

A speech by Brehane Adere, UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador for Girls' Education World Water Day 2005, Africa-wide Launch of the 2005-2015 International Decade for Action-“Water for Life”

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me to make a speech as goodwill ambassador of UNICEF for girls' education on World Water Day with the theme Water for Life.

As we all know Water and sanitation are vital to all of our lives, without access to safe water and improved sanitation we will continue in a cycle of poverty and disease with high death rates among our children.

In Ethiopia hundreds of children die each day from diarrhea and other water and sanitation related diseases, as we stand here promoting and encouraging improvements in Africa even more children will die needlessly. We have the knowledge and the solutions for improving water and sanitation coverage so we must commit ourselves to taking appropriate and immediate steps.

The value of improvements in water and sanitation should never be underestimated, not only is it important in reducing water and sanitation related diseases such as diarrhea, dysentery, cholera, worms, trachoma and skin diseases, it is also vital to reducing malnutrition and indeed poverty.

One of my main aims as UNICEF goodwill ambassador for girls education is to improve school attendance among girls in Ethiopia. Not alone do I hope to see more girls attending school but I hope to see them remain in school. In order for this to happen I know that water and sanitation are vital for the following reasons;

- The provision of water, sanitation and hand washing facilities in schools is important so that we can ensure a healthy and safe environment for all children in the school, while the provision of separate latrines for boys and girls can help ensure privacy and dignity for girls especially as they get older and reach puberty. Evidence shows us that the absence of appropriate and separate latrines for girls is a major contributing factor to their drop-out rate as they get older.
- As the main carriers of water, girls have an extra burden in communities where there is little or no water available. In some cases as you know girls have to travel long distances to fetch water (5-20kms) and are often not able to attend school because of the time they spend each day on this activity. The closer the water source to the communities the more time the girls from that community will be able to spend in school.
- Having clean safe water, improved sanitation and good hygiene practices reduces the disease burden not only among girls but of an entire community. However, for girls it has a double advantage as not alone will they be less prone to disease but if other members of their family are also fit and healthy the girls will have to spend less time caring for their sick family members and will be able to spend more time in school.

- Remember studies have shown that 4 out of every 10 children will not reach their full educational potential without improvements in water supplies and sanitation and the majority of these are girls.

As we launch the new decade “Water for Life” I believe we have a major chance to make a difference to many lives throughout Africa. Water and sanitation touches everyone’s life and in the context of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) is fundamental to the achievement of many of the goals:

Thank You