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# Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

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## UNICEF in action





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A latrine built with UNICEF assistance near Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea.

UNICEF's first action in the area of water and sanitation was in response to a crippling drought that affected hundreds of villages in northern India in 1966. Since then, UNICEF has worked in more than 90 countries around the world improving access to safe water and sanitation and promoting hygiene awareness.

Over the years, the UNICEF programmes that started with an emphasis on water supply 'hardware' like drilling rigs and hand pumps have evolved towards a greater concentration on sanitation and on the 'software' of supporting policy development, building the capacity of institutions and raising awareness about hygiene. UNICEF uses a human rights based approach and works in partnership with communities – especially women and children – in planning, implementing and maintaining water and sanitation systems.

UNICEF works with government and other partners to create conditions for change – or enabling environments – to ensure the effectiveness and sustainability of all water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) programmes.

Working directly with community-based organizations and communities and families themselves, UNICEF helps to ensure that households have access to a clean and secure supply of water, and safe and convenient sanitary facilities. Through hygiene promotion – and especially the promotion of hand-washing with soap – UNICEF works towards maximizing the health benefits, focussing in particular on the survival, growth and development of young children.

"Unsafe water, inadequate sanitation and poor hygiene habits play a major role in child mortality." — UNICEF Executive Director Ann M. Veneman

UNICEF works towards making schools healthier and more attractive to children, especially girls, through WASH in schools programmes. Healthier children are more effective learners, and girls who spend less time fetching water have more time for school. Helping to build separate and decent sanitation facilities in schools can reduce dropout rates, especially among girls. And hygiene promotion in schools creates conditions where children themselves are agents of change in their families and communities.

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