

Six ways to fix up a well and get clean water

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November 21, 2018 Posted by [Chris Hufstader](#)



A woman operates a bore hole water pump, which the women of the Fala village Saving for Change group helped repair by contributing money its members had saved, Wednesday, March 11, 2009. (Rebecca Blackwell/Oxfam America)

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Oxfam helps communities around the world fix up their wells and learn how to treat their drinking water to avoid water-borne diseases. It's particularly important during times when people are short on food, due to bad harvests following drought, floods, or any sort of humanitarian emergency. This was the case [in Senegal in 2011 and 2012, when Oxfam's program helped farmers recover from a drought and bad harvest in 2011](#). Oxfam delivered some cash to help farmers buy food, but we also helped them to address water and sanitation and hygiene, all closely linked to malnutrition — because if you have a stomach ailment from drinking bad water, you won't benefit from the nutrition derived from what food you can find.

1: Protect the top



Build a wall around the top of the well, with a reinforced concrete drainage apron around it. This will prevent surface water running into the well; particularly important where there are animal droppings around.

2: Reduce turbidity



A well near Ayetoro-Ijesa village, Nigeria. Photo by George Osodi/Panos.

If a well is serving up cloudy, muddy water, it may have too much silt at the bottom. Send an intrepid digger down there with a shovel to dig out the silt and debris, then put a layer of gravel at the bottom of the well. The gravel will keep the silt down, and when someone drops a bucket on a rope down to the bottom of the well it will be less likely to scoop up silt as well as water.

3: Disinfect



Local health promoters maintained and replenished the chlorine solution in the dispensers. They also trained people how to use the dispensers and promoted good hygiene. Jean Basset / Oxfam America

Scrub down the sides of the well with a chlorine solution to kill microbes that can make people sick. Disinfect the well water by temporarily adding a strong chlorine solution (removed before the well goes back into operation).

4: Cover it



Staff from Oxfam's partner FODDE in Kolda, Senegal, looking at a well in need of rehabilitation. Photo by Holly Pickett/Oxfam America

Install a reinforced concrete cover over the top of the well to keep anything from falling in and polluting the water.

5: Install a pump



Village residents fetch water from a communal pump in Faloumbou, Senegal. (Photo: Rebecca Blackwell)

This will make it easier to draw water, *if* a community can afford to maintain a pump (not always the case—pumps break down and take money, time, and spare parts to repair). Oxfam is introducing a variety of pumps, including locally manufactured and easily maintained rope pumps. A pump piping water up from the bottom of the well takes away the possibility of infecting water with a dirty bucket or rope.

6: Treat the water



Treating water with bleach in the village of Yongoya in eastern Senegal. Photo by Holly Pickett/Oxfam America.

In eastern Senegal, Oxfam distributed hygiene kits that included bleach – just a capful in a 10-liter container will kill bugs that make people sick. In the southern region near Kolda, Oxfam also installed special dispensers near the wells that dole out a pre-measured portion of a chlorine solution that will safely treat a container of well water. Oxfam works with communities to solve drinking water problems in emergencies because water-borne diseases can be devastating especially for malnourished children. But we also work on water and sanitation and irrigation in our long-term programs.

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Clean water can mean the difference between health and sickness, or even life and death. Help provide a community with buckets, chlorine dispensers, and other essentials. [Donate now](#)

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