



The *EDUCATION* 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 second Millennium Development Goal (MDG) is to achieve universal primary education. The target is to ensure that all boys and girls complete primary education by the year 2015.

Why should Ghana worry about education?

Sub-Saharan Africa as a whole has the lowest school enrolment rates in the world and there are concerns that most countries in Sub-Saharan Africa may not meet the MDGs for education. Education in Ghana is still trying to pull out of two decades of decline. The government's Free, Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE) programme, has increased school enrolment over the years but Ghana is still nowhere near achieving globally accepted levels for Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER).



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 children's education?

- *Children and Health*
Most childhood diseases that prevent children from attending school are related to the use of unsafe water, inadequate sanitation and poor hygiene.
- *School Attendance*
Children's attendance and retention rates at school are higher where schools have water and sanitation facilities with proper operation and maintenance.
- *Performance at school*
Children's performance in school is greatly improved when the incidence of diarrhoeal disease and worm infestation is reduced.
- *Girls' Education*
More girls attend school when adequate water supplies are available and there are separate and private sanitation facilities for boys and girls.
- *Teachers*
Teachers are more willing to teach in rural schools where an adequate water supply and sanitation facilities are available.
- *Healthy School Environment*
Children of school going age live much of their lives at home and school. Appropriate environmental health interventions relating to water, sanitation and hygiene in the home and the school can significantly reduce the incidence of sickness and disease in children.



Children and Health

The facts

- Diarrhoea is the largest preventable killer of children under five. In Ghana, dehydration from severe diarrhoea is a major cause of ill health and death among children. Studies show that the highest exposure to diarrhoea causing agents is through the use of contaminated water, poor excreta disposal and unhygienic practices.
- In most low-income countries, worm infestation is one of the greatest causes of disease among children aged between 5-14. In Ghana, one of the major causes of anaemia in children is intestinal worms. There is an 80% prevalence rate of anaemia among rural children.
- Guinea worm, bilharzias and skin diseases related to unsafe and inadequate use of water are still very prevalent in rural Ghana. Ghana ranks second in the world for guinea worm infection with 3,622 cases (WaterAid, 2003) including children.

Why water, sanitation and hygiene?

- Improved sanitation in the school accompanied by hygiene promotion significantly reduces the incidence of diarrhoeal diseases and helminth infections.
- Safe and accessible water supplies will facilitate the eradication of guinea worm and reduce the incidence of skin diseases.



- Improved hygiene practices, especially hand washing with soap have been shown to reduce diarrhoea by as much as 40%.



School Attendance

The facts

- Sub-Saharan Africa has the lowest primary school completion rates in the world. Ghana has an enrolment rate of 60%.
- Diarrhoeal diseases, intestinal worm infestations, guinea worm and other water related diseases still account for a high percentage of childhood illnesses, causing children to lose many school days.
- Domestic chores related to water and sanitation are often responsible for pupils' lateness or non-attendance at school. In Ghana, children spend about two hours a day on domestic chores such as fetching water (Ghana Living Standards Survey, 2000).

Why water, sanitation and hygiene?

- Where reliable water and sanitation facilities are located close to the home, less time is spent fetching water. Further, water does not necessarily have to be fetched early in the morning freeing children to attend school early.
- Most rural communities site their water facility close to the school so that children are not fatigued collecting water. This helps to reduce truancy.

Performance at School

The facts

- Water related diseases like guinea worm and bilharzias keep children away from school for long periods. This has a negative impact on their performance in school.
- Frequent worm infestation in school going children leading to anaemia and stunted mental growth is one of the major causes of poor performance in school. In rural Ghana, many children suffer from worm infestation resulting in malnutrition and anaemia.

Why water, sanitation and hygiene?

- It is important after de-worming that children do not get reinfected. The provision of a school latrine ensures that human excreta are disposed of safely. Active hygiene education also ensures that children maintain a clean school environment thus reducing the risk of re-infection.
- Hygiene education in the classroom is important to build children's capacity to remain healthy and improve performance in school.



Girls Education

The facts

- About 44 million children in Sub-Saharan Africa were not enrolled in school in 2000 and more than half of them were girls.
- Child labour and domestic chores prevent many girls from attending school. In rural Ghana, fetching water early in the morning before school is a common chore. In some cases, girls have to walk more than 2 km to get water.
- Evidence shows that a child's health is related in many ways to the mother's level of education. In Ghana, the highest levels of child mortality are recorded among children with mothers with little or no education.

Why water, sanitation and hygiene?

- Providing improved water facilities within the community reduces the distance and burden of fetching water for the home.
- Interviews with pupils in the Eastern region revealed that the majority appreciated the privacy afforded by a latrine and felt comfortable using it if it was well maintained.

Teachers

The facts

- The absence of basic water and sanitation facilities in rural areas is a major disincentive for teachers to accept rural postings. In 1999, for example, of 262 teachers posted to the 4 districts in the Upper West Region, only 115 reported at post.
- In areas where there is limited access to safe water and sanitation, teachers are exposed to water- and sanitation-related diseases.
- Inadequate washing due to water shortages results in skin diseases and body odour. In focus group discussions, teachers in the Eastern region of Ghana, mentioned that they reduce their interaction in classes where there is a general problem of body odour.

Why water, sanitation and hygiene?

- Increased access to safe water will ensure that all people, including teachers, have adequate water for domestic use. This will also make rural postings more attractive and reduce the potential for teachers falling ill.

Healthy School Environment

The facts

- Childrens' health is influenced in many ways by the physical and human environment of the school. Children need a safe and caring human environment in school to be able to learn. In Ghana, most schools are built without consideration for water and latrine facilities. In rural areas, most schools only have a makeshift pit latrine provided mainly by the Parent Teacher Associations (PTA).
- Water is essential for life and health. It is important that children have potable water to drink and wash hands whilst in school. However the majority of schools, especially rural ones do not have water facilities on the school compound.
- An unsanitary school environment is a major contributory factor to most diarrhoeal diseases.

Why water, sanitation and hygiene?

- In some communities, it is not unusual for people to defecate on school playing fields and even the classrooms especially after school hours or for cattle to be driven across the school compound. Latrines ensure that human excreta are disposed of properly and the threat of diarrhoeal disease to pupils is reduced. The CWSA is collaborating with the Ghana Education Service (GES) to provide rural schools with school latrines.
- Across the country, most schools have dusty open spaces which are used as playing grounds for the pupils. Food is also presented for sale to pupils in open spaces. This discourages hand washing which is critical in schools to reduce diarrhoeal disease transmission. Schools benefiting from Community Water Supply and Sanitation Project support in the Eastern, Volta and Greater Accra regions have 1400 litre water containers (polytank) to promote hand washing practice and make water available for other purposes in school.



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

Key references

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