



INTRODUCTION

A recent WHO/UNICEF report warned that more than 2.6 billion people – over 40 per cent of the world's population – do not have basic sanitation, and more than one billion people still use unsafe sources of drinking water. Ethiopia topped the list with only 6 per cent coverage for sanitation and came in second at 22 per cent for lowest access to clean drinking water.

Diarrhoeal disease currently takes the lives of 1.8 million people each year – most of them children under five. Here in Ethiopia, more than 500,000 children die each year from diarrhoeal disease. That means that for every 5 children born, one will die from diarrhea before they reach their fifth birthday. Other water and sanitation related diseases also account for high morbidity. In general, there are low levels of hygiene awareness, which compound the health risks associated with low water and sanitation coverage.

Low levels of water and sanitation coverage also have important social implications. Women and children often spend several hours every day fetching water. We know that over 40 billion

work hours are lost in Africa getting water. For girls, the task of carrying water, combined with a lack of sanitary facilities in schools, often stands in the way of their education, squandering their intellectual and economic potential.

In order for Ethiopia to meet the sanitation targets set forth in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), resources must target poor communities without adequate sanitation facilities. UNICEF is working with the Government to construct household, community and school latrines. Additionally, UNICEF is a member of WASH Ethiopia, a coalition of Government Ministries, UN agencies, NGOs, faith-based organisations and the private sector working with communities to improve sanitation. The WASH Handwashing Movement will be launched 20 November nationally. The messages are simple: wash your hands properly before eating or preparing food and after changing baby or using the latrine. Such simple, but cost-effective, sustainable and community-based solutions, will help save countless children from needlessly dying of diarrhoeal disease and ultimately improve Ethiopia's overall sanitation coverage.

Bjorn Ljungqvist
Representative

CLEAN DRINKING WATER AND SEPARATE LATRINES IMPROVE SCHOOL LIFE FOR GIRLS AND BOYS IN AFAR REGION

GEWANE, Ethiopia — The mid-morning bell sounds releasing a flurry of scampering students rushing to the newly constructed Gewane Primary School taps. The temperature outside is climbing towards 40 degrees Celsius in what is the cool season in Ethiopia's Afar Region where some of the hottest temperatures on the planet are recorded.

Water supply coverage in Afar is only 17 per cent. A considerable number of schemes are non-functional, which makes the coverage less than 13 per cent. Sanitation coverage is even lower at less than seven per cent.

The school is one of 12 primary schools in Afar targeted by a joint World Vision–UNICEF water

and environmental sanitation project. Drinking water, handwashing facilities and separate latrines for boys and girls were constructed during the 2004 summer holidays in time for the new school year.

Ten-year-old, second grader Humayso Abdo Hassen and fellow members of the recently formed Gewane Primary School Sanitation Club stand at





attention next to the taps. Club members are tasked with promoting hygiene and sanitation within the school community.

"No pushing! Stand in line. You will each get your turn," Humayso shouts. It takes a few minutes, but soon the four team members have the thirsty students lined

up behind each tap. They then call each student forward.

"Wash your hands first," Humayso tells each student pointing to a handwashing poster produced by UNICEF as part of its sanitation advocacy. "Your health is in your hands. Always wash them," the bold lettering reads under a photograph of an Afar girl washing her hands. After washing, the children cup their hands under the gentle flow of water gulping it down.

"I am here to make sure that students don't abuse this water," says Humayso. "Most students don't bring cups to school and sometimes the children put their mouths around the tap head when drinking. If I see a student doing that I tell them to stop, because it is not healthy to make contact with the spout. If they are sick they can pass their illness to others."

"I was very happy to see this tap when I returned to school after our summer holidays. In the past we had to bring our drinking water from home and in this heat one bottle was never enough. We would run home to get water to drink. If we stayed at home too long we would get in trouble."

The project is designed as part of UNICEF's Girls' Education Initiative and aims to improve school enrolment through the provision of water and sanitation facilities in targeted schools.

Primary school enrolment rates in Afar region are among the lowest in Ethiopia. In 1998 only 7.1 per cent of eligible boys and girls attended primary school. By 2002 that number had climbed to 13.8 per cent – 15.7 per cent boys

and 11.5 per cent girls. A school's learning environment is more conducive to girls when separate latrines for boys and girls are provided, which is a critical strategy to increase girls' enrolment rates in school.

Hassina Mohammed is a twelve-year-old fourth grader and a member of the sanitation club. Today, she is on toilet monitor duty with three other students.

"Last year we only had one block of toilets, which were shared by all students. We did not have separate toilets for boys and girls. Boys are messy and don't keep the toilets clean, which makes it uncomfortable for us girls. ... Having this new toilet block just for us is making a big difference in our school life."

Outside the toilet blocks are newly constructed taps. A pair of monitors from the sanitation club instruct children to wash their hands as they leave the toilets.

"If they don't wash their hands everyone will call them dirty, and the teachers won't be happy with them," says Hassina. "Nobody wants to be humiliated like that so the students make sure to wash their hands."

The new water and sanitation facilities at Gewane Primary school are already making a difference in the lives of students, particularly for girls.

