



The Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) Programme in Malawi

The UNICEF WASH programme aims to achieve universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water and adequate sanitation and hygiene for all. This includes ending open defecation and paying attention to the needs of women and girls and those in vulnerable situations. The WASH programme groups together water, sanitation and hygiene because of the connection between them. For example, without safe water, hand washing is impossible.

Water

UNICEF Malawi mainly focuses on the provision safe water to vulnerable communities and institutions. These institutions include Community Based Childcare Centres (CBCCs), schools, nutrition rehabilitation units and health facilities.

Sanitation

UNICEF Malawi looks to ensure access and use of basic toilets that separate human waste from contact with people in both communities and institutions. The main emphasis here is to end open defecation which is being practiced by about 1 million people.

Hygiene

About 15 million Malawians still do not have a specific place for hand washing with soap and water. UNICEF Malawi therefore focuses on nurturing good hygiene practices such as hand washing with soap.

Provision of safe water

UNICEF Malawi supports the provision of safe water to vulnerable communities and institutions through the construction and rehabilitation of water facilities. The focus is on ensuring that women and children cover a round trip of less than 30 minutes to collect safe water from facilities. The programme is also strengthening the capacity of water point committees and area mechanics to operate and maintain water points.

Sanitation and Hygiene

UNICEF Malawi partners with government, NGOs and the private sector to support interventions that promote the use of improved sanitation and hygiene services. The programme mainly uses the Community Led Total Sanitation (CLTS) approach which aims to improve sanitation and hygiene practices in a community by encouraging behaviour change through increasing the demand for toilets and hand washing facilities for households in communities. This is complemented with sanitation marketing which includes training business people to supply affordable and durable toilet options for households.

Safe water, basic toilets and good hygiene practices are essential for the survival and development of children.

In Malawi, there are around 9.9 million people who do not use basic sanitation, and 5.6 million people who do not have access to safe water sources.

Poor sanitation, unsafe water and unhygienic practices contribute to 3,000 under-five child deaths every year.

The lack of safe water is not only a health issue; it also affects the education and security of girls. In rural communities, women and girls have a primary role to fetch water and this involves walking long distances and meeting associated security hazards. This lack of sanitation and hygiene facilities in schools has implications on girl's attendance.

Even in circumstances where children survive, frequent diarrhoea episodes can have a negative effect on child development put children at high risk of acute respiratory infections.



Lucy collects water from a tap at her school, connected to a solar powered water pump.

Photo Credit: ©UNICEF Malawi 2017/Eldson Chagara

Solar power keeps the water flowing for a school and two villages: Lucy's Story

By Andrew Brown, UNICEF Malawi

Lucy Chalire, a confident and eloquent 13 year old, emerges from a classroom in her blue and yellow school uniform, smiling broadly after completing her end of year maths exam. Above the classroom door and windows, a brightly painted mural shows scenes of village life and numbered groups of objects to help the children practice counting. Lucy attends school every day and is third in her class of 45, but it wasn't always this way.

"I used to drink water from the shallow wells," Lucy explains. **"I had diarrhoea so many times. I would stay at home for around two weeks until I got better. I missed a lot of lessons but I always tried to catch up by copying notes from my friends."** Even when Lucy was well, water was a problem. She took turns with her mother walking 5km to collect water from the nearest standpipe. **"There were so many people waiting at the well,"** she says.

Fortunately, things changed for the village when UNICEF contractors arrived to install the solar powered water pump. **"I was so excited when the pump came because I knew I could drink safe water,"** Lucy remembers. **"The whole community helped. People were digging trenches. My mother helped fetch water to make concrete for the pump house."**

Housed inside a locked concrete building, the solar powered pump pushes water into a high tank, which holds 10,000 litres, then uses gravity to feed water through pipes to taps in multiple locations. As well as the school, it provides water for Lucy's village Kunja and another nearby village Chamba. Pump operators come every day to test the water quality and check chlorine levels. For families like Lucy's the change has been even more profound. She hasn't been sick once since the solar pump was installed. **"It feels so good not to be ill,"** she says. **"And I don't have to walk to the next village to get water. I'm doing much better in school. I would like to go on to secondary school and become a doctor to help my fellow Malawians."**

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