



The *CHILD HEALTH* Millennium Development Goal

What water, sanitation and hygiene can do
in **Ghana**

The Millennium Development Goals

In September 2000, the United Nations Millennium Summit agreed a set of time-bound and measurable goals aimed at combating poverty, hunger, illiteracy, environmental degradation and discrimination against women.

The fourth Millennium Development Goal (MDG) is to reduce child mortality. The target is to reduce by two thirds the mortality rate among children under five by the year 2015.

Why should Ghana worry about child health?

Statistics show that the rate of infant mortality increased by 12.3% between 1998 and 2003 whilst child mortality also increased by 2.8%. The decline has been attributed to poor health service delivery and poor nutritional status of children. Each year, many children die from diarrhoeal diseases which are water- and sanitation-related and are also preventable. The low level of coverage for both water and sanitation especially in rural communities has had a negative impact on child health and the quality of life.



Headline facts

The MDGs are strongly inter-dependent and programme interventions must reflect this.

Water, sanitation and hygiene deliver outcomes across the MDGs.

Why is water, sanitation and hygiene so important for child health?

■ Child Health

Water, sanitation and hygiene interventions reduce the occurrence of diarrhoea and other diseases related to inadequate water and sanitation services.

■ Child Health and Education

Improved water supply, sanitation and effective hygiene education in school leads to healthier, happier children, higher rates of school attendance and better performance at school.

■ Child Health and the Home

Hygienic home environments, including easy access to safe water and adequate sanitation facilities, decrease children's exposure to infectious disease.

■ Child Health and the Community

The environment in which children live and play has a big influence on their health as they grow up. The provision of environmental sanitation and water supply has major beneficial effects on children's health.

■ Child Health and Quality of Life

Improved water and sanitation services have important impacts on the quality of life enjoyed by children. The benefits include being part of a household which has greater opportunity for economic productivity leading to the alleviation of poverty.



Child Health

The Facts

- Despite widespread use of ORT and a better understanding of diarrhoeal disease its incidence remains very high in sub-Saharan Africa. In Ghana all health institutions record diarrhoea among the top five reported cases at their Outpatient Departments (OPD).
- Infant and child mortality rates in Ghana are still unacceptably high: one in every nine children will die before reaching the age of five (Ghana Statistical Service, 2003).
- In Ghana, fetching water for domestic use is one of the main household chores undertaken by children. In rural areas, this exposes them to diseases like guinea worm and schistosomiasis as they will usually end up swimming or playing in the water.

Why water, sanitation and hygiene?

- The availability of a safe water supply, sanitation and hygiene education reduces the risk of infant mortality from diarrhoea. Many NGOs in Ghana are working towards increasing coverage of both water and sanitation. For example, in Gyabenkrom (Ahanta West District), World Vision Ghana has installed two boreholes in the village to make safe water available for domestic use after over half a century of using water from river Nyame.
- The risk of children contracting both bilharzia and other water-related diseases is also significantly reduced when a safe water supply is available in the community. Other associated risks like children drowning while fetching water are also reduced.



Child Health and Education

The facts

- A well structured school hygiene education programme focusing on life skills is essential if the full benefits of water and sanitation facilities are to be achieved.
- Research shows a clear correlation between children's health and their achievement in school (DFID 1998). Worm infestation for example affects the child's ability to concentrate in class and subsequently their grade attainment. Maximum benefit from deworming can only be attained when it is combined with improved sanitation and water supply.
- Studies into classroom conditions that influence learning show that the absence of ancillary services like toilets, water supply and first aid negatively affect pupils' attentiveness, time available for learning, orderliness and ease of movement in the classroom (Urwick & Juniadu, 1991).

Why water, sanitation and hygiene?

- Accurate knowledge and understanding of disease transmission is important in preventing water- and sanitation-related diseases. The national School Health Education Programme (SHEP) has an important part to play in integrating the teaching of hygiene into every child's daily learning whilst in school.
- Among children, an important critical time for hand washing apart from after defecation, is after play. Hand washing is a singular action that can prevent a number of diseases. In schools, an effort is being made to provide water especially for hand washing alongside each school latrine built.

