

# Why building more clinics won't achieve global health:



## Health is just the tip of the iceberg.

We have made great advances in medical knowledge and technology. Yet each year, almost 6 million children still die, mostly from preventable diseases. Lack of education about hygiene, poor nutrition, and a shortage of trained medical staff create a situation where preventable diseases can spread out of control, like in the [Ebola crisis of 2014 and 2015](#). Women tend to have even less education, and may not be allowed to see a doctor without a man present because of cultural customs. If she can see a doctor, poor roads can make it difficult to get to a clinic, if she can afford the fees once she gets there.

Addressing the root causes of poor health, including gender inequality, unequal access to services, and human rights issues is a more sustainable way to ensure good health for everyone, both locally and globally. Here's how:

### Equality and Power

Governments in developing countries often don't have the money to invest in clinics and doctors, partly because international companies haven't paid their fair share of taxes to their host countries. In some cases, governments have even been told to cut back on healthcare if they want to receive certain international loans. Years of under-funding and wage freezes in healthcare led to trained medical staff leaving to work in developed countries.

If the money lost through tax-dodging were spent on strengthening local health systems, we would be much closer to achieving accessible healthcare for everyone, regardless of social class, income, race, or gender.

### Healthy Ecosystems

Clean, safe water is the building block of life as we know it. Pollution from industry and from human waste is a major source of contaminated drinking water that causes sickness. More than 1/3 of people on our shared planet don't have access to sanitation facilities, putting them at greater risk. As with many issues, those already experiencing poverty are most impacted.

By working to protect water sources, and to ensure clean water and sanitation services in every community, we can strengthen healthy systems that create healthy people.

## **Partnerships and Solidarity**

Medicine is a big portion of health costs in developing countries. One way to make medicines more affordable is through global partnerships that encourage sharing knowledge to create cheap medicines, rather than brand name ones to be sold for big profits. Locally, social stigmas and misinformation around diseases like HIV/AIDS often prevent people from getting the treatment they need.

Learning about others and breaking down social barriers within and across borders is another important way to help tackle health challenges at their source.

## **Dignity and Human Rights**

Health, including clean water, sanitation, and medical services is a fundamental human right. By working for human rights and supporting governments and community projects that put power in the hands of people, we are helping people to claim their own health rights, rather than making decisions for others.

As women face more challenges accessing essential health services than men, working for women's rights and education is another powerful way to tackle local and global health challenges.

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## **Women's Rights and Health in Afghanistan**

SCIC Member: [Presbyterian World Service & Development](#)

Years of conflict, drought and limited access to health care services make it difficult for vulnerable families in Afghanistan to grow enough food, improve their health, attend school or escape the cycle of poverty. This is especially true for women and girls.

In Afghanistan, mothers and children face some of the greatest challenges to survival found anywhere in the world. Health services across the country are uneven: pervasive socio-cultural, physical, and economic barriers impede the delivery of basic health-care. In addition, there is a lack of basic infrastructure, making physical access difficult.

[Presbyterian World Service & Development](#) is working with Community World Service-Asia (CWS-Asia) to address these challenges through innovative and sustainable development programs that improve farming practices, break down barriers to girls education and increase access to maternal health services.

“Women are happy with the maternal health services that have started here,” shares Amina, a twenty-eight year old expecting mother visiting a new health facility in Afghanistan. “People are usually unable to afford proper health services and have to travel long distances [to receive medical attention].” Thanks to the program, health services, including supplies and trained midwives and birth attendants, are now more easily accessible. Amina and other women in the community have also been taught about family planning, proper hygiene and the benefits of breastfeeding and nutrition.

PWS&D is working with CWS-Asia to improve the quality of mother and child health services and overcome cultural barriers that prevent women from receiving essential pre and postnatal care. Delivery rooms are being established and upgraded, and birth attendants receive training about how to deliver babies safely. Communities also learn about the importance of maternal health, nutrition, hygiene, family planning and the benefits of breast-feeding.

Girls’ education provides the opportunity for girls to overcome gender inequality and gain the skills to one day obtain employment, decrease poverty and contribute to the peaceful development of their country’s future. Educating religious leaders, parents and community members about the importance of sending children, especially girls, to school is essential to gain their support and increase attendance rates. Specialized trainings for teachers include sessions on child rights, gender, peace education and improved teaching methods, which foster a nurturing learning environment for girl students.

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*PWS&D works with international partners to carry out long-term community development programs that empower vulnerable people to overcome root causes of poverty and create lasting change. We undertake holistic programs in the areas of food security, livelihoods, health and human rights.*

*Human Rights: Working with partners in [Afghanistan](#), [Guatemala](#), [Ghana](#), and [India](#), PWS&D is responding to situations where women, youth and marginalized people are too frequently treated as second-class citizens, lacking access to basic human rights and freedoms. Through programs with local partners, women, children, and indigenous peoples are learning about their rights and working together to protect and defend themselves.*