

Talking Points for the International Year of Sanitation

The sanitation challenge

1. Sanitation, like education and health, is a fundamental building block in the fight against world poverty. That's why the international community has committed to halving the proportion of people without access to basic sanitation by 2015, as part of the Millennium Development Goals. History tells us that investments in basic sanitation can help lift people out of poverty, ill health and early death. But today, 2.6 billion people – more than 40 percent of the world's population – lack access to basic sanitation. Meeting the need of these women, men, and children for a private, clean toilet – something taken for granted in developed countries today – is both possible and imperative. Together, we can do it – and together, we must do it.
2. *There are four reasons and one inspiring truth that should lead us forward in this effort. First, the reasons:*

Sanitation is vital for human health

3. On a typical day, more than half the hospital beds in Sub-Saharan Africa are occupied by patients suffering from faecal-related disease; most of them would not be there if they had a way to safely dispose of their faeces and wash their hands.
4. Diarrhoea is one of the biggest killers of children under five worldwide, alone accounting for 17 percent of deaths in this age-group. More than 5,000 children die every day from diarrhoea.
5. Providing access to a toilet can reduce child diarrhoeal deaths by over 30 percent, hand-washing by more than 40 percent.
6. Sanitation and hygiene could also prevent most of the 130 million annual cases worldwide of serious worm infestation. This matters since worms can divert up to one-third of the food a child consumes, and malnutrition is at the root of 50 percent of childhood illness.
7. Toilets and basic hygiene facilities can significantly improve the quality of life and survival rates of people suffering from major diseases like HIV/AIDS, as well as making it easier for those who care for them.
8. Readers of a prestigious medical journal recently voted "better sanitation" as the greatest medical advance in the last century and a half.
9. The link between sanitation to health is not just theoretical. A recent city-wide sanitation drive in Salvador, Brazil resulted in a 43 percent fall in the prevalence of diarrhoea in the poorest areas of the city.

Sanitation generates economic benefits

10. Improved sanitation in developing countries yields about **US\$9 worth of benefits for every US\$1 spent**.
11. Conservative estimates from the World Health Organization suggest that alone the time saved by people using a toilet close to home would have an annual economic value in excess of US\$114 billion.
12. Toilets save lives and enhance productivity; investments in sanitation and hygiene are investments in a nation's economy.
13. Twelve percent of the total health budget in Sub-Saharan Africa is spent treating preventable infectious diarrhoea. Progress in sanitation and hygiene would enable that money to be spent on other critical needs.
14. Improving sanitation would have a profound impact on education. Currently, almost 200 million days of school attendance are lost due to the lack of sanitation each year, and up to two-thirds of children in some African schools are infested with worms and unable to concentrate and learn effectively. School enrolment and retention rates for girls will rise when there are appropriate toilets and bathrooms for them to use, particularly after menstruation starts.
15. Investments in sanitation protect scarce water resources and enhance the value of water supply. They also protect tourism revenues, which in some countries account for upwards of 10 percent of GDP.
16. Hygiene promotion is often the single most cost-effective public health intervention.
17. Basic sanitation and hygiene are essential drivers of economic development.

Sanitation contributes to dignity and social development

18. It is hard for someone living in an urbanised economy, with hot and cold running water, and flush toilets on every floor of the house, to imagine life in an urban slum with no sanitation. Millions of families live every day surrounded by garbage, pools of stagnant water and streams of urine and faeces. Children work and play surrounded by filth while their parents must bear the sorrow of their needless untimely deaths.

19. Many women and girls must wait until nightfall to relieve themselves, putting their safety at risk. In Darfur and Chad, aid agencies construct latrines close to settlement camps because of the risk of attack and rape faced by women who must walk any distance to use sanitation facilities.
20. In India, around 800,000 people make a living by removing faeces from other people's latrines and carrying it away in baskets on their heads, a livelihood that bars their inclusion in mainstream society.
21. Evidence from Alwar District, India, showed that school sanitation increased girls' enrolment by one-third, and improved academic performance for boys and girls by 25 percent. Similar results from Bangladesh showed that the provision of girls' bathrooms increased girls' enrolment by 11 percent.
22. Recent efforts in Bangladesh and India have resulted in significant numbers of rural communities declaring themselves "open defecation-free" – meaning that the entire community had jointly committed to eliminate open defecation and use basic covered latrines. These achievements not only have health benefits but draw communities together and provide a route for them to engage with higher levels of government. The effect is widespread, with more than 10,000 villages in Bangladesh claiming open defecation-free status.
23. Household, school, and community sanitation are not just the means to economic growth, they are essential tools to enable communities to live in dignity and to realise their full potential. Equity and justice demand that we support their efforts.

Sanitation protects the environment

24. The sheer volume of untreated human waste demands attention. Without effective sanitation systems, human waste flows directly into water courses and contaminates groundwater. Water supplies are compromised, rivers become stinking sewers, and fisheries are threatened.
25. In Southeast Asia alone, 13 million tons of faeces is released into inland water sources each year, along with 122 million m³ of urine and 11 billion m³ of greywater. This pollution costs Southeast Asia more than US\$2 billion per year.

26. Prevention can be achieved through a combination of simple household technologies and more complex collection and treatment systems. The technologies exist – all that is needed is the political will to spend public money in this crucial sector.
27. *So there are four compelling arguments to invest in sanitation. Finally, it is important to remember that:*

Universal sanitation is achievable

28. In 1973 the Government of Malaysia responded to several major disease outbreaks by establishing the National Rural Environmental Sanitation Program. Thirty-five years of sustained effort at the local level have paid off: today, 98 percent of the rural population has access to a sanitary latrine. This nearly universal sanitation access has resulted in a dramatic fall in incidence of cholera, dysentery, and typhoid. Malaysia's commitment to improving sanitation in rural areas has resulted in major health and development benefits for its people. The Government of Thailand can tell a similar story.
29. In Tanzania, national and local governments, NGOs, and communities are working together – and making major progress against the practice of open defecation.
30. Bangladesh, India and more than 15 other countries have committed to rolling out “Total Sanitation” in rural communities, allowing communities to lead behaviour change, with the goal of eliminating open defecation.
31. These examples of progress show that universal sanitation is an achievable goal.
32. Achieving universal sanitation will take:
 - an ability to respect and respond to people's own needs and demands;
 - an ability to work with suppliers of sanitation and hygiene services to meet those demands;
 - hard work and sustained funding over the long run;
 - an ability to talk openly about sanitation; and
 - an inspiring vision of the future.
33. Together, we can do it.