

1 in 3 women lack access to safe toilets

A briefing from WaterAid

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Key findings

- More than 1 in 3 (1.25 billion) women in the world lack access to safe sanitation.¹ Of these, 526 million women have no choice but to go to the toilet out in the open.²
- A lack of sanitation puts women at risk of shame, disease, harassment and even attack. Decent toilets would make their lives safer and healthier.
- Women and girls living without any toilets spend 97 billion hours each year finding a place to go.³
- Every day, around 2,000 mothers lose a child due to diarrhoea caused by a lack of access to safe toilets and clean water.⁴
- A new poll commissioned by WaterAid reveals that 40% of women in the slums of Lagos, Nigeria, have no toilets and are forced to defecate outside. A quarter of these had either first or second hand experience of harassment, a threat of violence or actual assault in the last 12 months.⁵
- 67% of the women interviewed in Lagos stated that they did not feel safe when using a shared or community toilet in a public place.⁶
- At current rates of progress, it will be over 165 years before Sub-Saharan Africa meets its sanitation MDG target, and another 350 years to get to universal access.⁷
- For South Asia it will be over 25 years before it meets its sanitation MDG target, and nearly 70 years to get universal access at current rates of progress.⁸
- Since 1990, around 900 million women and girls have gained access to safe sanitation facilities, while over a billion have gained access to clean drinking water.⁹

Pictures, case studies, a video news release and radio news release (including b-roll and interviews) can be found here <http://assetbank.wateraid.org/assetbank-wateraid/action/viewLogin>
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Case studies



Sandimhia Renato, 18, Mozambique

Sandimhia Renato is 18 years old and lives in Quelimanie, Northern Mozambique, with her one-year old baby Diani. Sandimhia’s family has no access to a toilet. She walks 15 minutes everyday to defecate in the bush, having to cross a dangerous bridge where she knows women are attacked at night.

“Sometimes when I go I feel ashamed and go back without defecating. Sometimes I wait until dark to go there so no one can see me. I will be very concerned about Diani, my daughter, going to the bush because it is so far from here. This will not be a good thing. To reach the bush, first there is a bridge. Sometimes people fall off the bridge and then they die. They fall through the bridge.

“I know a person, my classmate when we were in grade 7, she fell into the water. This is when we were 12. The bridge is made of sticks. When the river is full of water you can’t see the logs. I was really very sad about my friend. She was a close friend. She couldn’t swim when she fell into the water.

“I think it takes 15 minutes to get to the bridge. I come here once a day, between 4pm and 5pm. At night it is very dangerous. People get killed. A woman and a boy were killed with knives. One woman I know of has been raped. There are people living on the other side of the bridge. They come very early to go to the city. Sometimes they meet with killers who take their products. I had to go over the bridge once when I was pregnant – I was three months pregnant then.”



Katherine Mulemba, 60, Ngombe, Zambia

Katherine lives in Ngombe, an unplanned settlement outside the capital, Lusaka. She lives alone and earns money by crushing stones to sell.

“I don’t have a latrine. I just go to neighbours and ask to use theirs. Sometimes they refuse so I have to go to a bar. If they don’t see me, it’s fine, but if they do see me, they refuse to let me in.

“I have no other option. I feel bad. I feel embarrassed, but what can I do? My landlord tried to have a latrine built but the guy who was employed to do it ran away with the money.

“At night, I go in a tin in my home and then throw it down a latrine the following day. I stay indoors as it’s dangerous to go out alone at night. People can rape you when you go out late at night as criminals usually move at night.

“I would love to have a toilet. I hope people will help me to have one in the near future, but I need money.”

Case studies



WaterAid/Jon Spaull

Budhani Kumari, 20, Digha Maharajganj, India

Budhani works as a rag picker and has recently been diagnosed with TB. The children in the area go to the toilet on the railway tracks, while the women go further afield in an attempt to find some privacy.

