

ACHIEVING RESULTS for Afghanistan's children

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WASH

Every child in a safe
and clean environment

Country Programme of Cooperation

UNICEF and the Government of the
Islamic Republic of Afghanistan

2015-2021

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WASH

Every child in a safe and clean environment

UNICEF has worked continuously for Afghanistan's children for 70 years. The Country Programme guides UNICEF's partnership with the Government of Afghanistan, identifying key issues, activities, and outcomes to realize the rights of Afghan girls, boys and women within a volatile development and humanitarian context. In 2018, the Country Programme was extended to 2021 to align with the Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework, United Nations Development Assistance Framework and the UNICEF Strategic Plan.

Context

Clean water, safe sanitation and good hygiene practices are essential to survival and development. Their absence can lead to diarrhoea, stunting and delayed development. In times of conflict and natural disaster, hygiene and water kits, access to safe drinking water and emergency latrines to minimize open defecation can save lives.

In Afghanistan there has been significant progress in access to improved water sources that are protected from outside contamination. However, more needs to be done to protect children from untreated diarrhoeal diseases and repeated intestinal infections. Similarly, most families do not use safe sanitation in which human waste is separated from human contact, and many defecate in the open, increasing disease and protection risks for children.

Learn more: <https://www.unicef.org/afghanistan/wash-water-sanitation-and-hygiene>

Key facts

- **67%** of Afghans use improved sources of drinking water (UNICEF/WHO JMP 2019)
- **43%** of Afghans have access to improved safe sanitation (UNICEF/WHO JMP 2019)
- **11%** of Afghans practice open defecation (UNICEF/WHO JMP 2019)

Targets

- People using basic drinking water services to be increased from **63%** in 2015 to **73%** in 2021
- People practicing open defecation to be reduced from **13%** in 2015 to **<11%** by 2021
- Rural-dwellers using improved sanitation to be increased from **39%** in 2015 to **46%** in 2021

HOW UNICEF ACHIEVES RESULTS

One of the most effective ways to save children’s lives is by teaching them proper hygiene practices—especially regular handwashing with water and soap—and guaranteeing clean drinking water and adequate sanitation. UNICEF supports the government and communities in Afghanistan to make lasting change in water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), focusing in particular on intersectoral work to provide WASH in schools and in combination with health and nutrition services.

WASH in schools and for adolescent girls

A healthy and clean school environment, with information about proper hygiene, helps students and their families maintain health, and encourages both girl students and female teachers to stay in school. UNICEF has accelerated its work with the Ministry of Education to bring clean water, separate toilets for boys and girls, menstrual hygiene management facilities and handwashing stations to schools.

Installing washrooms in girls’ toilets where they can manage their periods and introducing curricula on menstrual hygiene can make the difference between girls attending school or staying at home.

UNICEF is ending the taboos around menstrual hygiene management by producing guidelines, educational materials for teachers and informational comics for girls produced in partnership with the Ministries of Education, Women’s Affairs, Religious Affairs and Public Health. These were launched in 2018 at an event attended by the First Lady and male ministers, bringing high-profile endorsement for breaking silence around girls’ menstruation needs. The resources are being piloted in schools in 17 provinces.



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Total sanitation

In support of the government’s commitment to end open defecation by 2025, UNICEF is expanding community-led total sanitation, a sustainable way of changing behaviours. This approach uses shock, shame and pride to motivate entire communities to build and use low-cost latrines and is designated a national development priority by the government. Following UNICEF advocacy, this approach has been included in the Citizen’s Charter to provide basic services through Community Development Councils.

In remote and rural communities, UNICEF works with community mobilization teams to build awareness of hygiene, with women’s groups, known as Family Health Action Groups, spreading messages to other women and families within their homes. By the end of 2018, nearly half a million more Afghans across 11 provinces were living in 1,115 communities declared free of open defecation.

Safe drinking water

UNICEF supports the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development to provide clean drinking water to communities that rely on rivers, streams, wells, boreholes and traditional ponds, as well as to those whose water systems have been destroyed or fallen into disrepair. Developing government’s capacity on the construction of local water supply systems is essential for long-term sustainability.

UNICEF prioritizes new technologies that are more appropriate to local contexts, such as climate-friendly gravity-fed piped drinking water and solar pumps that provide more water, are located closer to homes, and are easier and cheaper to maintain by communities. In 2018, over 117,000 people in 88 communities benefited from safe, sustainable drinking water. UNICEF is committed to testing the water quality in all systems it builds or rehabilitates.



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WASH in emergencies

UNICEF coordinates the WASH Emergency Cluster in Afghanistan. During natural disasters as well as in continuing armed conflict, cluster partners provide safe drinking water, sanitation facilities, and hygiene education to children and families in need. UNICEF mobilizes partners in assessing the situation and planning both preparedness and response actions to reach vulnerable persons. In 2018, following displacement due to drought and conflict, UNICEF strengthened its WASH humanitarian response to provide emergency water services and long-term sustainable solutions such as water facilities in places of origin, and increased the use of sustainable technology.

Challenges & opportunities

A major long-term challenge faced by Afghanistan is that of climate change and desertification. As the population grows and water supplies run low, it is essential to ensure that water solutions are clean and sustainable. However, while Afghanistan is amongst the most highly water-stressed countries in the world, it also has amongst the highest levels of solar energy potential, opening doors to climate change financing.

Despite resource limitations on sustainable WASH solutions, UNICEF is working to achieve strategic synergies among sectors (WASH, education, health and nutrition) by combining services and communications, and is exploring ways of bringing this inter-sectoral approach into the Citizen's Charter.

Budget

UNICEF Afghanistan's 2015–2021 budget for WASH is US\$ 88.7 million. This excludes the humanitarian response budget.



Story

“I am very thankful that at least we managed to get water into the house.”

Thuraya, from Samangan province

Six years ago, Thuraya lost her husband to cancer. Today, she supports her children through low-paid crafts.

“I started doing embroidery and crochet,” she says. “I need not only to feed my children, but also to buy them some stationery for school.” She earns only Afs 2,500 (US\$ 30) a month. “This is not enough to feed my kids,” she adds.

Although the financial worries remain, recently, one great burden has been removed. In the past, Thuraya and her children had to carry home heavy bottles of water thrice a week. Today, the water is piped directly into her home.

“I am very thankful that at least we managed to get water into the house,” adds Thuraya pointing at the courtyard, where her 11-year old son Samir, is filling up the storage tank.

The piped network, which supplies 400 families directly and 1,000 more through filling points, is maintained by the village shura.

“We are so proud of this project, and we are constantly raising the awareness of families, especially children, on proper hygiene practices,” says the head of the shura, Haji Mohammad.



“We used to bathe once a week, now we have water and we bathe three times a week,” says Samir with a smile.

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Key alignments

Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework 2017–2021
Afghanistan National Rural Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) Policy 2016–2020
National Education Strategic Plan (NESP) III 2017–2021
Law on Disaster Response, Management and Preparedness in the Islamic State of Afghanistan 1990

- 👤 SDG-5 Gender Equality
- 🚰 SDG-6 Clean Water and Sanitation

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