

FACT SHEET ON SANITATION AND HYGIENE

- Worldwide, over 2.6 billion people, or 40 per cent of the world's population, lack basic sanitation facilities and more than 1.1 billion people have no access to a safe water supply. The consequences of this neglect are staggering: 1.6 million deaths per year, including some 4,500 children dying every day from diarrhoea and other water-, sanitation-and hygiene-related diseases.
- According to WHO and UNICEF, diarrhoeal disease is the biggest killer of children in the developing world and 90 per cent of deaths from diarrhoea today occur in children under five. Improved drinking water and sanitation services and better hygiene behaviour especially by mothers are crucial in cutting child mortality.
- Children, especially girls in Africa and Asia, are missing school because they do not have adequate drinking water in their homes or access to safe, separate school latrines for girls and boys. The lack of education marginalizes children and reduces their future chances of self-improvement and participation in society.
- There is emerging evidence linking better hand-washing practices with reduced incidence of water-borne diseases. Programmes that combine improved sanitation and hand-washing facilities in schools with hygiene education can improve the health of children for life. Where properly integrated into wider community initiatives, school-based programmes also promote positive change in communities as a whole.
- Women and girls usually bear the burden of hauling water from long distances and the lack of sanitation facilities in their homes make them vulnerable to violence and sexual assaults, posing risks to their personal safety and dignity. According to a new evidence report published by the Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council (WSSCC), women and girls in low-income countries spend 40 billion hours every year fetching and carrying water from sources which are often far away and may not, after all, provide clean water. It is also estimated that women can spend eight hours a day carrying up to 40 kilos of water on their heads or hips, stunting their growth or causing physical damage.
- Women have a key role in the smooth running of water supply and sanitation schemes, including an active role in maintenance and ongoing repairs. A good example is India's first slum with sanitation facilities in Tiruchirappalli where the NGO Gramalaya provides slum communities with safe drinking water through hand-pumps and the construction of community and household toilets, including child-friendly latrines. Working through local women's self-help groups, which are made aware of the need to use and maintain toilets, women in the Sanitation and Hygiene Education group are responsible for maintenance and repairs. As a result, open defecation has completely stopped in the area and the project has been extended to seven slums.
- Studies have shown that empowering women brings about multiple benefits. Group initiatives led by women are an effective way of transmitting key water, sanitation and hygiene messages, which bring about radical changes in their environment. The Nagarata Women's Group in Bauchi State, Nigeria, works closely with women in the delivery of water, sanitation and hygiene education for the communities. The hygiene component of the intervention has meant that women are now aware of basic hygiene practices and living conditions have become healthier, children are better nourished and cared for and mortality rates have fallen. Women are also involved in income-generation by making and selling soap.

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