“To relieve myself I go in the orchards and groves but the men in the surrounding areas harass me and sometimes the owners chase me away. Us women try to go to the orchard in groups, where we face less harassment or none at all.

“Early in the morning, if I need to go to the toilet, I can’t go if there are men around, or I have to wait until after dark. When the men harass me, I try to stick up for myself. But I can’t tell the police as they are not interested.”

Maria Espelho, Zambezia, Mozambique

Maria Espelho is married and has three sons. Her husband built a latrine, which has had a huge impact on Maria’s life.

“We have a latrine here. This year we got it. We’ve had it for one month. It helps our life. It’s better now we have a latrine. Before the latrine we used the bush in front of the house, not far, but I was afraid of animals and snakes, I was afraid of stepping on things that would hurt my feet.

“I was also afraid that because I am a woman someone could come and rape me. We went any time of day, in the night though we went close to the house and then collected the faeces in the morning and took it out to the bush... Kids put faeces all over the house, so we decided that it was time to build a latrine. Now I am not afraid anymore, I am happy.”



WaterAid/Caroline Irby

Annette Namougabo, 16, Kampala, Uganda

Annette Namougabo is expecting her first child.

“I use a public lavatory, which is 100m from my house. It is not safe to go there at night, it is dangerous here. I have to go to the toilet at home and throw it outside.

“This place is overcrowded with houses and there is no room for a toilet with every household. I do not have any hope that this situation will improve in the near future.”



WaterAid/Eva-Lotta Jansson

What the experts say

Barbara Frost, Chief Executive, WaterAid UK

“When women don’t have a safe, secure and private place to go to the toilet they are exposed and put in a vulnerable position – and when they relieve themselves in the open they risk harassment. Women are reluctant to talk about it or complain, but the world cannot continue to ignore this.

“Adequate sanitation, coupled with access to clean, safe water to drink, transforms lives, improving health, safety and productivity. Governments are urged to take action and invest in access to sanitation and water.”

Lydia Zigomo, Head of East Africa region, WaterAid

“WaterAid would like governments to understand why sanitation is so important. It underpins human development. Anything we want to achieve in terms of health outcomes for our people in this world depends fundamentally on safe sanitation and access also to safe water.

“Lack of access to sanitation can increase the risk of women and girls being harassed and shamed. Firstly, there is the indignity of having to go to the toilet in an open space, which is a much more difficult thing for a woman or a girl to do than a man or a boy. Secondly, the terrain can be dangerous for a woman to negotiate to find a place where they can safely go to the toilet in private.”

The consequences of a lack of sanitation

No issue affects women as intimately as a lack of sanitation, with 1.25 billion women and girls around the world without access to a safe toilet. This represents nearly 1 in 3 women globally. Of those, 526 million women have no access to any form of sanitation and have no choice but to go to the toilet out in the open.

Shame

There are few things more unpleasant or humiliating than having chronic diarrhoea without access to a suitable toilet, however this is too often the reality for billions of people around the world.

Although men also suffer from the burden of poor sanitation, women are disproportionately affected. For women, the issue of privacy and modesty means that finding somewhere suitable to go to the toilet can be both an indignity and an ordeal.

Many women can feel immense shame defecating out in the open; in bushes or ditches, along railway tracks or in fields. Coping with menstruation in the absence of any real privacy is also detrimental to a woman’s sense of dignity and health.

Some women resort to ‘flying toilets’ – plastic bags or buckets at used at home – rather than walking long distances to use substandard and costly facilities. As a result women feel an increased sense of humiliation for ‘dirtying’ their homes, but also exposing their families and neighbours to the risk of disease. “When somebody knows that you defecate in the house, your household is hated and people do not want to visit”, one woman from Kampala, Uganda, told WaterAid.¹⁰

Violence and fear

In many cultures, women who lack safe access to sanitation or have no access at all may end up waiting until it is dark to go to the toilet, have to walk long distances to find an isolated spot or use public amenities.

This exposes them to an increased risk of being shamed, sexual harassment, assault as well as animal attacks.

