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Ensuring Access to Basic Necessities: The Importance of Sustainable Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene

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Abstract

Access to safe water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) is a fundamental human right and essential for public health. However, many communities around the world still lack access to these basic necessities, which can lead to a variety of health problems and a reduced quality of life. In this review article, we will explore the concept of sustainability of water, sanitation, and hygiene, and its importance in ensuring access to these essential resources for all. Looking back at the history of water, sanitation, and hygiene can help us understand the challenges and opportunities of these issues and draw lessons to achieve sustainable development in the future. Throughout history, civilizations have successfully experimented with treating water and using it for drinking, sanitation, and agriculture. For example, the Hygiene in ancient Rome was promoted by the famous public baths and toilets, which were supplied with water through widely branched aqueducts that had a high standard of cleanliness for the time and were regularly maintained.

Keywords: Hygiene, Sustainable Water, social life, sustainable WASH systems.

Introduction

Hygiene is a practice related to health and medicine. In medicine and everyday life, hygiene practices are employed as preventive measures to reduce the incidence and spreading of germs leading to disease. In Department of Civil Engineering & Architecture, University of Pavia, Italy, Bacalini Maria, <u>Mariabacalinia@esu.com.it</u>



addition, WASH is crucial to human health and well-being. Contaminated water and poor sanitation are linked to the transmission of diseases such as cholera, dysentery, hepatitis A, typhoid, and polio, among the most common diseases. In addition, diarrhea symptoms are very common, happening in most people a few times each year. In most cases, the cause is unknown and it goes away on its own after a few days. However, dehydration is a dangerous side effect of diarrhea. Absent, inadequate, or inappropriately managed water and sanitation services expose individuals to preventable health risks. Billions of people today lack access to these basic services and will be in the same condition for decades, save for a rapid acceleration in the sector's progress. It was estimated that to reach universal access to drinking water, sanitation, and hygiene by 2030, as foreseen by the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the current rates of progress would need to increase fourfold.

Sustainability of Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene

Sustainability of WASH refers to the ability of communities to maintain access to safe water, sanitation, and hygiene practices over time. This includes not only the availability of these resources but also their affordability, accessibility, and cultural appropriateness. Sustainable WASH systems also take into account environmental factors, such as the availability of water resources and the impact of sanitation systems on the environment.

Importance of Sustainability of Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene

Ensuring the sustainability of WASH is crucial for a number of reasons. First and foremost, access to safe water, sanitation, and hygiene is essential for public health. Lack of access to these resources can lead to the spread of waterborne diseases such as cholera, typhoid, and dysentery, as well as the transmission of other diseases such as diarrhea and hepatitis A. Sustainable WASH systems can help prevent the spread of these diseases and improve overall health outcomes.

Sustainability of WASH is also important for social and economic development. Lack of access to safe water and sanitation can lead to lost productivity due to illness and the time required collecting water or finding a place for open defecation. Sustainable WASH systems can help increase productivity and economic growth, particularly in rural areas where agriculture is a primary source of income.

Finally, sustainable WASH systems are important for environmental sustainability. Improper sanitation practices can lead to contamination of water resources, which can have negative impacts on the environment and wildlife. Sustainable WASH systems can help minimize these impacts and promote environmental sustainability.



India is a good example of why WASH is significant in urbanizing areas under low water availability. More than half of the population of India, one of the most densely populated nations in the world, lives in suburban areas. People in India have limited access to sanitation and hygiene due to the country's rapid population expansion and limited availability of water. The majority of children's diarrhea-related deaths in India are caused by nearly half of the population who inhabit outskirts, polluting and contaminating the water. Due to unhygienic conditions and tainted water, 117,000 children under the age of five die each year from diarrhea. According to research, little over half of Indians wash their hands after defecating. Fewer than 40% of Indian people wash their hands before handling food, and just 30% wash their hands before eating. However, using soap to wash hands might lessen the likelihood of developing respiratory infections and diarrheal diseases, which are most common in young children. Since about 600 million people do not use toilets, there is a greater chance of water contamination and diarrhea since their waste penetrates the environment. Children with diarrhea are more vulnerable to pneumonia and other ailments like malnutrition, which affects almost 50% of children. Only about 10% of rural homes correctly dispose of their garbage, with the majority being either dumped in the trash or left outside. Approximately 6% of young children under the age of five use toilets.

