives. Their poor health reduces cognitive potential and indirectly undermines schooling through attention deficits, absenteeism, and early drop-out. Water-related diseases cost an estimated 443 million school days each year.<sup>1</sup>

## SANITATION AND HYGIENE

Lorenzo Gorvie School's latrines were once adequate, although there are only five of them for 700 kids. "They stink," Gabriel says. He knows that simple maintenance would have kept them in much better shape, but explains, "We don't have water to wash the latrines." He's right. It turns out that the latrines began the decline into disrepair when the hand pump broke.

The deteriorating sanitation situation, caused by the absence of water, has had a devastating effect on the students—particularly the girls. Without proper sanitation facilities, the teachers of Lorenzo Gorvie have to send girls home when they menstruate. Gabriel shares that the girls are too shy to talk openly about their needs; when they complain about their stomachs, the teachers know to excuse them from class.

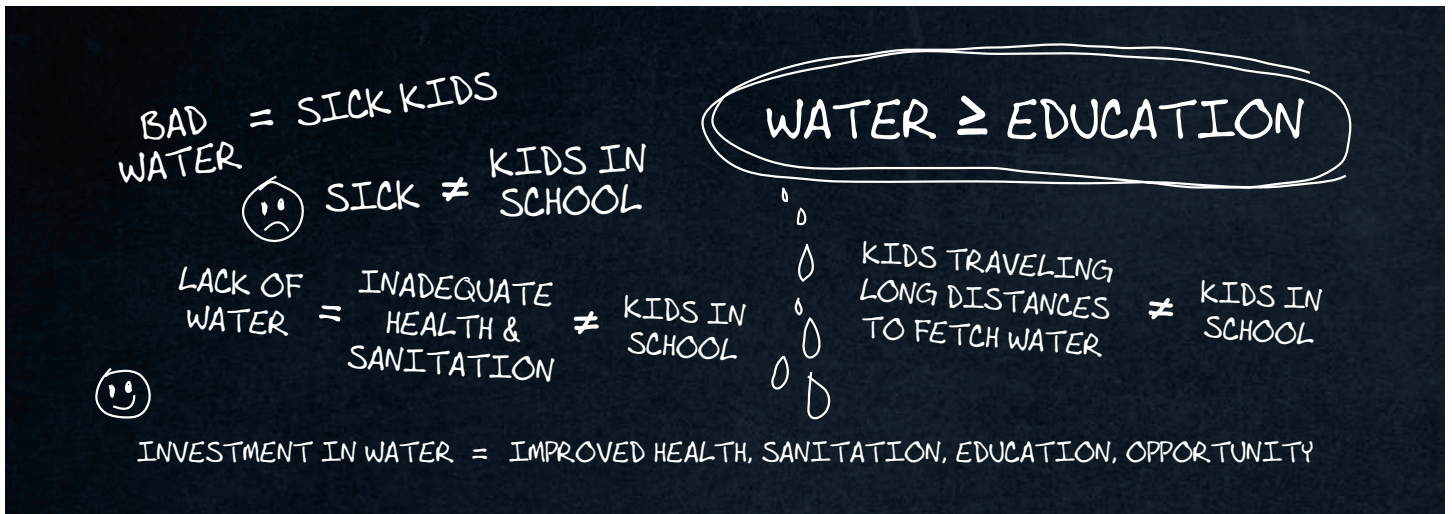
Lack of water and sanitation facilities also makes the recruitment of well-trained teachers difficult, which sometimes results in schools being closed for days or weeks at a time. The teachers who do accept posts in communities without water and sanitation face the same problems of water collection and disease as the pupils, and this affects the quality of their teaching and the amount of time they are able to dedicate to it.

Teachers know what they're up against. Gabriel, as the leader of Lorenzo Gorvie's health and sanitation program, understands more than most. UNICEF was recently in town to promote "Global Handwashing Day."

What on earth does a school without water do to promote hand-washing?

Gabriel explains: "We taught hand-washing—without water. The idea of hand-washing is... how do you say... an abstract thing without clean water."

*continued on back...*



### WALKING FOR WATER

It's not just illness that keeps kids out of school in the developing world. When households rely on water sources far from home, someone has to walk to collect it—a task that usually by necessity falls on the women and children of the family. Sometimes a water source is a hole in the ground, and that hole in the ground is half a day's walk away. This means that kids who could be in school spend their days collecting water.

Carrying heavy containers of water over long distances is not only physically stressful, but extremely time consuming. One of the most serious effects is that children do not have the time to attend school—they may not enroll at all, or they may be frequently absent.

In Tanzania, school attendance levels are 12 percent higher for girls in homes 15 minutes or less from a water source than for girls in homes an hour or more away. Attendance rates for boys are affected, too—but not as dramatically.<sup>2</sup>

### WATER ≥ EDUCATION

It's not that water is more important than education—it's foundational. Try to convince teachers in the developing world otherwise.

Educational opportunities linked to water have lifelong impacts

across generations. Education empowers women to participate in decision-making in their communities. Educated adults are more likely to have smaller, healthier families; their own children are less likely to die and more likely to receive education.

Just one additional year of schooling can earn individuals at least 10 percent higher wages. These earnings contribute to national economic growth. No country has ever achieved continuous and rapid growth without reaching an adult literacy rate of at least 40 percent.

With education, people are far better able to prevent disease and to use health services effectively. For instance, Africans who have completed primary education are half as likely to contract HIV as those who have little or no schooling.<sup>3</sup> This alone is a staggering fact, considering that almost two-thirds of individuals with AIDS live in Africa.

Gabriel Kamara might say, "Without clean water, education is how do you say... an abstract thing." 💧

1. UNDP Human Development Report 2006 – *Beyond Scarcity: Power, Poverty, and the Global Water Crisis*, p. 45. 2. *Ibid.*, p. 47. 3. "Education and the Developing World" – 2006, Center for Global Development, p. 1.

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**Left:** In India, an average of \$64 per year is spent per primary student in public education. In the U.S., it's about \$6,800. **Middle:** More than 150 million children in the developing world start school but do not complete four years; in Sub-Saharan Africa, only one in three who attend school complete a primary education.

**Right:** Gabriel Kamara stands proudly in front of the new handpump at Lorenzo Gorvie Memorial Secondary School.