Our own findings in Delhi and Kampala indicate that women feel particularly vulnerable in and around public toilets or defecating out in the open. Women reported incidences of men hiding in public latrines at night, waiting to rob or assault those who entered. One described how women do “not feel safe walking to the toilet. Men rape women there at night.”¹¹

In two slum districts in Delhi – Bhalswa and Sunder Nagri – women reported specific incidents of girls under ten being raped while on their way to use public toilets.¹² In work carried out by WaterAid in Bhopal, India, 94% of the women interviewed said that they had faced violence or harassment when going out to defecate, and more than a third had been physically assaulted.¹³

Amnesty International has also looked into this issue and reported that women and girls in the slums of Nairobi were staying away from communal toilet facilities at night because of a fear of physical violence and rape. It reported similar findings in the slums of the Solomon Islands. One woman described being severely beaten up and raped by two men after relieving herself in the sea.¹⁴

A 2005 report, *Health, dignity and development: what will it take*, published by the United Nations Development Program also highlighted these risks: “The need to travel further from home to secure the family’s water can expose women and girls to sexual harassment and rape; this can also happen when women who lack safe, nearby sanitation facilities move about at night in search of privacy.”¹⁵

Health implications

The links between poor sanitation, water and illness are well established, with an increased risk of diarrhoea, as well as infections such as worms and trachoma, which can lead to blindness.

Women are also more susceptible to urinary tract infections and dehydration by trying to limit going to the bathroom for long periods of time and drinking less water over the course of the day.

As women are generally responsible for the disposal of human waste when provision is inadequate, they are more exposed to diseases such as dysentery and cholera.

It has been calculated that every day around 2,000 mothers lose a child due to diarrhoea brought about through a lack of access to safe toilets and clean water.¹⁶ Half the hospital beds in developing countries are filled with people suffering from diseases caused by poor water, sanitation and hygiene.¹⁷

Economic implications

Women’s economic opportunities can be significantly reduced as a result of poor access to a toilet, as their time and health is impacted. Finding a place to go to the toilet can take women away from productive activities for long periods of time.

WaterAid has calculated that women and girls in the developing world with no toilet spend 97 billion hours each year finding a place to go to the toilet.¹⁸ This is twice the total hours worked every year by the entire labour force in the UK.¹⁹

As women are most often the caregivers within the family and the community, they have less time for education and work when they are looking after those who are sick.

WaterAid Bangladesh found that a school sanitation project with separate facilities for boys and girls helped boost girls' attendance by 11% per year, on average, over seven years.²⁰

More broadly, poor water and sanitation stifles economic growth, costing Sub-Saharan Africa about 5% of its gross domestic product each year.²¹ That is equivalent to the amount of aid the continent currently receives from Western nations.²²

Injustice

A recent campaign in India flagged up the injustices in sanitation provision between men and women in many developing countries.

In April, activists in Mumbai launched a campaign called 'A Right to Pee' to address gross inequalities in the allocation of public toilets and the fact that women have to pay for facilities while men can use urinals for free. The municipal government in Mumbai provides 5,993 public toilets and 2,466 urinals for men, compared with only 3,536 for women.²³ This followed a similar campaign in China in February, where students in Guangzhou protested in men's toilets in an 'Occupy the Toilet' movement to highlight public toilet disparities.²⁴

WaterAid's work

WaterAid enables people to access clean water, improved hygiene and sanitation, and works in 27 countries around the world. We have reached 12.9 million people with sanitation since 2004 and 17.5 million people with safe water since 1981.²⁵

Women are at the heart of everything WaterAid does

We have been making some great progress, not only in meeting women's immediate needs for clean water, safe toilets and improved hygiene, but also by championing their voices and their leadership. Along with our local partners, we have helped set up community groups, led by women, to raise sanitation issues in their own communities.

