

WASH initiative by UNICEF

January 17, 2020

Source: *Yojana Magazine & UNICEF*

WASH is the collective term for Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene. Due to their interdependent nature, these three core issues are grouped together to represent a growing sector. While each a separate field of work, each is dependent on the presence of the other. For example, without toilets, water sources become contaminated; without clean water, basic hygiene practices are not possible.

Current situation

Today, 2.2 billion people lack access to safely managed drinking water services and 4.2 billion people lack safely managed sanitation services. Unsafe hygiene practices are widespread, compounding the effects on people's health. The impact on child mortality rates is devastating with more than 297 000 children under five who die annually from **diarrhoeal diseases due to poor sanitation, poor hygiene, or unsafe drinking water.**

Water

UNICEF's work in water **focuses on the ability for children to access safe water, the quality of the water they can access and the journey they must take to collect it.** UNICEF is at the forefront of exploring innovative ways to access water, and building climate-resistant infrastructure

Water facts

- 663 million people are still without access to clean drinking water, despite the Millennium Development Goal target for clean water being met in 2010.
- 8 out of 10 people without access to clean water live in

rural areas.

- 159 million people use untreated water from lakes and rivers, the most unsafe water source there is.
- Since 1990, 2.6 billion people have gained access to improved drinking water and today, 91% of the world's **population drink clean water.**

Sanitation

- For sanitation, UNICEF works to **ensure access and use of basic toilets** and **ways to separate human waste from contact with people.** One important area of work for sanitation is to **end the practice of “open defecation,”** and facilitate community-led initiatives to build, maintain and use basic toilets.
- Sanitation is essential to the survival and development of children. Currently, **there are 2.4 billion people worldwide who do not use improved sanitation** (a facility that safely separates human waste from human contact). 946 million people go in the open, known as “open defecation”. While progress has been made to improve access to sanitation in some parts of the world, millions of children in poor and rural areas have been left behind.

Key sanitation facts:

- 1 in 3 people don't use improved sanitation.
- 1 in 7 people practice open defecation.
- Since 1990, 2.6 billion people have gained access to improved sanitation.
- 5 countries, India, Indonesia, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Pakistan, account for 75% of open defecation.
- It is necessary to double the current efforts in order to end open defecation by 2030.

Hygiene

- **UNICEF's work in hygiene is aimed at nurturing good**

hygiene practices, especially handwashing with soap.

Although it sounds simple, this act is essential to prevent disease and the health of children.

- Something as simple as handwashing can save lives. Washing hands with soap at critical times, like after going to the toilet or before eating, can have a significant impact on children's health. Good hygiene practices reduce the incidence of diseases such as pneumonia, trachoma, scabies, skin and eye infections and diarrhoea-related diseases like cholera and dysentery.
- Research shows that regular handwashing with soap can reduce the number of incidents of diarrhea, a disease which can be deadly for children, by around 50 percent.

UNICEF's work in hygiene

- UNICEF programmes help to **promote handwashing and behaviour change by advocating for increased funding for hygiene activities and the inclusion of hygiene in government policies and strategies.**
- It also supports national and sub-national handwashing campaigns, which can include recruiting high-profile decision-makers and celebrities as handwashing advocates.
- UNICEF ensures that all WASH programmes in the field include strong hygiene components, especially in emergency response programmes.