

Play Pumps: Clean drinking water through harnessing the power of play.

For many remote communities in sub-Saharan Africa water, often of dubious quality has to be transported daily from the nearest river or stream. Hauling water to drink, wash and cook with is a chore primarily undertaken by women and girls.

It has been estimated that half the people in developing countries are suffering from water-related diseases; diseases that are responsible for about 80 per cent of all sickness in the world. Each year 4 billion cases of diarrhoea per year cause 2.2 million deaths. The solution – clean, fresh drinking water – may be taken for granted in developed nations but remote communities lack the access to both water and the engineering support which could help them to access water through a well.

Innovative Technology

A life-changing and life-saving invention – the PlayPump water system has been developed by an NGO registered in South Africa with a US based sister organisation. The innovative PlayPump water system provides easy access to clean drinking water and has directly led to improved health, and indirectly addressed issues of education, gender equality, and economic development.

Through the unique idea of using the power of children at play the PlayPump systems doubles as a water pump and a roundabout for children.

Pumps are situated close to local schools and while children have fun spinning on the roundabout, clean water is pumped from an underground well into a 2,500-litre tank which stands seven meters above the ground. The installation process is straightforward. A team of engineers can install the pre-fabricated pump system often within a single day. The technology used is simple and can be maintained on site by those with basic mechanical skills.



Photo: Fimmel Smith

The design of the PlayPump water system makes it highly effective, easy to operate and very economical, keeping costs and maintenance to an absolute minimum.

A simple tap makes it easy for adults or children to draw water. And any excess water is diverted from the storage tank back down into the borehole.

Communicating Messages

The water storage tank provides a rare opportunity to advertise in remote communities. All four sides of the tank are leased as billboards, with two sides for consumer advertising and the other two sides for health and educational messages. The revenue generated by this unique model pays for pump maintenance.

Community Benefit

While the health benefits of a clean water supply are obvious, other benefits flow from the PlayPump water system. Children are playing and staying in school instead of hauling water. Women benefit too, as they no longer have the daily task of transporting heavy containers of water over great distances, and they can use the time saved to better care for their children and start small enterprises that bring additional food and income to their families.

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