

A poor situation



WaterAid/Caroline Iby

Victoria Nalo lives in an urban area called Bwaise 2 in Uganda. She describes the poor sanitation there and the lack of understanding in the community about the link between hygiene and health.

“The situation here is not good. Mosquitoes breed on the stagnant water and there is a lot of malaria. People often suffer from diarrhoea and vomiting. The water contains urine and faeces. People use the channels to throw their waste and garbage. It would be much better if the garbage was collected and the proper channels constructed. I do not feel good here and would like to be in a better place.”

From waste to compost



WaterAid/Layton Thompson

Mary Nyirenda, from Chikompulazi village in Malawi, talks about the benefits of composting toilets, which turn human waste into free compost that can be used to grow crops.

“I went with this new toilet because I would get manure for my crops. Before this I had nowhere to get manure. I was using chemical fertiliser but I couldn’t afford to buy enough. I don’t know how much I will get from the toilet but I’m happy because it’s free. It’s important because it will help the people to get manure for growing their crops which will give them more to eat and more to sell. I also hope it will reduce sanitation-related diseases and keep the village clean.”

Life-changing latrines



WaterAid/Juthika Howlader

Fatima Begum from Motijharna slum in Bangladesh explains the impact that access to sanitation facilities has had in her community, where open defecation used to be common.

“It was very dirty here before. People used to go here, there and everywhere. Insects like mosquitoes were everywhere and they got in the food. We got diarrhoea, dysentery and jaundice. With the building of the latrines, life has changed – the environment has improved a great deal.”

Sanitation



WaterAid/Marco Betti

Sanitation is a basic human right but almost two fifths of the world’s population do not have anywhere safe and hygienic to go to the toilet.

Safe disposal of human waste massively reduces the spread of diarrhoeal diseases which kill 1.4 million children every year. WaterAid works in the world’s poorest communities to improve people’s access to sanitation and safe water and promote good hygiene practices.



WaterAid transforms lives by improving access to safe water, hygiene and sanitation in the world’s poorest communities.



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Booja, standing by a drainage ditch in India's Ranipura slum.

What is sanitation?

Sanitation is somewhere safe and hygienic to go to the toilet. Combined with an understanding of good hygiene practices, like hand-washing with soap, this basic human right can transform people's lives.

The problem

Human waste is deadly. Just one gram of human faeces can contain 10,000,000 viruses. Diarrhoeal diseases caused by poor sanitation and unsafe water kill more children every year than AIDS, malaria and measles combined.

Despite its profound impact on child mortality and wider ill-health, sanitation is often seen as a symptom of poverty rather than a fundamental cause. This means it is seriously neglected by governments and often absent from poverty reduction plans. To make matters worse, many people are reluctant to talk about what can be an embarrassing subject.

Women and children

In the world's poorest communities, it is often women and children who are most affected by poor sanitation. With no access to a latrine, women must often wait in serious discomfort until dark to walk to an isolated spot. This can make them ill and also exposes them to the risk of sexual harassment, assault and animal attacks.

Girls and female teachers can be put off attending school when there is a lack of toilet facilities, particularly when menstruating. It is estimated that 11% more girls attend school when sanitation is available.

Inadequate sanitation makes children considerably more vulnerable to deadly diarrhoeal diseases, especially those who are malnourished.

Employment and economics

If people have severe diarrhoea they cannot work. A combination of reduced earnings and increased medical costs can have a devastating impact on a household's income.

Poor sanitation also affects the national economy. Significant amounts of money are spent combating sanitation-related illnesses and diseases, while huge numbers of school and working days are lost at further economic cost. It is estimated that poor sanitation, alongside unsafe water, costs sub-Saharan Africa 5% of its GDP each year.



A rubbish dump in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.

For the first time in history, more people live in urban than rural areas. Many people migrating from the countryside arrive in overcrowded, unplanned settlements where sanitation and water facilities are usually non-existent or in very poor condition.

Where this is the case, people often have no choice but to defecate in the open. Human waste then pollutes the environment and gets into water used for drinking, cooking and washing. Disease is rife and women in particular face the daily indignity and danger of going to the toilet outside.



Kenedy Gondwe, a sanitation promoter in Malawi, making a latrine slab.

WaterAid and sanitation

A combined approach of providing safe water, sanitation and hygiene reduces the number of deaths caused by diarrhoeal diseases by 65%.

Together with our partners, we help communities improve their sanitation facilities using simple,

low-cost technologies (see our *Technology* issue sheet). We take a sustainable approach to our work, providing community members with the support they need to plan, build and maintain their latrines and sewerage systems themselves. We also educate people about the link between sanitation and health so they can spread this knowledge in their communities.

Latrines provide a safe way to dispose of faeces and, together with improved hygiene practices such as hand-washing with soap, can prevent diseases being spread by water, soil, flies and human contact.

To ensure long term health benefits it is vital that all latrines are used hygienically. New latrines will only significantly reduce incidences of diarrhoea if:

- Everyone uses them so no human waste is left in the open.
- They are properly cleaned and maintained.
- Children's waste is disposed of safely.
- Everyone washes their hands after using the latrines and before handling food.

We often use an approach called community-led total sanitation to help ensure each of these objectives is met and communities are able to eradicate open defecation. People are shown how easily disease spreads without latrines and the simple steps they can take to improve their hygiene practices, motivating whole villages to build and use new facilities.

We work locally and internationally to change policy and practice to ensure sanitation's vital role in

reducing poverty is recognised. Governments have a responsibility to address this basic human need. We use our practical experience to demonstrate how they and other organisations can do so in an effective and sustainable way.



Raila, at her school's latrines in Kampala, Uganda.

Sanitation: the facts

- Diarrhoea kills more children every year than AIDS, malaria and measles combined.
- Children living in households with no toilet are twice as likely to get diarrhoea as those with a toilet.
- Every year, around 60 million children in the developing world are born into households without access to sanitation.
- One gram of human faeces can contain 10,000,000 viruses, 1,000,000 bacteria, 1,000 parasite cysts and 100 parasite eggs.
- At any one time, half the hospital beds in developing countries are filled with people suffering from diarrhoea.

Sources:
UK Department for International Development; UN Development Programme Human Development Report [2006]; UNICEF; UN Water; Water, Engineering and Development Centre; World Health Organisation. Find more statistics at www.wateraid.org/statistics.