WHY?

A large number of people in South Africa do not have an acceptable toilet, and cannot easily access safe water to drink or wash hands. These circumstances are causing significant proportions of young children to die of preventable illnesses. The high prevalence of water- and hygiene-related illnesses, such as diarrhoea and intestinal worms, also contributes to malnutrition and poor school attendance, the combination of which can lead to cognitive impairment and reduced learning outcomes.

Handwashing with soap is one of the most cost effective interventions to prevent diarrhoea-related illness and deaths. By ensuring handwashing at critical times, up to 40 per cent of diarrhoea-related deaths, up to 47 per cent of all childhood diarrhoea cases, and up to 25 per cent of respiratory infections can be prevented.

WHAT? WASH

Working with partners, UNICEF raises awareness from local to national level on the critical importance of safely managed water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) for the health, education and nutrition of children, adolescents and families. The WASH programme builds commitment and capacity among key stakeholders – including school educators, community members and service providers - to drive behaviour change and make good hygiene and sanitation practices, as well as safe management of water, a habit. At the same time, schools, homes and health care facilities in vulnerable areas of the country are provided with support to prevent and treat water-, sanitation- and hygiene-related illnesses. A further component is ensuring menstrual hygiene management among adolescent girls in schools.

HOW? TARGETED POLICIES AND PROGRAMMES TO PROMOTE KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS AND INFRASTRUCTURE

UNICEF helps the Government and partners to develop national policies, strategies and programmes to drive evidence informed and targeted action on all aspects of WASH. This requires building knowledge and skills in communities to create demand, while ensuring adequate supply of infrastructure, commodities and services. Latest mapping technologies and tools are used to collect data, detect gaps and share knowledge on where the need is greatest; what the challenges are; and how best to drive behaviour change.

“Ensuring that the South African public knows about the importance of washing hands is only part of the battle; the real challenge comes in ensuring that the behaviour is a habit.”
– Dr Aaron Motsoaledi, Minister of Health

Such strategies and policies guide action from national level all the way down to communities. Of critical importance is the need to increase understanding among children, adolescents and families about the role of water, sanitation and hygiene in ensuring good health and
education outcomes. Handwashing with soap, hygiene and sanitation behaviours are learned early in life, and are difficult to change once they are entrenched. Intervening early promises the best return on investment.

Community campaigns and initiatives all focus on teaching good hygiene practices to women, children and caregivers in a fun and engaging way. Existing community health workers are trained in hygiene and handwashing promotion as well as how to ensure safely managed water and sanitation. They serve as WASH ‘heroes’ who foster good habits while also taking stock of which specific localities and schools are vulnerable, or lagging behind.

Within schools, key stakeholders - such as school principals, educators, learners, parents and school governing bodies - are trained on the importance of handwashing with soap and ensuring good sanitation practices to help prevent illness. De-worming pills are distributed, and soap is being leveraged through public-private partnerships to enable grade R and 1 learners to practice appropriate handwashing.

Critical messages related to water, sanitation and hygiene are integrated into broader primary healthcare and education campaigns, and mobile technology is used to reinforce communication and outreach.

WHO? UNICEF, GOVERNMENT AND PARTNERS

UNICEF works closely with the Departments of Health, Basic Education and Water and Sanitation, as well as other private sector and non-governmental partners to deliver multi-sectoral action on WASH at all levels. While UNICEF supports education and capacity building through community health workers and educators, both Government and private sector partners help to build infrastructure - such as group handwashing facilities in schools - and deliver much needed commodities like soap.

TIPPY TAPS

A ‘tippy tap’ may at first sound like a toy, but this innovative device is used by rural communities to address issues of health care and good hygiene practices in various parts of South Africa.

Made from a plastic bottle and straw along with water and soap, the tap relies on the laws of physics where pressure within the bottle releases the water creating a drip mechanism which can be used to wash hands.

With the support of community health care workers who act as WASH “heroes”, tippy taps are being introduced in schools and households across the country and are helping to improve maternal and child health outcomes.

WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES IT MAKE?

- Launched in 2014, the national WASH campaign includes observance of global handwashing days and world toilet day; and raises awareness and knowledge by disseminating information across the country.
- The recently launched National Hand Hygiene and Behaviour Change Strategy was based on a strategic bottleneck analysis that determined what needed to be improved and where. Implementation of the strategy began in 2017 and is helping to improve multistakeholder coordination around WASH.
- WASH targets have been integrated in the health facility score card used in Ideal Clinics.
- Introduction of a Government-sponsored deworming programme ensures 7 million tablets are provided each year to disadvantaged schools.
- Nearly 50,000 learners have been reached with participatory health and hygiene promotion through puppet shows in 131 schools across five provinces.
- More than 8500 community health workers have been trained to promote WASH in their communities. Eighty per cent of people visited by health care workers in KwaZulu Natal said they have changed their handwashing and hygiene behaviour.
- Simple and safe water solutions such as Tippy taps have been introduced in four disadvantaged communities within Ethekwini and Buffalo City metros thus providing lessons for scale up across the country. The taps not only provide running water, but also serve as a visual reminder and encouragement to engage in group handwashing with soap.

“My children … who have children, are well informed, they know that they must wash their hands before and after changing a nappy. And even at the toilet they know that there is soap that they must use”

- Sizakele Mathe, 38, Community Health Worker, Ethekwini, KwaZulu-Natal

WHAT NEXT? SCALING FOR THE FUTURE

WASH is a necessity and a right for all residents in South Africa. In today’s society, there is no excuse for children to be raised in a household or attend a school where they cannot easily wash their hands with soap or access a toilet. South Africa has committed to meet Sustainable Development Goal 6 of providing safely managed water, sanitation and hygiene to all by 2030. Collective action and increased investment are required to reach all communities and children who are currently left behind. We know which districts, communities and schools are in need, yet a large portion still need to be reached. Public-private partnerships will assist South Africa to ensure WASH programmes and infrastructure reach all areas of the country, and help to curb avoidable illness and death.
HOW CAN YOU HELP?

By supporting UNICEF and Government to promote WASH, companies have the opportunity to demonstrate private sector leadership in South Africa; integrate clear measurable targets in their corporate social investment (CSI) programmes; and directly support the objectives of the National Development Plan as well as the Sustainable Development Goals. Companies that work in the field of water and sanitation also have an excellent opportunity to create shared value by contributing research and innovation capacity to develop novel, cost effective solutions for disadvantaged communities.

CONTACT US

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