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Ghana, Factor 9: Water and Sanitation

### **Ghana: Helping To Provide Clean water**

Here's a little job for you: walk into your kitchen, get a glass, fill it with water from your faucet, and take a drink. You didn't get sick, did you? No worms coming out of your skin? Some people can't say the same. The subject of contaminated water is a very world renowned topic in developing countries. This problem could be solved by simply cleaning the water that is contaminated and then taking measures one step farther to make sure it stays that way. But is it really that easy?

The small country of Ghana, located on West Africa's Gulf of Guinea, is not lacking a substantial amount of water..But is in dire need of clean water. According to Water.org, although nearly eighty percent of people have access to safe water, less than thirteen percent have access to improved sanitation. With this in mind remember that unsafe water is much more common in rural areas so the number of people with availability to improved water decreases even more significantly. Many times the most available source of water is a man-made trench that fills with rain during the rainy seasons.

Ghanaweb.com says that the average Ghanaian household consists of 5.1 people. Also, 38.7 percent of these people are children under the age of fifteen. The life expectancy at birth of the total population is 65.32 years. The average farm size in Ghana is three hectares which is equivalent to about seven acres. The primary crops in this country include cocoa, beans, oil, palm, cotton, bananas, pineapples, and tomatoes. One of the main problems in this country is the water sanitation.

Ghana has experienced one of the world's most successful changes to multiparty democracy. It's economy is the sixth-largest in Africa and one of the fastest growing in the world. Ghana also has the tenth highest per capita income on the continent of Africa. (European Business Organization) The country has held six elections since 1992 and power has been transferred from the government to the opposing factions twice. The providing of basic services, especially in education and health, has dramatically improved in the small country. With this improved government system you would think that getting decent drinking water would be a small problem. But it's not that simple. According to Water Aid America there are more than 9 million people that still do not have access to clean drinking water. That is one-third of the country's 27 million people. Although this may seem like a small fraction something must be done to farther lower the number of people without clean water. There has been incredible change in Ghana concerning health conditions and medical practices, even so, it is very evident that democracy here is far from perfect, and there are many challenges yet to be addressed. The topic of water contamination may be discussed but actions have not been taken far enough to completely eliminate this dilemma yet.

So you may ask, if they are doing so much better as a country then why is it so hard to get clean water to its people? Most people in Ghana rely almost completely on surface water which contain flatworms and other parasitic organisms. Communities in Ghana lack basic training in maintaining wells and other systems that well-intentioned organizations have provided. Lack of sanitation and problems with hygiene frequently contaminate the only available water. These people are unintentionally making matters worse without even realizing it.

Diarrheal disease is a very deadly and very commonly reported illness across the country of Ghana and is responsible for numerous deaths of children under five. The most common causes of diarrheal disease are Rotavirus (RV), Shingella Salmonella, Cryptosporidium app, Salmonella, Campylobacter jejune, and Escherichia coli.

The Ghana Water Company, the public water utility, at one point provided water to about half of the country's population. Sadly this company started losing money due to unpaid bills and illegal connections. This resulted in repairs being put on hold and also ceased further extension of the system. By the year 2005 it was estimated that the Ghana Water Company had lost half of their daily delivery through leaks in old pipes.

Although this negatively affects the country there is still hope for the people of Ghana. Ghana has recently become the first African country to introduce vaccines for both pneumococcal and rotavirus at the same time. This simultaneously takes care of the two leading causes of childhood deaths- pneumonia and diarrhea.

Along with these horrible illnesses, something else is threatening the lives of Ghana's people. Dracunculiasis, also known as "Guinea worm disease" is a deadly parasite found in thirteen countries in sub-Saharan Africa, one of which is Ghana. This disease is caused by a nematode or flatworm called *Dracunculus medinensis*. This parasite infects small Crustaceans, known as Cyclops that are water dwelling. Humans consume the water in which they dwell and if it is unfiltered it may contain infected water fleas, or guinea larvae, that cause the sickness. Once you have consumed them these larvae turn into worms which grow and thrive inside your body. The worm stays in your body for about a year and then emerges slowly, for weeks until it is completely out. The guinea worms makes its way out of your body by coming through your skin. It wiggles its way out of painful blisters that incapacitate and sometimes even cripple their victim. If a person is infected with this parasite and immerses their blisters in water that water becomes infected and the worm is free to release new larvae there and continue its life cycle, infecting other people that use this water. When infected with this pest you experience pain in that area as well as swelling and a fever. Most worms come out of the feet or somewhere on the leg. This problem has been surprisingly rapidly diminishing in big thanks to former U.S. President Jimmy Carter, who led a twenty-two-year eradication campaign with the Atlanta-based Carter Center. At one time villagers thought Guinea worm disease was caused by witchcraft, or by eating spoiled meat, but they now understand the origin of the parasite that has tormented them for thousands of years.

Ghana's varied geography also plays a small role in water availability. It includes forests, cave systems, springs, mountains, nature reserves, estuaries, and savannas making obtaining water more difficult in some circumstances. Also cultural beliefs and different views encourage people to not use latrines in rural areas. This does not help the matter of contamination in the country.

I believe that to get those almost one billion people clean water we must continue our work with the Carter Center. To do our part back here in the U.S. We can sponsor children in Ghana, help missionaries and medical workers by fundraising with them, send a Carter Center e-card or journey to the field with the Carter Center. Also local fundraisers could be done by churches, schools, and communities to send money to Ghana to help with water sanitation needs. Water.org has done thier part educating and encouraging the people of Ghana to better their sanitation by using latrines. We can do our part by getting local and national banks to sponsor Ghanaian families and mission workers. I feel we can aid the country in more ways than one. Working with organizations like The Orphan Grain Train my community can also help the people of Ghana with water and sanitation. We can help by raising money and sending missionaries. Families can partake in spare change collections such as with the Ronald McDonald House Charities and Lutheran Women's Missionary League. I believe that nationwide if we all band together as a country the U.S. can solve this problem by the end of 2015. But this problem should not only be addressed by the U.S.. We can better inform the people of Ghana so they are better able to help themselves. If we assist Ghanaians by further educating them on the severity of this problem they themselves can work together with companies like Water -Aid America which has been working with eight local development partners since 1985. Projects for water sanitation and hygiene education are

currently carried out in six of the ten regions in Ghana. This helps to improve sanitation for some of the poorest Ghanaians and helps to improve access to clean water. according to [wateraid.org](http://wateraid.org) community-led systems and solutions are being put in place to aid local communities and their people so they are better able to help themselves make their way out of poverty.

So, the next time you get a glass and fill it with water from the faucet think of the more than 9 million people that do not have clean water and may not even have a faucet, and remember how lucky you are. Then take initiative and do your part in getting all third world countries clean drinking water.

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