



Sale of locally produced water filters in Ethiopia.

World Water Day

Clean drinking water for everyone? You can, with filters

Everyone drinks water, but half of the world's population does not drink clean water. The solution is simple, say two experienced water experts: filters. They are safe and affordable.

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Fuss in the supermarket. In Apeldoorn, there was literally a fight over bottles of water when the poo bacteria e-coli was found in the drinking water last autumn. Supplier Vitens advised boiling the tap water for three minutes, but tens of thousands of households opted for bottled water until the problem was solved after ten days.

Advertentie

"Half of the world's population lives permanently in an Apeldoorn situation," says Sjef Ernes. Clean and safe tap water is unfeasible in large parts of Africa and Asia, and not even always here in Europe, explains his companion Henk Holtslag. Then the water from the tap must be purified at home. The World Health Organization (WHO) has been advocating this since 2007.

Ernes is a former director of the Aqua for all foundation and Holtslag was involved in clean drinking water all his life as a development worker. On World Water Day (22 March), the two experienced 'water men' - Ernes is a former director of the Aqua for all foundation and Holtslag was also a lifelong development worker working on clean drinking water - draw attention to their plan to help at least the poorest quarter of the world's population get clean water with the help of water filters.



Advertentie

Because a water filter is more efficient than boiling, UV purification or the addition of chlorine, the two know. "Everyone can have safe drinking water with a good filter," says Holtslag. "Even here in the Netherlands, it is advised to put it in an emergency kit." But not everyone can afford a filter, and filters are not easy to get everywhere.

Subsidy for the poorest of the poor

With a simple idea, which can be applied thousands of times worldwide, that problem can be solved, Ernes and Holtslag think. It's about raising awareness and strengthening the distribution chain. For the poorest of the poor, a small subsidy in the form of a voucher is needed to buy a filter. That voucher boosts the market, according to a trial in Malawi. Giving away for free would actually distort the market, Holtslag explains. "Once you get used to it, you buy a new filter element, but it has to be for sale in the area, you don't have to travel to the city for it."

Buying a new filter should be the same as new batteries for your radio, Ernes adds. "It is now often easier to sell cigarettes or spirits than a water filter." To change this, an investment is needed, as a subsidy for the poorest of the poor, to help the production of filters start and to promote the importance of safe drinking water.

Advertentie

To help the poorest 2 billion people with safe drinking water, 8 billion dollars is needed, Ernes and Holtslag calculated, who therefore gave their model the name *2with8*. That seems like a lot of money, but it is only a futile amount compared to the expenditure

on infrastructure and treatment plants that are needed and are not forthcoming. "With 10 percent of the Dutch budget for development aid, we can already help one or two countries, and you get other countries on board when they see that it works," says Holtslag.

Voorbeeldproject

In Ethiopië is dat al te zien, vertelt Ernes. "We hebben daar enkele drinkwaterbedrijven en filterleveranciers bij elkaar gebracht. dat is niet makkelijk want geen enkel leidingbedrijf vindt het leuk om te zeggen dat zijn drinkwater niet veilig is. Maar het is gelukt en zo is het voorbeeldproject in Ethiopië een succesverhaal geworden."

De impact van veilig drinkwater is gigantisch, zegt Ernes. "Het heeft een onmiddellijke impact op de volksgezondheid, maar ook op het inkomen van mensen die niet kunnen werken als ze ziek zijn. En op kinderen die naar school kunnen in plaats van eropuit om water te halen."

Advertentie

Holtslag en Ernes bedachten hun plan een paar jaar geleden, tijdens de Stockholm World Water Week, en presenteerden het in 2023 in New York op de VN-Waterconferentie die Nederland samen met Tadzjikistan voorzat. Holtslag gaf ook tijdens de waterconferentie in Oeganda, een maand geleden, uitleg over het model. Met een verwijzing naar Apeldoorn. "We zijn trots op de waterkwaliteit in Nederland", zegt Ernes. "Iedereen die flessenwater drinkt, wil geflest worden, zeg ik altijd. Maar ook wij zijn kwetsbaar."

Lees ook:

Genoeg water in Nederland, en toch kan schoon drinkwater straks schaars zijn

Apeldoorn zit nog tot volgende week met vervuild drinkwater. De besmetting met de poepbacterie e-coli legt de kwetsbaarheid bloot van