

Water and Sanitation in the News

World toilet day raises awareness about global lack of sanitation

Wednesday 19 November 2014 was *World Toilet Day*, created by the United Nations in 2001 to raise awareness about lack of available sanitation around the world.

“Equality, Dignity and the Link Between Gender-Based Violence and Sanitation” is the theme for this year’s World Toilet Day. The campaign will inspire action to end open defecation and seeks to put a spotlight on the threat of sexual violence that women and girls face due to the loss of privacy as well as the inequalities that are present in usability. Toilets generally remain inadequate for populations with special needs, such as the disabled and elderly, and women and girls requiring facilities to manage menstrual hygiene.

About 35% of the world, or 2.5 billion people, are estimated to not have access to toilets according to the World Toilet Organization 2013 Annual Report – meaning more people have access to mobile phones than to toilets.

According to the United Nations 14%, or 1 billion people, regularly defecate in the open air (no latrine, no privacy). 10 countries where the most people lack proper sanitation, including but not limited to those who defecate in the open air:

- India, 818 million people or 65% of the population.
- China, 607 million people or 44% of the population.
- Indonesia, 109 million people or 43% of the population.
- Nigeria, 103 million people or 57% of the population.
- Pakistan, 98 million people or 52% of the population.
- Bangladesh, 75 million people or 48% of the population.
- Ethiopia, 71 million people or 80% of the population.
- Congo, 50 million people or 72% of the population.
- Brazil, 39 million people or 19% of the population.
- Tanzania, 32 million people or 68% of the population.

Lack of access to sanitation creates a host of health problems, making it easier for diseases to spread, infecting drinking water and contributing to undernourishment and

poverty. A child dies every 20 seconds because of poor sanitation, according to the U.N. It can also impact future economic opportunities because lack of sanitation can negatively affect school attendance, especially for girls. In 2013, 1,000 children died every day due to diarrheal disease because of poor sanitation.

Having to defecate openly infringes on human safety and dignity. And this has a profound impact on a country’s national health, children’s education, women’s safety, and productivity. In fact, the World Health Organization has estimated that poor water and sanitation costs developing countries US\$260 billion, or 1.5% of their GDP (PDF), each year.

Yet, for every US\$1 invested in water and sanitation, an average of at least US\$4 is returned in increased productivity. So it is surprising that, despite this evidence, sanitation is a challenge the world has yet to overcome.

There is a strong role for the private sector to address the water and sanitation crisis through funding, collaboration and supporting domestic economies with appropriate investment. Companies can support the World Business Council for Sustainable Development pledge and ensure their employees have access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene at work. They can extend these expectations to their supply chains, and partner with governments and non-governmental organisations to advance sanitation in nearby communities.

Read the full reports at: <http://www.usnews.com/news/blogs/data-mine/2014/11/18/on-un-world-toilet-day-more-have-access-to-cell-phones-than-toilets>; <http://www.un.org/en/events/toilet-day/index.shtml>; <http://www.unwater.org/worldtoiletday/home/en/>; <http://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/2014/nov/19/world-toilet-day-what-business-can-do-to-improve-global-sanitation>; <http://www.forbes.com/sites/jonspringer/2014/11/18/why-world-toilet-day-should-matter-to-you/>

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