"I hated using the toilets before," says Hassina. "My friends and I preferred waiting to go home after school, even if we had to go badly. We have also learned a lot about how to keep ourselves healthy by doing simple things like washing our hands after using the toilet. Being part of this club encourages us to share what we have learnt not only with other students but also with those people who are not in school. We can help those who are less fortunate in our community. I want to be a doctor when I grow up, because I want to heal people. Through this club I can start healing people from today."



INTERVIEW WITH THERESE DOOLEY UNICEF HYGIENE AND SANITATION PROJECT OFFICER

What is UNICEF trying to achieve in the area of sanitation?

UNICEF is trying to increase overall coverage in line with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to reduce the number of people without access to sanitation by half by 2015. We also look at how sanitation can contribute to overall child survival and improvement in girls' education.

A recent UNICEF/WHO report found that Ethiopia has the lowest sanitation coverage in the world. Why is that?

Traditionally the focus has been to ensure that people have access to safe water. The focus has not been so much on water, sanitation and hygiene as a complete package. Droughts are cyclical here in Ethiopia. Most people are more concerned in improving water coverage in terms of service delivery without looking at in terms of health impact. Building a latrine of water point is not the end of the story. If people do not know how to utilize the latrine or improve their hygiene in the home then you won't have an improvement on health status.

How are child survival and girls' education linked with sanitation?

If you take the current situation in Ethiopia, under five mortality is about 171 per 1,000 live births. Diarrhoea is responsible for about 20 per cent of those deaths. That adds up to incredible number each year. Diarrhoea can be caused by a number of factors but the most important is sanitation and hygiene. Water will only reduce diarrhoea by about 15 per cent where as safe handwashing, for example, could reduce diarrhoea by 36 per cent.

For girls' education, it is slightly different. Without proper sanitation, particularly in schools, four out of 10 children won't reach their full educational potential. When girls reach puberty, privacy is a very big issue for them. Part of our project ensures separate facilities for boys and girls to encourage girls at risk of dropping out to remain in school.

How are you assisting the Government?

We work with the Federal Environmental Health Department and in all 11 regions in the country focusing on school and household sanitation. We



build demonstration latrines at community level so that communities can see the different technologies available. We contribute to the construction of communal latrines for urban areas. We work with the Government printing and distributing hygiene promotion materials at community level. Currently, we are working closely with the Government on the WASH movement, involving all key players, NGOs, community-based and faith-based organisations, the private sector, the Ministries and the Bureaus. This year, we are focusing on handwashing, because we believe we can reduce diarrhoea by 36 per cent if we can get everybody to do proper handwashing at the appropriate time.

What are some of the constraints?

We had difficulties having trained staff at the community level. But with the new health extension package this will greatly assist us to have people at the kebele level who can work with communities. Sanitation and hygiene education is about promotion, motivation and awareness building within the community so that is where we really need to have trained people. We are working at all levels with the Government to support training on participatory hygiene education so that we look at not just information and knowledge but at individual behaviour change and overall social change within the community. The Ministry is also developing a sanitation strategy that looks at sanitation as a whole not just as the construction of latrines. UNICEF has made a strong commitment to support sanitation and hygiene in this country.

NEWS FILE

2 August – Members of the Ministry of Health, the Japanese Embassy, UNICEF and WHO participated in a signing ceremony in honour of the \$3.4 million donation by the Japanese Government to support polio eradication and the elimination of maternal and neonatal tetanus (MNT) in Ethiopia.



The Japanese donation will contribute to two nationwide polio immunisation rounds in early 2005. The campaign will target 95 per cent of children under five nationwide an estimated 14.2 million children.

20 August – Development Cooperation of Ireland (DCI) donated \$1.1 million to UNICEF for water supply, sanitation and hygiene education in Guraghe, Silite and Sidama zones in the Southern Nations Nationalities and Peoples Region (SNNPR).



The money will be used over a one-year period to assist 67,935 beneficiaries in the region and is an extension of on-going programme between DCI and UNICEF in SNNPR. A portion of the donation will be used to improve rural water supply, including the installation of pumps and generators, tools and spare parts and social mobilisation and community training.

23 August – The Ethiopia Country Office congratulated Olympic gold medal winner and UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador for Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVCs) Kenenisa Bekele for his victory in the 10,000 meters in Athens.

Kenenisa Bekele is one of the country's rising stars in the field of athletics. UNICEF Ethiopia was very moved and privileged to sign the young runner as Goodwill Ambassador for OVCs before he travelled to Greece to compete for his country.

17 September – UNICEF and the World Food Programme (WFP) announced that they are joining forces for the Enhanced Outreach Strategy (EOS) Child Survival Programme to benefit six million children in seven regions of Ethiopia.

The EOS is a three-year UNICEF project, funded by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and supported by WFP, with the specific aim of reducing the mortality rate of mothers and children, increasing access to health care for the target group and providing supplementary food for those in need.



For further information, please contact the UNICEF Communication Section, telephone: 251-1-515155 or 444400; fax 517111; e-mail: awalker@unicef.org