

FACTSHEET



WASH: Water, Sanitation & Hygiene

UNICEF's Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) programme throughout Afghanistan increases access to clean water and helps communities develop healthy habits that can save lives. UNICEF in Afghanistan works with the government, partner UN agencies, NGO's and urban and rural communities to address the country's severe challenge of shortages of potable water and poor sanitation and hygiene practices. WASH initiatives cover a wide-range of projects, from the testing of water quality, building of wells and piped water systems in villages, to the construction of water and sanitation facilities in schools and teaching children and families about the importance of hand washing in preventing water-borne diseases.

Impact of WASH for communities

Ongoing conflict in Afghanistan has impeded the development of infrastructure throughout the country, resulting in many communities not being able to develop quality water sources. This problem is compounded by Afghanistan's semi-arid climate, which leads to the rapid evaporation of surface water, meaning both urban and rural communities must rely heavily on groundwater. The lack of clean water and poor sanitation result in exposure to water-borne illnesses, including diarrhoea, claiming the lives of an estimated 85,000 children a year.

WASH in Afghanistan	
% Total population with access to safe drinking water	48
% Rural population with access to safe drinking water	39
% Urban population with access to safe drinking water	78
% Total population with access to safe sanitation	37
% Rural population with access to safe sanitation	30
% Urban population with access to safe sanitation	60
% Schools with access to improved water sources	55
% Schools with access to improved sanitation	50

Source: Joint Monitoring Plan UNICEF/WHO, 2010 [Data 2008]

In addition to the general lack of access to clean water, communities in drought-prone regions are completely dependent on government and aid organizations to supply water to their villages. Situated in remote locations, delivery is often very difficult, placing these already disadvantaged communities in further danger of not accessing clean water. To date, this year UNICEF supported water supply activities – construction of hand pumps and spring protection – that have benefitted 100,000 people in the country.

UNICEF's Response

Working with the Afghan Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development and the Ministry of Public Health, UNICEF is developing policies and best practices for establishing community-based water and sanitation services. Additionally, UNICEF is contributing to the government's national emergency-preparedness plan by supporting a surveillance system for cholera and other water-borne diseases and strategically placing water basins and supplies for rapid deployment to populations affected by emergencies. Assisting the government to apply the global approach of Community-Led-Total-Sanitation (CLTS) for achieving zero open defecation, UNICEF has worked with villages to improve sanitation through proper hygiene promotion strategies that will help mitigate the spread of disease and illness.



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Boys and girls crowd around a hand pump for a drink of water in a school in the city of Mazar. Improving water and sanitation in schools is a key area of UNICEF's work in Afghanistan.

Key Challenges

Access for implementing and monitoring programmes remains difficult due to insecurity and the physical landscape of Afghanistan. This is compounded by the constraints local partners, including Community Development Councils, have in executing projects within allotted periods and the lack of technical support available at the Provincial level.

WASH in Schools

UNICEF has developed a WASH in Schools programme to bring water and sanitation facilities and information to nearly 500 schools every year. In addition to ensuring children have access to clean water and develop sound hygiene practices that they can share with their families, this initiative helps to keep children in school. One of the most common reasons for young women to stop attending school is the lack of proper and separate sanitation facilities for girls as they reach the age of menstruation. As well as constructing latrines, incinerators and hand washing stations, UNICEF is also working to develop advocacy materials that inform communities about the benefits of girls' education, and information packets on the proper hygiene practices for girls during menstruation.



Water pitchers in hand, girls jump over a stream, after using the UNICEF-provided latrine, at Bam Sarai School in the village of Bam Sarai in the central Bamyan Province.

This year 215 primary schools for girls and boys were provided with WASH facilities, benefiting 215,000 students. A guideline on maintenance and operation for WASH in schools is under development in collaboration with the Ministry of Education.

WASH in Emergencies

Recurrent droughts in the Northern region of the country and flash floods along the Pakistan border, coupled with large numbers of internally-displaced persons (IDPs) and returning refugees, present unique stresses on accessing water within the country. As an organization with a long history in emergency response, UNICEF is at the forefront of leadership and coordination for the WASH cluster – a consortium of UN agencies, local and international NGOs that work together to ensure integrated responses to humanitarian disasters.

By prepositioning essential WASH supplies at the Provincial level, UNICEF has helped ensure that quick responses to emergencies prevent major disease outbreaks, particularly in IDP camps. For communities in drought areas, UNICEF has worked with the government to provide drilling equipment needed to drill 40 deep tube wells in remote areas, serving an estimated 56,000 people in the drought affected Northern region of Afghanistan over the past two years.

The Way Forward

The tenuous security situation in Afghanistan continues adversely to affect children and creates many barriers to the development of adequate clean water sources throughout the country and the provision of WASH services. In the face of these challenges, UNICEF remains committed to helping the government and people of Afghanistan to develop access to clean water and healthy sanitation and hygiene practices that can save lives. To that end, in the remainder of 2011 UNICEF will continue building latrines and hand-washing stations in schools, support the government in the drilling of wells and provide technical expertise to the development of the first two water quality testing laboratories in the country.

For more information:

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