

SANITATION FOR ALL



THE DRIVE TO 2015

SUSTAINABLE SANITATION: THE FIVE YEAR DRIVE TO 2015

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Sanitation Sustains Clean Environments

A healthy living environment depends on toilets. Human waste enters water sources and land through open defecation, dumping from buckets, inadequate disposal via sewer pipes into water courses and onto unused land, and leakage from pit latrines. 90% of diarrhoeal diseases are linked to environmental pollution. In the developing world, roughly 90% of sewage is discharged untreated into rivers, lakes and coastal areas.

The sanitation crisis is keenly felt in informal settlements across the globe. With no way to safely dispose of either faeces or garbage, around a billion slum dwellers must resort to “flying toilets” (plastic bags that are used then thrown away) and to dumping trash in public spaces. This situation is not limited to urban settlements; in impoverished city suburbs, small market towns, large villages, and periurban settlements across the developing world, the public environment is full of human waste. The contents of bucket-latrines and pits, even of sewers, are often emptied into the streets, lakes, rivers or coasts. This excrement immediately contaminates the surrounding environment, enters waterways and harms communities.

Living in a squalid environment harms physical and psychological health. It is stigmatizing, often presents employment challenges and deepens human poverty. Poor sanitation creates a host of health hazards as well as a bleak and disheartening visual landscape. Roads are full of mud, puddles and piles of garbage and debris, not to mention disease-carrying insects, microbes and rodents. The odours are often unpleasant, sometimes overpowering.

Ending open defecation is critical

A healthy living environment, one that supports human dignity and is free of disease transmitting agents and conditions, is impossible if open defecation is widely practiced. This is why countries made a call to end open defecation in the UN resolution establishing the Drive to 2015.

- Globally 17 % of the population still defecates in the open.
- Rates are highest in Asia and sub-Saharan Africa (44 % and 27 %, respectively).
- In a community of 10,000 inhabitants, if 30 % defecate in the open, 3 tonnes of faeces a week or 100 dump trucks a year is deposited, uncontained, in the community.

Toilets support environmental sustainability

In the developing world, roughly 90% of sewage is discharged untreated into rivers, lakes and coastal areas, polluting waters and killing plants and fish.

Dead zones – locations with reduced or no oxygen levels – have now grown to cover 245,000 km of the marine environment including in North America, the Caribbean, Europe and Asia. In Southeast Asia alone, 13 million tonnes of faeces are released to inland water sources each year, along with 122 million cubic metres

of urine and 11 billion cubic metres of greywater. This presents a major health threat to people who depend upon open streams and wells for their drinking water as well as an economic blow to people whose livelihoods depend upon fisheries.

Upstream water users find better quality water, whereas downstream users find “sewage sinks”. Water quality is worse near densely populated areas. The impact of poor wastewater systems and non-existent sanitation is not only costing billions of dollars and degrading ecosystems, it is also challenging the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, sustainable development, jobs, labour productivity and the health of hundreds of millions of people worldwide.

Water pollution stemming from poor sanitation costs Southeast Asia more than US\$ 2 billion per year, and in Indonesia and Vietnam creates environmental costs of more than US\$ 200 million annually, primarily from the loss of productive land.

Reusing waste has many benefits

Sanitation involves a range of actions, but for a healthy environment – in communities as well as in the larger natural world – the top priority is separating excreta, with its host of biological pathogens, from contact with human beings as well as plant and animal life.

Ending open defecation is a critical first step. But to fully realize the health, social, and economic benefits, the management of wastes must also be considered. For example, conventional sewage can now be supplemented with ecological sanitation technologies that make use of the nutrients in human waste.

Managing nutrients efficiently makes sense when we think about food and energy security, water quality and availability, biodiversity, fisheries and climate change.

Handled properly, good sanitation and disposal of waste can create employment, support livelihoods, boost public and ecosystem health, and contribute to the achievement of a range of Millennium Development Goals. Instead of being a source of problems, human waste, whether managed at the household level via safe latrines, or collected in urban wastewater treatment systems, can be a positive addition to the environment, which will in turn lead to improved food security, health and economic activity.

Sustainable Sanitation: the five year drive to 2015 is a global campaign to redouble efforts to reach the MDG targets – and then go beyond them to ensure Sanitation for All. Sanitation is a human right – help us turn the right into a reality. To find out more visit www.sanitationdrive2015.org