

# PATH's Safe Water Project

## Partnerships for commercialization of household water treatment

### Safe drinking water: an essential human need

Safe drinking water is essential to good health. However, in resource-poor settings, water often comes from unsafe sources and carries deadly pathogens. The World Health Organization estimates that 1.8 million people die each year from diarrheal diseases, many of which are attributed to unsafe water. Safe drinking water is one of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals—by 2015, the United Nations hopes to decrease the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water by 50 percent.

Household water treatment and safe storage (HWTS) systems are among the most simple, acceptable, affordable, and effective methods of getting safe drinking water to people who need it. If they can be provided at a reasonable cost and with education and service to low-income populations, more people will have access to safe water. They will also be more likely to use HWTS systems correctly and consistently, thereby reducing disability, illness, and death related to unsafe water.

### A unique learning initiative

For years, governments and charities have been reaching low-income communities with household water treatment systems, but they have found that the cost of these programs is large and ongoing, and scalability is very difficult. Through the Safe Water Project, PATH is seeking complementary solutions to sustainability and scale-up by exploring the potential for commercial enterprises to produce, distribute, sell, and maintain HWTS consumer products to low-income populations.

If the approach shows promise, it may offer families one more way to improve the quality of their drinking water.

### Innovation grounded in research

During the five-year lifespan of the project, PATH and its collaborators will test the effectiveness of several



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PATH is developing a commercial market in India for household technologies that treat water.

commercial strategies for providing HWTS to low-income consumers. PATH will also work with companies to develop new, more affordable technologies for low-income households based on its understanding of user needs in developing countries. At the end of the project, in 2011, PATH will provide strategies and tools for replication and/or scale-up and reflections on how well or poorly different strategies worked in specific settings. PATH will initially model, implement, and evaluate these products and strategies in India and on a limited basis in Cambodia and will undertake focused formative research in several other countries, including Vietnam.

Commercial markets offer growth potential and may be a viable model for selling HWTS products that are appropriate and affordable for low-income populations. The potential of the commercial market has been demonstrated in recent years through private-sector marketing mechanisms, industrial capacity, and sales and service networks for other consumer products in

developing countries. Commercial markets currently supply consumers at the base of the economic pyramid (BOP) with household goods such as soap, food items, and basic commodities. PATH's learning to date has revealed that HWTS products have the potential to be provided to many BOP consumers in this same way.

### Iterative learning

Now in the third year of this five-year project, PATH's partners are developing and rolling out market models in India and Cambodia based on the information gathered and the strategies developed together with PATH in the first two years of the project. Models of current interest include:

- Bicycle entrepreneurs: promoting and selling water purification tablets to low-income rural populations at weekly markets and to local shops.
- Microfinance institutions: providing financing and access to durable products to their client base for personal use.
- Direct sales: offering a choice of products through women to their surrounding community.

The aim behind these models is to demonstrate mechanisms to distribute and market safe HWTS

products to consumers in a price range appropriate for initial purchase and continued use. Project partners are also identifying and testing new HWTS products to improve on the product offering.

### Collaborative partnerships

This learning initiative was launched with support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation through its Global Development Program. As with all PATH projects, collaboration and partnership are key to the success and sustainability of our work. PATH will work closely with:

- Commercial partners to refine product design, manufacturing, distribution, promotion, and financing.
- Research institutions to develop programmatic evaluation criteria, test products, and gain knowledge on safe water needs of low-income households.
- Other nonprofit and nongovernmental organizations to find synergies in reaching target consumers, learn from their experience implementing and studying safe water initiatives, and share information derived from this project.
- Governments and policy-setting bodies to ensure that solutions are useful and sustainable in their constituent communities.

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## About PATH

PATH is an international, nonprofit organization that creates sustainable, culturally relevant solutions, enabling communities worldwide to break longstanding cycles of poor health. By collaborating with diverse public- and private-sector partners, PATH helps provide appropriate health technologies and vital strategies that change the way people think and act. PATH's work improves global health and well-being.



### For more information

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