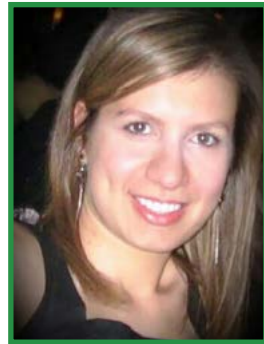


# Drowning: How Can NGOs Act?



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Drowning is defined as a process resulting in primary respiratory impairment from submersion in a liquid medium. The presence of liquid-air interface at the entrance of the victim's airway prevents the breathing of oxygen. **Drowning is usually silent and quick.** The immediate threats of drowning are the effect on the cardiovascular system and the central nervous system and the first actions to take in the management of drowning are the correction of hypoxemia and acidosis.

Drowning is a major public health issue worldwide. Around 372,000 people worldwide die annually from drowning. In the United States, drowning is the sixth leading cause of accidental death for people of all ages and the second leading cause of death for children aged 1 to 14 years old. 95% of the drowning incidents occur in Asia where two third of the world children live. In some countries of the Asian continent such as Bangladesh, Cambodia, Thailand and China, drowning has become the leading cause of death with more than 100 children dying from drowning every day. Drowning rates are 10 to 20 times higher in developing countries compared to more developed countries.

**Drowning is preventable.** Drowning prevention activities such as teaching kids the basics and techniques of swimming and informing them about the risks of water activities can significantly lower drowning rates and save lives.

The magnitude and gravity of drowning worldwide is

such that prevention campaigns and initiatives must be initiated, implemented and enforced as soon as possible.

Non Governmental Organizations can be a major role player in the prevention of drowning incidents worldwide by collaborating with both Governments and private sectors. Swimming teaching to school children and adults is very important but represents only one part of drowning prevention which is wide and includes, among others:

- Awareness campaigns and education on water safety targeting mainly school children but also educators, parents.
- Enforcement of safety measures at the beaches and swimming resorts (presence of trained and qualified lifeguards, toddlers' supervision...)
- Installing barriers on water (cover home swimming pools and wells, limit access to open water sources).



Fig.1. First Aid in Drowning

NGOs can also work on post drowning rescue programs. In other words, spreading knowledge and practice on first aid intervention when encountering a drowning victim can save lives. As mentioned earlier, drowning is quick so the earlier the intervention and the rescue, the faster and easier is the recovery (Fig.1)

In Lebanon, where drowning is a challenging public



Fig.2. LASIP reminding swimmers about the decision of Sidon's municipality.

health problem with many cases of drowning reported yearly, the Lebanese Association for Sport Injuries Prevention (LASIP), an NGO specialized in sport safety promotion and in designing and implementing interventions for injury prevention in all kinds of sports is conducting awareness campaigns on drowning and on the safety of swimming. An example of their activities is the publishing on their website of news and updates about risks of swimming in Lebanon (Fig.2)

In conclusion, NGOs are important players for awareness raising about drowning but let's not forget the importance of effective policies and the need for each country to develop a national water safety strategy that "can raise awareness of safety around water, build consensus around solutions, provide strategic direction and a framework to guide multisectoral action and allow for monitoring and evaluation of efforts" (WHO report, updated May 2017). Drowning could be a nightmare, particularly where regulations and accountability are not enforced.

