

Improved Sanitation Often Overlooked in Child Development Plans

[SUVA, 20 MARCH, 2008](#) -- Every year inadequate water, sanitation and hygiene contribute to the deaths of 1.5 million children. UNICEF Pacific, Deputy Representative, Tim Sutton said "improving sanitation is a key contributing factor for improved health and well-being of children, although this is often overlooked when formulating plans for the development of children."

He added "improved sanitation not only helps people break the cycle of poverty, it leads to social and economic development and protects the environment. Improved sanitation includes clean, safe toilets, wastewater management and hygiene promotion, all of which prevent the transfer of disease in human waste."

"Lack of improved sanitation in schools contributes to absenteeism and poor classroom performance due to illness, low enrolment and early school dropout, especially for girls whose parents may remove them from the education system when they start menstruating. Lack of toilets exposes women and girls to violence and abuse as some are only able to relieve themselves only after nightfall and in secluded areas," he said.

The United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF) Pacific office is pleased to partner celebrations for World Water Day (March 22) which is being celebrated by the UN on March 20, 2008, with the World Health Organisation (WHO), Pacific Islands Applied Geoscience Commission (SOPAC), Foundation of the Peoples of the South Pacific International (FSPI), Live and Learn Environmental Education, Fiji School of Medicine, and the International Federation of Red Cross – all known as the Pacific Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) coalition. The theme this year is sanitation, linked to the ongoing International Year of Sanitation (2008), which aims to raise awareness and accelerate progress for the 2.6 billion people who are still without access to improved sanitation. For UNICEF this day highlights the importance of clean water, proper sanitation and hygiene for every child.

"Access to sanitation is deeply connected to virtually all Millennium Development Goals, in particular those involving the environment, education, gender equality and the reduction of child mortality and poverty," as so rightly summarised by the UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-Moon.

Proper sanitation, including hand washing with soap, prevents the spread of diarrhoea, which is the second biggest killer of children under five. Though more than 1.2 billion people worldwide have gained access to improved sanitation between 1990 and 2004, an estimated 2.6 billion people -- including 980 million children – have yet to be reached. This is one of the single biggest development challenges facing the world today.

In emergencies, UNICEF provides urgent relief to communities and nations threatened by disrupted water supplies and disease. Since the April 2007 tsunami in Solomon Islands, UNICEF has been and continues to work with partners to provide safe drinking water and proper sanitary and hygiene facilities in the Western and Choiseul Province. Sanitary facilities for internally displaced people, water purification tablets, bathing soaps, water containers and water pumps were provided by UNICEF during the tsunami recovery phase. In Fiji, UNICEF plans to work with relevant government ministries and the WASH coalition to provide for proper sanitary and hygiene facilities in schools.

According to the SPC/UNDP Regional MDG Report(2004), sub-national data reveal that access to improved water sources and to improved sanitation facilities in rural areas remains below 80% and 75%, respectively. The report also highlighted that sub-national data also suggest access to improved water sources has decreased in urban areas of Republic of Marshall Islands (RMI), Palau, Samoa, and Vanuatu and in rural areas of Samoa and Palau.

Data from the WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme on Water Supply and Sanitation (2004) indicate 83% of people living in Pacific Island countries use improved drinking water sources – Kiribati, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and Fiji fall well below this figure. The same data-set reveals that 72% use improved sanitation facilities – Kiribati, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) are well below this regional average.

Clean water, proper sanitation and hygiene are linked in many ways to people's livelihoods and sustainable development in general. It is an important input not just for Target 10 of Millennium Development Goal 7, which is to halve, by 2015, the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation but for all of the Millennium Development Goals. Through strategic coordination within country programmes UNICEF can make significant contributions to the health and environment objectives of the Millennium Agenda.

UNICEF is on the ground in over 150 countries and territories to help children survive and thrive, from early childhood through adolescence. As the world's largest provider of vaccines for developing countries, UNICEF supports child health and nutrition, good water and sanitation, quality basic education for all boys and girls, and the protection of children from violence, exploitation, and AIDS.

World Water Day provides an opportunity to draw attention to the International Year of Sanitation 2008; a year in which the United Nations General Assembly in December 2006 has called for a focus on addressing sanitation and hygiene problems.

The International Year of Sanitation 2008 aims to raise the profile of sanitation issues on the international agenda and to accelerate progress towards meeting the Millennium Development Goal target of reducing by half the proportion of people living without access to improved sanitation by 2015. Within the United Nations system, the focal point for the International Year of Sanitation is the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, in collaboration with the UN-Water Task Force on Sanitation.

Sanitation is not a dirty word. Sanitation matters.

Please visit <http://www.sanitationyear2008.org> and <http://www.unwater.org>

The WHO/UNICEF global press release, an overview/brief, key messages and facts are attached.

For further information, please contact Donna Hoerder, COmmunications Specialist - External Relations on telephone (679) 3300 439 or fax (679) 3301 667