

Safe Water: A Market-Based Approach

Health need

Safe drinking water is essential to good health. However, in resource-poor settings, water often comes from unsafe sources and carries deadly pathogens. The World Health Organization estimates that 1.1 billion people lack access to improved water supplies, and 1.8 million people—nearly 5,000 children a day—die each year from preventable diarrheal diseases; many of these deaths are attributed to unsafe water.

Various products exist today to treat and safely store water. Yet, according to international experts, less than 1 percent of those without access to improved water supplies are being reached with current efforts to promote household water treatment and storage (HWTS). Clearly, the scale of the problem is far beyond what current efforts can handle.

Technology solution

Commercial markets supply low-income consumers in the developing world with household goods such as soap, food items, and basic commodities. PATH understands that HWTS products can be successfully marketed and sold to these consumers in a similar way for positive health outcomes.

Market-based solutions offer a number of potential advantages. In general, the private sector is more nimble and innovative, has greater resources, is more responsive to consumer preferences, and has the potential for sustainability and scalability without ongoing subsidies. Through the Safe Water Project, PATH has worked to catalyze and facilitate new partnerships and approaches to selling HWTS products to low-income consumers. Partners can now take these initiatives to scale—independent of PATH—and the marketplace will make them sustainable. These established market products and infrastructure are ready to be used in a coordinated manner by nongovernmental organizations and the public sector to cost-effectively provide products to the poorest of the poor, ultimately leading to a greater overall impact on health.

Current status and results

Four user-driven PATH-improved products are being carried forward by private-sector partners, including two water treatment elements and two HWTS gravity-fed devices. One improved HWTS device is already being sold in Cambodia. Several successes based on our market-based distribution models are ready to be scaled in Cambodia and India and to be replicated in new countries. PATH also continues to refine tools to support our distribution partners around sales recruiting and training, active monitoring, and encouragement of sound enterprise operating principles.

The Safe Water Project activities, funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, are wrapping up and the results of this five-year learning initiative will be disseminated throughout 2012. PATH and our partners are moving forward with the most successful of our product, distribution, financing, sales and operational approaches and seeking funding for replication in new settings. PATH is actively cultivating public-sector partnerships to complement the role of the private sector in meeting the universal need for safe drinking water.



Hydrologic

A household water and safe storage device developed with and for low-income families.

Through the Safe Water Project, PATH has worked to catalyze and facilitate new partnerships and approaches to selling household water treatment and safe storage products to low-income consumers.

Availability

For more information regarding this project, contact Glenn Austin at gaustin@path.org.

Donor support

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