Child Health and the Home

The facts

- Exposed human excreta is the beginning of faeco-oral transmission of disease. It is not uncommon in a traditional Ghanaian home to see children's faeces exposed in the home environment prior to their final disposal. In some local traditional areas, there is the belief that children's faeces, especially those who are still being breastfed, are not dangerous.
- Worm infestation is one of the major causes of anaemia in Ghanaian children. In the traditional home environment, babies are left to crawl and play on the bare floor. Further, children in rural areas, in many instances, eat from plates placed on the floor.
- The quantity of water used for domestic and drinking purposes in a house is greatly influenced by accessibility to the source. Since most rural people have to walk over a kilometre to get a bucket full of water, they are economical in their use of water for domestic purposes.

Why water, sanitation and hygiene?

- Improved water supply makes more water available for domestic use. That means mothers can use a lot more safe water to bathe, wash, clean and prepare food for children.
- A latrine in the home allows children's faeces to be disposed of immediately. It also allows children to be taught at an early age to use the latrine and appreciate its importance. The Community Water and Sanitation Agency in Ghana is actively promoting the construction of household latrines rather than communal facilities.
- It is important for the survival of the child that mothers especially, appreciate the impact of simple hygiene actions and make a conscious effort to practice them. WATSAN Committees in rural communities are tasked to strategize and implement hygiene education activities to ensure that the full benefits of water and sanitation facilities are derived by everybody especially children.



Child Health and the Community

The facts

- The WHO estimates that each year close to 1.7 million people (mostly children under five) die because of inadequate access to safe water and sanitation services (WHO, 2002).
- Rural communities in Africa are the least served for water supply. In Ghana only 41% of rural people have access to safe water (World Bank, 2004).
- When a community has a reliable water supply system and improved sanitation facilities, women, especially mothers are able to devote more time to care for their children.

Why water, sanitation and hygiene?

- In all instances of diarrhoeal diseases, the availability and use of safe water and appropriate sanitation is essential to restore and sustain health. It is important that each household in the community has ready access to a safe water source at all times. The key role of the Community Water and Sanitation Agency (CWSA) in Ghana is to assist rural communities and small towns obtain access to safe water and sanitation services.
- The time saved when water is available close to the house is quite significant and mothers can use the time gained to better care for their children especially those who are sick. In Ghana, the CWSA target is that the maximum walking distance to a water facility should not exceed 500 meters so that community members can have easy access to sufficient safe water at all times.

Child Health Quality of Life

The facts

- Improved water supplies lead to opportunities for household poverty alleviation through increased economic productivity, especially by women.
- Children born to poor families who have little or no access to basic water and sanitation services usually do not live very healthy lives. Yaws, diarrhoea and other water- and sanitation-related diseases are usually common among such children.
- Simple hygiene actions like washing hands regularly can be the difference between living a healthy life and a life of disease and illness. Hepatitis A, Salmonellosis and Shigellosis are all spread through faecal-oral transmission.

Why water, sanitation and hygiene?

- A reliable safe water supply system and provision of improved sanitation services are essential ingredients for quality life. In Ghana, the government through the Ghana Water Company Limited and the Community Water and Sanitation Agency is committed to increasing people's access to safe water and sanitation as a way of improving their quality of life and reducing poverty.
- Behaviour change, especially in hygiene, is essential if the provision of physical facilities is to impact positively on people's quality of life. In Ghana various hygiene promotion initiatives have been put in place to ensure that a change of behaviour goes hand in hand with improved service delivery.



This Country Note provides evidence for the impact of water supply, sanitation and improved hygiene on child health in Ghana.

Key references

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DFID Resource Centre in Water, Sanitation & Environmental Health
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Photographs by Vincent Tay

Country Note compiled by Vincent Tay

Editor: Frank Odhiambo, WEDC

For further information, contact:

WELL
Water, Engineering and Development
Centre (WEDC)
Loughborough University
Leicestershire LE11 3TU UK
Email: WELL@Lboro.ac.uk
Phone: 0 (44) 1509 228304
Fax: 0 (44) 1509 211079
Website: <http://www.Lboro.ac.uk/well/>



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