WaterAid influences decision-makers. This World Toilet Day, WaterAid is joining the call being made by hundreds of organisations around the world, for governments to keep the promises they have made to get adequate sanitation and safe water to the world's poorest people.²⁶

We are calling on governments to keep their promises to invest in delivering increased access to sanitation.

Poll in Lagos, Nigeria

Lagos is one of Africa’s megacities, growing from a population of just 1.4 million in 1970 to 11.2 million in 2011.²⁷ While it is an economic powerhouse, 70% of Lagos’ residents still live in slums²⁸ with poor access to sanitation and clean water.

WaterAid commissioned international polling and research company GlobeScan to conduct a poll in five of the slums of Lagos, between 18 - 22 October 2012. The poll interviewed 500 women about their experiences of and around sanitation.²⁹ The survey was conducted in Ajegunle, Ijora, Badia, Oko Agbon and Otto-Oyingbo.

Headline poll results

- 67% of women feel unsafe using a shared or community toilet in a public place.
- 40% of women in the slums of Lagos, Nigeria, have no toilets and are forced to defecate outside. A quarter of these had either first or second hand experience of harassment, a threat of violence or actual assault in the last 12 months.
- 68% of women agree that the cost of using public toilets is a problem for them.
- 61% of women find the toilets they regularly use to be unhygienic.
- 56% of women avoid using toilets at certain times of the day to avoid putting themselves at risk.

The full results are as follows:

Q1 Here are a number of public situations people may find themselves in on a regular basis. Thinking about your own experience, how safe or unsafe would you say you feel in the following situations?

	Total safe (1+2)	Very safe	Somewhat safe	Not very safe	Not at all safe	Total unsafe (3+4)
At my local market	50	26	24	27	23	50
When using a shared or community toilet in a public place	33	8	25	33	34	67
On public transport	48	19	29	33	15	48
At home	81	48	33	12	7	19

Q2 Can I just check, which of the following best describes the toilet facilities that you use most regularly?

	Most regularly (%)
Informal outside location used as toilet (eg behind a building, open drain, on the road)	40
Toilet within my own home	33
Public toilet in the area where I live	19
Public toilet at my place of work	6
Public toilets in market or shopping area	2
Neighbours’ toilet	1

Q3 Which, if any, of the following have you or a friend personally experienced while using either a public toilet or informal toilet facilities like these over the past year?

	Experience (%)
Verbal harassment or statements that make you feel ashamed	15
Other types of non-physical intimidation (eg men watching when you are seeking privacy, sexual harassment)	10
Threat of physical assault or of unwanted physical contact by another person	9
Actual physical assault or unwanted physical contact by another person	8

A cross-tabulation of Q2 and Q3, showing the % of women that have experienced either harassment, intimidation, threat of assault or actual assault in the last 12 months:

	%
Informal outside location used as toilet (eg behind a building, open drain, on the road)	25.10
All locations (toilet at home, public toilet where I live, public toilet at my place)	21.8

Q4 If you feel able to, please tell me a little more in your own words about what happened on one of these occasions. Again, your comments are completely anonymous.

Note: Some results available upon request.

Q5 Some people have suggested that having to use unhygienic or unsafe toilet facilities can cause problems for people in other areas of their daily lives. To what extent would you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?

	Total agree (1+2)	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree	Total disagree (3+4)	N/A
I avoid using public toilets at certain times to avoid risks to myself	56	38	18	16	25	41	4
The cost of using public toilets is a problem for me	68	48	20	12	18	30	2
The public toilets I normally use are unhygienic	61	36	25	17	15	32	8
I have suffered ill health as a result of using unhygienic public or informal toilets	36	20	16	19	35	54	11

Q6 Compared to other priorities, such as spending on education or transport infrastructure, how important do you think it is for the Nigerian Government to invest in sanitation as a way to improve your health, safety and livelihood?

	Total important (1+2)	Very important	Somewhat important	Not very important	Not at all important	Total unimportant (3+4)	Don't know/ N/A
Nigerian Government to prioritise investment in sanitation	98	89	9	2	0	2	0

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Endnotes

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