

PlayPumps: A New Invention Turns Work into Play

For kids in many rural parts of Africa, the colorful PlayPump is the first playground equipment they've ever seen. When they give a push and jump onboard for their first ride, smiles of wonder break out on their faces.

The fun of whirling in a circle is just part of the amazement. This incredible invention doesn't just change their playtime, it changes their lives.

As the merry-go-round spins, it pumps clean water up from deep underground and stores it in a huge tank. People are welcome to come and help themselves to the water.

In rural Africa, clean water is a luxury. Most people don't have plumbing in their homes. Instead, they often must walk long distances to wells and haul heavy containers of water back.

Patricia Molohe, 17, explains that before her South African village got a PlayPump, people would pay a taxi driver to take them to a far-off well. "Sometimes the taxi drivers were busy, and we would have to go without bathing in order to save our water. It was too far to walk there. But now we have our own clean water in our village, and life is better."

The exhausting chore of carrying water traditionally falls to women and girls. Hauling water for miles—and hours—each day is such a big job, it sometimes prevents girls from being able to attend school.

Thanks to the PlayPump, getting water is quick and easy—and even boys join in. The pumps have become a center of social activity where kids and adults gather to visit while collecting water.

Two sides of each tank carry educational messages that remind people about good health practices like battling germs through hand-washing. The other two sides carry advertisements, which help pay for the pump's upkeep.

So far, more than 800 PlayPumps are operating in schools and communities in four African countries, providing water for almost two million people. The pumps are made by a South African company called Outdoor Fabrication and

Steelworks. Another company, Roundabout Outdoor, trains local teams who maintain the pumps. Each system costs U.S. \$14,000.

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Twelve-year-old Siyabulisiwe Khumalo lives in a South African community called Diepsloot. She says, “I have seen many kinds of water pumps where I grew up in the farmlands, but never one that stores the water. When I grow up, I want to be an inventor so I can invent clever things like the PlayPump that will help my community.”

Fast Facts:

- Many toilets use more water in one flush than most rural families in Africa have for one day of cleaning, cooking, drinking, and bathing.
- The average distance an African villager must walk to a water source is five miles (eight kilometers).
- A five-gallon (19-liter) container can weigh about 40 pounds (18 kilograms), and many women and girls suffer injuries carrying so much weight every day.
- A child dies somewhere in the world every 15 seconds from a water-borne illness.
- The PlayPump can pump up to 370 gallons (1,400 liters) of clean water an hour.