

THE PROBLEM

THE BIG PICTURE: ISSUES LINKED TO WATER AND SANITATION

Useful definitions:

- **WASH** – water, advocacy, sanitation and hygiene
- **Hygiene** – activities to keep people and their surroundings clean so they will stay healthy
- **Sanitation** – the process of keeping places free from dirt, infection and disease, through e.g. the safe disposal of human waste
- **Open defecation** – the practice whereby people go out in fields, bushes, forests, open bodies of water, or other open spaces rather than using the toilet to defecate.

Safety

In many cultures, women and girls cannot be seen going to the toilet. So if they don't have a latrine, and have to relieve themselves in the open ('open defecation'), they have to go out before dawn or after dark. Holding on until they can relieve themselves causes severe discomfort, and sometimes serious illness. They risk being harassed and attacked, by men or creatures such as snakes, scorpions and spiders.

Education

Less than half (45 per cent) of schools in developing countries have proper sanitation facilities. Each year, millions of school days are lost to water-related illnesses, especially diarrhoea. At least 40 per cent of diarrhoea cases in schoolchildren result from infection caused in school rather than at home. Improving sanitation and hygiene conditions in schools also helps prevent worm infestations.

Separate toilets at school mean that girls are more likely to attend in the first place, and they are more likely to stay on when they reach puberty. Without proper toilets at school, many girls miss school during their periods – or drop out altogether.

Health

The water and sanitation crisis, and the disease it helps spread, claim more lives than conflict or war. Diarrhoea is the second leading cause of child death in the world today. More than 900 children globally die every day as a result of diarrhoeal diseases.

Women and girls

Women and girls often spend large parts of their day fetching water. In many developing countries, women and girls walk on average over 3.5 miles each day to fetch water, which adds up to more than 15 hours per week. In Africa alone, people spend 40 billion hours every year just walking to collect water. Women and girls carry two-thirds of this burden.

Diarrhoea is the second-biggest killer of children under five. Every day at least 900 children under five die of illnesses linked to unclean water and poor sanitation

STINKING STATISTICS

Water in developing countries

- About one in every ten people (or about 663 million people) in the world does not have access to safe water.
- Many people in the world exist on 10 litres of water a day or less.
- By 2025 there will be another 2 billion more people requiring food and water.
- Roughly a third of the world's population do not have access to adequate sanitation.

Water in the UK

- One third of water consumption in each UK household is used for showers and baths Another third gets flushed straight down the loo.
- More than a quarter of all clean, drinkable water you use in your home is used to flush the toilets.
- The average flush of a UK toilet uses 10 litres of water – the same as the total amount of water that people in developing countries use every day for drinking, washing and cooking.

Water and our bodies

- The average adult body contains about 40 litres of water. A man's body is up to 65% water: a woman's body is on average 55% water.
- The human brain is about 75% water.
- 70% of your skin is water.
- By the time a person feels thirsty, his or her body has lost more than 1% of its total water content.

Water and the world

- The total amount of water on the earth is about 326 million cubic miles of water.
- 70% of the world's surface is covered in water: 97% of it is salty and only 3% is fresh water. Of this 3%, three-quarters is frozen, leaving less than 1% available for use by all of the people, animals and plants on earth.
- Trees are about 75% water.
- Rivers and lakes have shrunk or dried up in poor areas of Central Asia (eg the Aral Sea).
- In the wealthy south-western states of the USA, the once mighty Colorado River now no longer even reaches the sea.

Conserving water

By reducing the amount of water you waste, you protect and conserve the earth's most valuable resource

- Having an ordinary shower (rather than a power shower) will use two-fifths of the water needed for a bath.
- A bath uses an average of 80 litres of water, while a (non-power) shower uses only about 30 litres of water.
- You waste several litres of water a minute if you don't turn the tap off while brushing your teeth.
- A dripping tap, losing one drop a second, will waste 15 litres of water a day.
- Don't use dishwashers or washing machines half full. You could waste up to 20 litres of water every time.

Sources: UNICEF, WaterAid, Welsh Water, WHO