

Talking about Toilets

Background



Children washing their hands during the GHD activities

In the year 2000, 1.1 billion people did not have access to an improved water supply. More than double this figure – 2.4 billion people – did not have access to improved sanitation. The consequences of poor sanitation are wide ranging and serious, for example two million children die each year due to diarrhoea, whilst many women run the risk of rape every time they practice open defecation. Improving access to safe water has always been a popular issue with donors and the general public alike, but even discussing sanitation is taboo in many cultures. Consequently, the international community has focussed on the former but neglected the issue of access to improved sanitation for many years. This disparity resulted in access to water being enshrined as a target within Millennium Development Goal 7, whilst access to sanitation was left out.

Original text of target 7c: *Reduce by half the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water*

The MDGs attempted to reflect the priorities and goals of the international community for 15 years. Issues which were not reflected within the goals, like access to basic sanitation, were therefore likely to receive less international attention and funding.

International Interest

Tearfund began policy work on water and sanitation in 2000. The unequal status of sanitation and water was a serious concern and the omission of access to sanitation from the MDGs was therefore of particular interest. Tearfund and WaterAid decided to launch the joint campaign 'Water Matters' in order to lobby on the issue. The campaign coincided with preparations for the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg. At that time, very few development agencies were interested in engaging with the Summit, or environmental issues in general. The links between sanitation and the environment resulted in the Summit being identified as a key moment to try and change MDG target 7c.

The strategy combined behind the scenes meetings with ministers/officials and public campaigning. These tactics, which included a 120,000 person petition, resulted in the UK government declaring that the addition of sanitation to the MDGs was their most important target at the Summit. Attention then turned to the European level. Policy officers and the UK government used the regional preparation meeting to successfully push for sanitation to be included in the European position text for the Summit. Meanwhile, the team discovered that the main blockers to the 'ask' were the US, Canada and Australia.

At the Summit, the team (which included Tearfund partners working on water and sanitation) benefitted from the strong relationship which had been built with the UK government and had regular contact with them during negotiations.

Tearfund, Water Aid and others undertook prominent media work and criticism of the blocking governments made headline news. These comments were reported in the press of the blocking nations and the public criticism began to take effect. The new target was agreed and access to sanitation was permanently added to the MDGs, with target 7c now reading: "Reduce by half the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation".

Tearfund is a Christian relief and development agency working with a global network of local churches to help eradicate poverty

Case Studies – Water and Sanitation

Now that the issue was included within the target, progress in global access to sanitation would be monitored. The baseline of those with access to sanitation was low. By monitoring the rate of improvement, it would be easier for NGOs to hold governments to account for their commitments, lobby for sufficient funding for the sector, and campaign for greater action.

A petition of 1.4 million signatures was presented and the campaigners garnered an unprecedented amount of coverage. Despite initial attempts to avoid and ignore the protests, the media uproar was so strong that by the end of the day, Tony Blair (then British Prime Minister and host of the Summit) asked to meet with the leaders of the campaign. By 1999, the Enhanced HIPC initiative was in place, providing faster, deeper and broader debt relief and poverty reduction.



Campaign hand-in at Number 10

Next steps: Water and Sanitation for All

At the mid-point of the MDG timeframe, monitoring of MDG7c revealed that progress was extremely slow and the world was not on track to meet the target by 2015. This urgent need for progress led to the establishment of the advocacy coalition End Water Poverty. In March 2007 they began campaigning on access to WASH (Water, Sanitation, Hygiene), lobbying for a global action plan, monitored by a global task force. UK campaigners knitted squares forming a 250 metre long river, which 'flowed' through London to Downing Street and demanded then Prime Minister Tony Blair to take a stand against water poverty.

From June 2009 to July 2010 the most campaign actions received by DFID were on the issue of WASH and Tearfund was the second biggest generator of these. 80,000 campaign actions were handed in to then Prime Minister, Gordon Brown. Hundreds wrote to the new DFID Minister with responsibility for watsan, Mike Foster, asking him to champion the issue. He was asked to take every opportunity to champion a global framework for action and he began doing so, increasing political interest in the UK and Europe. The UK and Dutch governments subsequently announced their support for a framework for action and by 2010, there was global agreement to establish 'Sanitation and Water for All: A Global Framework for Action' (SWA).

