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Sanitation fosters social development

Social development is about human progress; it centres on equality between women and men, social inclusion, access to education, community cohesion and poverty eradication. At its core are human dignity and human rights. For the 2.6 billion people who have to defecate behind bushes, in plastic bags or buckets, along railway tracks or in roadside ditches, human dignity is under daily assault. The humble toilet can speed social development in a number of ways:

By aiding progress toward gender equality

Poor women and girls are hit hardest by the absence of toilets. They care for the sick and are in greatest physical contact with human waste. Lacking toilets in overcrowded slums means going the whole day without relieving oneself and then risking exposure – or even assault – at night, a humiliating daily routine that can damage health. Menstruation adds considerably to the need for sanitary facilities. Sexual harassment and rape are also a risk in rural areas, where women often seek privacy in the darkness, and in refugee camps, which all too often fail to provide safely located, women-only toilets. These realities absorb women's time, imperil their physical well-being, and limit their free and equal participation in the economic and social life of their societies.

By promoting social inclusion

Poverty is more than a lack of income or a shortage of material goods. Human poverty, the lack of basic capabilities for participating in the standard activities of the community, is greatly exacerbated by lack of sanitation. For urban slum dwellers, living surrounded by

human waste and garbage is stigmatising and marginalising, creating embarrassment and depriving people of participation, choices and opportunities. Around 800,000 people in India still live by personally removing faeces from other people's latrines, taking it away in baskets on their heads, a livelihood that bars their inclusion in mainstream society.

By increasing school attendance

Over 190 million school-days would be gained each year if the sanitation goal were met. In addition, most schools in the developing world are built without sanitation and hand-washing facilities. Where no toilet block is set aside for girls, parents often won't allow their daughters to attend school, especially once they have started menstruating and need somewhere discrete to change and dispose of used cloths. This fuels the discrepancy in primary school completion rates: one in four girls do not complete primary school, compared to one in seven boys. In Alwar District, India, school sanitation increased girls' enrolment by one-third, and improved academic performance for boys and girls by 25 percent.

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→ **By building community pride and social cohesion**

When families and influential local figures focus on ending open defecation, the condition of the whole community can be transformed. Pride in keeping paths and streets unsoiled can help build and maintain community morale. The need for sanitation and self-respect from a clean environment have provided incentives for a transformation of local governance; sanitary reform has historically been the starting point for civic improvement. Recent efforts in Bangladesh and India have resulted in significant numbers of rural communities declaring themselves ›open defecation-free‹ – meaning that the entire community have jointly committed to eliminate open defecation and use basic covered latrines. Once new standards are the norm, social attitudes change, and families may not be willing to marry their daughters into households without proper toilets. In fact, in some villages in Maharashtra, the first Indian state to

pilot an approach centred on ending open defecation, residents have painted signs that read: »Daughters from our village are not married into villages where open defecation is practised.«

By contributing to poverty eradication

Poor sanitation is often a symptom of poverty; in Vietnam, hardly anyone from the poorest income quintile has a toilet, but 70 percent of those in the richest quintile do. It also causes poverty by making people ill, reducing their productivity and incomes, and by forcing them to use their time unproductively, either waiting to use public toilets or, in the case of open defecation, searching for seclusion. The chief asset a poor person has is often his or her physical health and resulting ability to work; illness robs the poor of this asset while also diverting scant resources from critical areas like education.

Main sources: UN, UNDP, UNICEF, WHO, WSP/World Bank.

Asked to prioritise reasons for satisfaction with their new latrines, rural householders in Philippines and Benin cited the following:

Rank	Philippines	Benin
1	Lack of smell and flies	Avoid discomfort of the bush
2	Cleaner surroundings	Gain prestige from visitors
3	Privacy	Avoid dangers at night
4	Less embarrassment when friends visit	Avoid snakes
5	Less gastrointestinal infections	Reduce flies in compound

Note that health considerations are at the bottom of the Philippines list and even further down on the Benin list (13th place).

Source: Cairncross 2004. *The Case for Marketing Sanitation*. Water & Sanitation Programme. World Bank, Nairobi