

Sanitation: A Strategic Approach

Health need

According to the United Nations Children's Fund, more than 2.5 billion people live without access to improved sanitation. People without access to safe water and basic sanitation facilities are exposed to fecal contamination and are put in contact with harmful viruses, bacteria, and parasites that can lead to serious infections and diseases such as diarrhea, cholera, typhoid, and hepatitis A. This exposure results in the deaths of more than 4,000 children every day. Sanitation practices such as open defecation have serious health consequences and have been linked to reduced school attendance—especially for female students—with dramatic effects on personal development. Despite the ongoing efforts of many governmental and nongovernmental stakeholders, large gaps in access to sanitation remain, resulting in this continuing health burden concentrated in low-income communities.

Technology solution

PATH's sanitation strategy addresses access and sustainability in four key areas: market approaches, technology and products, financing, and an overall sanitation framework focused on end users. Sustainable sanitation solutions begin with a thorough understanding of the sanitation value chain and an in-depth assessment of gaps involved in the delivery of sanitation products and services at the household- or community-toilet level. PATH is adapting effective technologies into products that are well-suited for consumers who need affordable, appropriate products and enterprising providers who need sustainable business models. Also, PATH is working to enable suppliers with loans to improve their ability to expand delivery of sanitation products and services to low-income households. These loans provide working capital and allow providers to build inventory and purchase capital equipment.

However, a user-centered focus requires looking beyond markets, technology, and financing as discrete elements of development. We created a framework of domains that represents the roles and spheres of influence at all levels of the decision-making process and considers critical social, cultural, financial, legal, and power relationships in order to understand the complexities and interactions of these domains. With this framework we aim to increase demand for and acceptance of improved sanitation solutions.

Current status and results

PATH has a number of ongoing projects addressing key gaps in sanitation provision and uptake, including financing, demand generation, gender issues, business and service delivery models, and product design—with special focus on platform technologies—for both household and community systems. In Cambodia and India we are developing financing mechanisms for enterprises and consumers, and we are working to understand the product and service delivery networks in Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda. Additionally, we are evaluating the impact of menstrual hygiene products on sanitation systems in both India and South Africa and the effect those impacts have on women and girls. Key outputs from these activities will include reports, case studies, new product designs, and recommendations to policy leaders. We are currently seeking funds to build on these activities.



PATH

A new business model for sanitation in Nairobi.

“The world is still far from meeting the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) target for sanitation and is unlikely to do so by 2015. Only 63% of the world now has improved sanitation access, a figure projected to increase only to 67% by 2015, well below the 75% aim in the MDGs.”

United Nations Children's Fund and World Health Organization. Millennium Development Goal drinking water target met. March 6, 2012. Available at: http://www.who.int/mediacentre/news/releases/2012/drinking_water_20120306/en/index.html.

Availability

For more information regarding this project, contact Glenn Austin at gaustin@path.org.

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