



Drinking water for development?

UNICEF's integrated package of water, sanitation and hygiene

1. From safe water to development?

The logic seems straight forward: If people have convenient access to safe water, this will lead to health improvements and more time available for education and economic productivity with economic and social development as the ultimate achievement. Unfortunately it is not that simple.

One of the main lessons learned in the sector was that providing drinking water alone will not lead to the desired health benefits. Adding sanitary facilities is a step in the right direction but still not enough. UNICEF's approach in water, environment and sanitation (WES) focuses on an integrated package of water, sanitation and hygiene for communities ("Community WES"), school sanitation and hygiene education ("SSHE"), and enabling environments.



Foto: Water in Honduras

Although World Water Day has only Water in its title it, is the UN system celebration for water, *sanitation and hygiene*. UNICEF sees this years theme "Water for Development" as one component of a package for hygiene improvement.

2. Where are we now? And where are we heading?

Globally 82% of the population today has access to improved drinking water sources and 61% to improved sanitation. This means an increase of 5% for water and 10% for sanitation over the last 10 years (more data and information at www.childinfo.org). The goals set at the World Summit for Children in 1990 to reach universal access to water and sanitation have not by far been reached.

New goals have been set by different organisations, like the UN Millennium Declaration Goals and the targets of the water and sanitation sector's *Vision 21*. In line with these

targets, UNICEF included water and sanitation goals in its new global agenda “A world fit for children” as follows:

“By 2010 reduction in the proportion of households without access to hygienic sanitation facilities and affordable and safe drinking water by at least one third.”

The strategy to achieve this is phrased in “A world fit for children” as: “Pay greater attention to building family and community capacity for managing existing systems and promoting behavioural change through health and hygiene education including in the school curriculum.” In the paragraph below it will be further explained how UNICEF focuses its work in WES.

3. What is UNICEF’s approach in water, environment and sanitation?

Regular UNICEF WES programmes, which currently are taking place in about 80 developing countries, are usually composed of three interrelated and mutually supportive components: Community WES, School Sanitation and Hygiene Education and Enabling Environment.

Community WES

“Community WES” is the package of supportive and empowering interventions at community and family level which improve access to, and sustainable use of, WES facilities. Community WES seeks to provide safe and reliable supplies of water, especially for those who currently walk long distances to water points of marginal quality, through new or rehabilitated wells, drilled bore holes, hand pumps, protected springs, small piped systems or rainwater harvesting. Sustainability of water supplies requires training of operators or caretakers and creation of village management committees. Systems must be in place so that community users have ready access to spare parts, skills and maintenance services. Appropriate cost sharing arrangements, which take into account community willingness and capacity to pay, are part of this package.

With increasing water shortages and rising water quality problems reaching universal access to safe, sufficient and affordable water for all remains an enormous challenge.

Community WES programmes use appropriate and low cost ways for households to gain access to sanitary means of excreta disposal. These personal and family choices require communication approaches and mobilisation of resources often different from community based water supply interventions. However, the importance of sustainability is the same, requiring building of awareness and demand at household level, training of local latrine

Rationale for Community WES

- Universal access to safe water supply and environmental sanitation services is a basic right, in line with the goals of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- Large disparities in access to safe drinking water and sanitation still exist, especially affecting poor, rural, remote or marginalised communities¹.
- The root cause of many childhood diseases is poor hygiene conditions. Diarrhoea and other water and sanitation related disease can be significantly reduced through low cost, sustainable WES interventions.
- Reliability of community water supplies needs to be improved by building the awareness and skills for community management.
- Coping capacity of those infected or affected by HIV and AIDS is greatly enhanced, and the incidence and impact of opportunistic infections are significantly reduced, by a cleaner and healthier environment.

builders and greater promotion efforts by service providers. Training of health extension workers in effective hygiene education, using participatory methodologies, is crucial to achieve the desired hygiene behaviours in the communities.

School sanitation and hygiene education

School Sanitation and Hygiene Education (SSHE) focuses on creating more child-friendly and health-promoting environments at schools and early childhood care centres. This effort involves assessment of existing school water and sanitation facilities, hygiene education resources and hygiene behaviours. Currently in over 40 countries UNICEF assists in the provision of infrastructure and child-centred promotion of hygiene-related behaviours such as hand-washing and proper maintenance of latrines.

SSHE combines the efforts of government ministries of education and health. Strategies for improving SSHE are determined in collaboration with government and local partners. WES facilities to be constructed or upgraded at schools include wells, hand pumps, latrines and hand washing tanks. Child-friendly facilities in most countries still need to be researched, demonstrated and taken to scale. Improving hygiene practices will be the focus of curricula changes, material development, training of teachers and skills based education. The central role of schools within communities presents opportunities for SSHE to influence wider community action. More information on SSHE can be found at www.irc.nl/sshe.

Rationale for SSHE

- Most schools in developing countries either lack safe water and sanitation facilities or existing facilities are in unusable or unhygienic condition.
- Girls are disproportionately at risk due to the lack of separate, safe and private sanitation facilities, often forcing them out of schools and thus greatly reducing their chances of reaching a good level of education.
- Children cannot learn well when suffering from ill-health and malnutrition made worse by worm infestations or unsafe environments.

Enabling Environment

“Enabling Environment” support the creation of conditions conducive to the provision of quality WES services for communities. National policies and strategies must recognise and support decentralised, sustainable solutions for people’s water and sanitation requirements. This requires capacity building through training, supervision, logistical resources and personal motivation. Besides national governments, it involves local authorities and communities themselves, so that they become fully aware of their options and responsibilities to plan, act and monitor WES activities.

Rationale for Enabling Environment

- The capacity of government departments and agencies mandated for providing WES services is often weak, either due to lack of resources and qualified staff or unclear roles and responsibilities.
- Service providers and communities often give low importance to safe sanitation and hygiene improvement for health.
- Building decentralised skills for planning, implementing and monitoring WES programmes requires training, resources and long-term commitment.
- Demand for drinking water is putting increasing pressure on freshwater resources which need to be managed carefully so that access by the poor and most vulnerable is not jeopardised.

Besides the above regular programmes a substantial percentage of human and financial resources of UNICEF WES are spent on the increasing number of natural and man-made emergencies. As emergencies usually result in large numbers of displaced people, quick provision of water and sanitation is crucial to avoid large scale outbreak of infectious diseases like cholera and contributes significantly to people’s well-being and dignity.

4. Still a long way to go

Over the last decades achievements and improvements have been made in the water and sanitation sector. But the other side of the coin shows population growth, environmental degradation and a growing gap between the rich and poor. All over the world, access to safe drinking water increased, except for the least developed countries.



Foto: Handwashing at school in The Gambia

Of course money is required to move forward and to realise the ultimate goal of universal access to safe water and sanitation and a clean and hygienic living environment for children.

UNICEF estimates that halving the proportion of people without access to water and sanitation by 2015 (i.e. part of the Vision 21 targets) will cost about \$ 9 billion per year, based on low cost technologies. This is a relatively small amount compared to overall governments expenses or the \$17 billion yearly spent on pet foods in the USA and Europe. Crucial for reaching the water and sanitation goals is the political will of governments, especially for improving sanitation, and of donors for targeted support. Private sector initiatives need to be encouraged, but these must guarantee that poor households also benefit.

Sustainable development requires much more than “just” access to drinking water. The integrated package of hygiene improvement which UNICEF promotes, is not only a dream. It can be done!!

Check-out www.unicef.org and www.unicef.org/programme/wes for more information.