

## UNICEF and the International Year of Sanitation 2008

### *Why improved sanitation is important for children*

Sanitation and hygiene are key to child survival, development and growth. Improved sanitation has yet to reach 2.6 billion people in the developing world – almost 980 million of which are children under 18 years old. The result is not surprising and yet it is shocking: millions of children die each year from preventable diseases. These numbers are of epidemic proportions: the time for action is now.

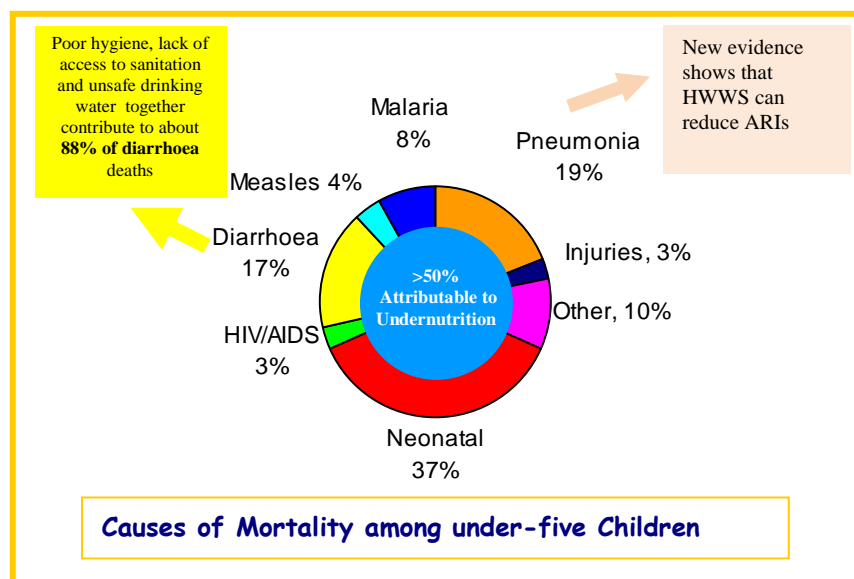
### *Expected impacts of improved Sanitation*

Where adequate sanitation is provided coupled with improved hygiene behaviours the following improvements could be expected:

- ✓ Lower morbidity rates in the population.
- ✓ Lower mortality rates due to diarrhoea.
- ✓ Better nutrition among children.
- ✓ Cleaner environment.
- ✓ Safer food and increased impact of improved water supplies.
- ✓ Better learning and retention among school children.
- ✓ More dignity and privacy for everybody especially women and girls.
- ✓ Increased awareness of the importance of sanitation and hygiene and the need to develop a more permanent strategy.



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Here's how the five IYS messages are particularly critical for children:

### 1. Sanitation is vital for health.

Of the approximately 120 million children born in the developing world each year, half will live in households without access to improved sanitation, at grave risk to their survival and development. Poor hygiene and lack of access to sanitation together contribute to about 88% of deaths from diarrhoeal diseases, accounting for 1.5 million diarrhoea-related under-five deaths each year. The WHO projects that achieving the MDGs in Africa would result in 173 million cases of diarrhoea being avoided every year and that providing a basic level of access to all would result in 245 million avoided cases.

### 2. Sanitation leads to social development.

Schools that have water and sanitation attract and retain students, particularly girls. One in four girls does not complete primary school, compared with one in seven boys. Girls bear the burden of water collection, which can take many hours a day, leaving them with no time or energy for school. Secondly, girls, particularly those old enough to menstruate, are reluctant to attend schools without toilets, and their parents are reluctant to send them. In general, healthy children attend school more and get more out of it. The WHO estimates that 194 million schooldays, resulting from fewer incidents of diarrhoea, would be gained annually if the MDGs for water and sanitation were met. Studies have shown that children with intense worm infections perform poorly in learning ability tests, cognitive function and educational achievement and that heavy infections can result in a six-month delay in development. Some infected children attend school only half as much as their uninfected peers.

### 3. Sanitation is a good economic investment.

Research shows that for every 10% increase in female literacy, a country's economy can grow by 0.3 percent. Educated girls are more likely to raise healthy, well-nourished, educated children, to protect themselves from exploitation and AIDS and to develop skills to contribute to their societies. Children weakened by frequent diarrhoea episodes are also more likely to be affected by malnutrition and opportunistic infections such as acute respiratory infections – the other major child killer. The WHO Commission established that reducing infant mortality is key to economic growth. Lowering infant mortality is associated with greater abilities of families to invest in health and education, in fewer dependents per worker and overall increase in per capita GNP and economic growth.

### 4. Sanitation helps the environment.

At present, each year more than 200 million tonnes of human waste – and vast quantities of waste water and solid waste – go uncollected and untreated around the world, fouling the environment and exposing millions of children to disease and squalor. Improved sanitation leads to less environmental degradation, increased sustainability of environmental resources and a more secure future for children.

### 5. Sanitation is achievable!

Now is the time to act. We can influence political leaders to act now. The estimated \$10 billion annual cost to halve the proportion of people without basic sanitation by 2015 is affordable. If sustained, the same investment could achieve basic sanitation for the entire world within one or two decades.

