

WATER, SANITATION AND HYGIENE (WASH)

Relevant Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

UNICEF's WASH programme is designed to contribute to Target 10 of MDG 7: to halve, by 2015, the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe water and basic sanitation. Achieving this target in Liberia is likely.

OVERVIEW

National coverage of safe water and basic sanitation was estimated by the national Demographic and Health Survey in 2007 as 66% and 10% respectively. The recent national Poverty Reduction Strategy (2008) records safe water coverage for the entire country at only 25% with a slightly better figure for sanitation at 15%. Possible reasons for this discrepancy are the decreasing efforts of humanitarian actors as the post-conflict situation moves towards development. Highlighted is the need for more sustainable, rural and urban water supplies with a continued effort for sanitation founded in sound household hygiene practices.

Accomplishments

UNICEF has supported the construction and rehabilitation of safe water points and latrines in schools, health facilities and communities focusing on areas of high population return after the end of Liberia's civil war. Recent results include:

- Development of safe water sources in schools, health facilities and communities contributing to increasing the coverage of safe water.
- Support to the Government of Liberia's Cholera Prevention Strategy which has contributed to improved cholera preparedness and response.
- Positive hygiene behaviour changes as a result of intensified hygiene education and promotion in communities and schools.
- Enhance community capacity to maintain and manage water and sanitation facilities through training of community-based technicians and establishment of water source management committees.

Challenges

However, major challenges remain in scaling up access to water and sanitation services for the entire population. Piped-bourne water systems that operated in nine Liberian cities before the war, now operates only in the capital, Monrovia, and at only at a fraction of pre-war capacity.

The use of unsafe water, the lack of basic sanitation and poor hygiene knowledge and practices

contribute to the high rate of morbidity and mortality in children under five in Liberia. Diarrhoeal diseases account for over a quarter of child deaths in the country. Cholera is endemic in Liberia and outbreaks affect an average of 1,000 people per year. Critical humanitarian needs and gaps that must be addressed to curb the burden of diseases include: the prevention and control of cholera and acute watery diarrhea; mitigation of water and sanitation-related impacts of flooding; the prevention and control of water and sanitation-related diseases in remote communities, especially in southeast Liberia; and improvements in water and sanitation facilities in health centres and schools.

Institutionally, several government entities in Liberia have oversight of the water and sanitation sector. This has led to some coordination challenges. Technical support is required for the development of a coherent strategy and policy framework that identifies clear and complementary roles and links the work of various government ministries and agencies.

FOCUS AREAS 2008-2012

UNICEF, working in partnership with other actors, aims to increase the effectiveness of policy and strategic planning, achieve results at scale, and ensure the leveraging of resources for the sector. Working at three levels, UNICEF will focus on:

- Strengthening sector financing, coordination, and policy;
- Training and monitoring service providers to ensure the design and implementation of well-targeted capacity development in the health, education and WASH sectors and to implement high impact low-cost interventions at scale; and
- Finding rapid and efficient approaches to fast track 'at scale' promotion of basic hygiene, sanitation and safe water usage at household level.

Other strategic contributors to Water, Sanitation and Hygiene activities:

UNDP, UNESCO, UNFPA, UN-HABITAT, UNHCR, UNMIL, UNOPS, WB, WFP, WHO, international and national NGOs.