The first High Level Meeting of SWA was held in April 2010. 26 countries/ multilateral organisations made commitments at this meeting to improve either their own WASH provision or their support of other countries to do so. The meeting enabled participants to share best practice, discussions on how to integrate services and ensure the coordination of provision or support. SWA provides a global framework within which global WASH efforts can be coordinated and linked to country level dialogue and action. Countries made concrete commitments to improve financing, coordination and evaluation efforts, providing a monitoring mechanism to hold governments to account.

Impact at National Level

In 2011, SWA participants were assessed on their progress towards their individual commitments. 65% of countries had either completed or were progressing well on the implementation of their commitments, and they directly attributed 44% of these commitments to the SWA process. Domestic spending on WASH was increasing in nine countries; Timor-Leste, for example, increased their investment in the sector from US\$2m in 2009, to US\$11.2m in 2010. Other areas of progress included increased transparency and availability of budget information in Mauritania, and the development of coordination and evaluation systems in Nepal and Liberia respectively.

Other donors and countries made steady progress in implementing their commitment to target WASH funds to hard-to-reach populations, for example the Finance Minister in Timor-Leste used sanitation coverage data to make budget allocation decisions to ensure better targeting of the un-served. Overall, sanitation commitments showed consistent gains, with good progress in improved sanitation policies, decentralised sanitation services and sanitation awareness in five countries, such as Bangladesh and Senegal.

National Case Study: Liberia

In 2008 3.1 million Liberians, out of a total population of 3.5 million, had no access to sanitation facilities. The problems caused by a lack of appropriate facilities were compounded by poor hygiene habits; for example 19 out of every 20 Liberians did not wash their hands after using the toilet. Liberia was the first country to take action under SWA. They held a week long consultation on how to equitably and sustainably improve access to WASH, with a delegation of Government, CSO and SWA representatives. Tearfund partner AEL was involved as part of the CSO working group. A Compact was eventually agreed, outlining WASH action plans for the next two years and the government committed to increase access to safe drinking water and sanitation by 25% between 2008 and 2012. In 2008/2009 WASH comprised just 1% of the total budget. By 2010/2011, WASH was allocated 7.3% of the budget.

The post-conflict conditions of Liberia have made it difficult to regularly collect accurate statistics on living conditions. However surveys are showing that the SWA-driven efforts in Liberia are beginning to produce dividends across the country. In 2004, 27% of the population had access to sanitation facilities, whilst 61% had access to improved water sources. By 2009, 45% had access to sanitation facilities, whilst 75% had access to improved water sources. Whilst survey results are tentative, it appears that the percentage of under 5 deaths due to diarrhoea fell from an estimated 19% in 2008, to 14% in 2011.

Community Impact

Handwashing has been shown to make a significant contribution to swift improvements in sanitation levels. Consequently, one initiative resulting from the addition of sanitation to the MDGs was a Global Handwashing Day (GHD) on October 15th each year. As part of the Liberian SWA plans, the Ministries of Education and Health led NGO partners in organising GHD activities across the country. Tearfund and local authorities used Global Handwashing Day to mobilise the town of Tappeta, Liberia around the issue of sanitation. Educational radio talks complemented marches with drama and dance troupes singing and acting messages about handwashing with soap. Over 1,000 people took part and 2,852 students symbolically washed their hands with soap.

Ma Yassah Kollie, a resident of the slum community, Buzzi Quarter has been one of the beneficiaries of the Global Hand Washing Day activities carried out by the AEL WASH Program. Her income was low, and most of her earnings had to be spent on hospital bills and medical expenses. Her children suffered from water borne diseases, such as diarrhoea and cholera, due to poor hygiene practices and sanitary conditions. However, having taken part in the activities carried out by the AEL Global Hand Washing Day programs, Ma Yassah adopted hand washing and other good hygiene practices. Having seen the positive impact this had on her own children, she decided to help ensure that other children don't needlessly suffer. She now serves as one of the community hygiene promoters in the Buzzi Quarter community.