Nowadays, the main idea of implementing water/wastewater historical technologies in developing countries is quite appealing since the features of historical systems would amount to decentralized water and sanitation provision. Before mechanical pumps and computers were invented, simple but efficient ideas and techniques were implemented, which can still be applied today to save energy and to set up cost-friendly and environmentally conscious water systems. This applies to drinking- and wastewater supply systems, irrigation, and electricity-producing micro-watermills. The latest figures indicate that 2.6 billion people do not have access to improved and advanced sanitation. Although community/public toilets are not categorized as advanced sanitation systems by the World Health Organization (WHO) and United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), this can be a debatable premise since examples like Durban in South Africa indicate how public toilets continue to show a water and sanitation way for populated cities. According to the critical need for water and sanitation advanced technologies, particularly dry sanitation technologies, public toilets have important applications in both rural and urban areas.

Emergency WASH interventions are vital to prevent the transmission of diseases and also to minimize susceptibility to disease-bearing vectors. NGOs play a vital role in improving WASH policies, contributing to government organizations (GOs), particularly during the post-disaster stage, during both reconstruction and recovery phases. Enhancing contribution between NGOs and GOs has the potential to build a link leading to realistic results. On the other side, a lack of contribution will result in negative



outputs, such as infrastructure destruction, loss of life, loss of property, and lack of proper access to an improved WASH system.

Hygiene is a broad subject with many aspects and a key factor in the prevention of diseases and the promotion of good health. Hygiene has been identified to reduce diarrheal diseases and infections among others, and proper hygiene practices enhance dignity, self-esteem, and prestige in social life. Hygiene can be practiced at the personal, domestic, industrial, institutional, and community level, with several sectors playing various roles in enhancing hygiene as it improves human health. However, it is necessary to incorporate hygiene with sanitation and an adequate and clean water supply, since these go hand in hand. Different countries have made significant efforts to enhance safety, minimize costs, and reduce environmental impact and they continue to invest in infrastructure. It is anticipated further efforts will be undertaken in tunnel engineering, thus contributing to sustainable development in the future.

Achieving full or even partial access to WASH services is still the main challenge for many developing countries, given that WASH is a component of the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development, particularly for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 6. Until then, economic consequences, such as increased healthcare costs and lost productivity, are expected. To move forward, a multifaceted approach is required, including governmental actions, public-private partnerships, and social participation. Emphasis should be given to investments in WASH, targeting mainly the mobilization of financial resources, to support critical actions, such as building basic and cost-effective sanitation infrastructure, establishing collaborations and promoting good hygiene practices, improving water quality, and implementing effective technologies and waste management systems. Moreover, current innovative solutions, such as low-cost toilets that use minimal water and do not require a sewer connection and mobile sanitation facilities, are also important, in the context of the adoption of decentralized household-centered sanitation, particularly in rural areas. Additionally, technological tools and new approaches and methodologies are needed to address new issues arising from climate variability and population growth, expected mainly in low-income countries.

Finally, it should be concluded that: The history of water quality is equivalent to the history of life longevity and quality. In addition, it is indicated that: The study of the past allows us to learn about the present and to make plans for the future. As already mentioned, each year's World Water Day focuses on topics relevant to WASH. Thus, it is devoted to that day.

Conclusion



In conclusion, sustainability of water, sanitation, and hygiene is essential for ensuring access to these basic necessities for all. Sustainable WASH systems can help improve public health, promote economic development, and protect the environment. However, achieving sustainable WASH systems requires addressing a variety of challenges, including inadequate infrastructure, lack of funding, and social and cultural barriers. By working together to address these challenges, we can help ensure that all communities have access to safe water, sanitation, and hygiene practices, now and in the future.

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