

## MEDIA RELEASE

### UNICEF CALLS FOR ACTION TO ACHIEVE UNIVERSAL ACCESS TO SANITATION IN ETHIOPIA

*35 Million Ethiopians lack adequate sanitation facilities*

**ADDIS ABABA**, 22 March 2008 - UNICEF today announced that it is possible to achieve universal access to sanitation in Ethiopia, where at present approximately 35 million Ethiopians are deprived the dignity of adequate sanitation facilities to safely contain and dispose of human faeces.

In order to achieve this goal, however, it will require the concerted efforts of all stakeholders beyond the traditional health and water sectors including agriculture, education, private sector, and media.

Donors, in particular the African Development Bank, the World Bank and the UK Department for International Development (DFID) are also doing their part, as over US\$ 50 million has been pledged in the coming years for sanitation and hygiene. This is still a far cry, however, from the estimated US\$ 650 million required for universal coverage in Ethiopia.

"UNICEF calls on all donors to invest in achieving sustainable access to improved sanitation which is essential for the realization of human rights, health and dignity," said Bjorn Ljungqvist, UNICEF Representative to Ethiopia. "The returns are too good to ignore."

Achieving access to sanitation has a direct bearing on the achievability of other Millennium Development Goals, including goals on health, child survival, poverty reduction and education.

"Girls, who bear the burden of water collecting, are often left with no energy or time for school," said Ljungqvist. "And when girls are old enough to menstruate they become unwilling to attend schools without toilets and their parents are reluctant to send them to school."

"The good news is that 100% sanitation coverage in Ethiopia is *achievable!*" Ljungqvist added. "UNICEF applauds the positive actions taken by the Government of Ethiopia to turn the situation around through the Government health sector development program."

Approximately 24,000 health extension workers are working at community level to promote *do-able* actions and behaviors towards sanitation. Key behaviors which can make a difference for children's health and development are hand washing with soap at key times like before eating, after defecating and after disposing of children's faeces, water treatment and consistent usage of the toilet facility for safe excreta disposal.

UNICEF and partners are using the opportunity of World Water Day to showcase the plight of millions of Ethiopians who are denied access to sanitation and are therefore denied basic rights of dignity and health. Sanitation is the theme for this year's World Water Day and aims to highlight the need for urgent action on behalf of the more than 40 per cent of the world's population who continue to live without improved sanitation.

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. Lack of proper sanitation contributes to the deaths of thousands of children every day from largely preventable causes, including diarrhoeal diseases.

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WHO estimates that 194 million school days could be gained annually because of fewer incidents of diarrhea. Studies have shown that children with intense worm infestation perform poorly in school and can delay development by as much as six months.

International Year of Sanitation in Ethiopia is being celebrated in conjunction with the African Union's Year of the African Youth. A school water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) competition is being launched in selected schools in Addis Ababa, Amhara, Oromia, and Tigray, to engage youth to sensitize their peers and surrounding communities on the importance of sanitation and hygiene using fun and interactive means. Participant schools have been provided with media training in video, photography, cartoon drawing, radio production and story telling. The competition is expected to be launched in all regions in 2009.

Globally, International Year of Sanitation 2008 was established by the United Nations General Assembly in December 2006 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. In addition, progress on sanitation will contribute to the achievement of all the Millennium Development Goals.

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### For more information

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