

Addressing the gaps in sanitation –

SLWP launches program for the estate sector on World Toilet Day !

In 2001, November 19th was founded as World Toilet Day. Seen one of the less glamorous days that the UN General Assembly has designated, World Toilet Day is overshadowed by World Water Day, World Children's Day - the list goes on. The lack of publicity and fanfare for World Toilet Day is representative of the global sanitation crisis – it is unspoken of, unknown, and is even in some areas, a topic of taboo. It has been celebrated under themes ranging from equality and dignity, toilets and nutrition, to the catchier 'I give a shit, do you?'.

This year's theme was "Toilets and Jobs", in line with a similar focus on World Water Day. The theme underscored the impact poor sanitation, or the complete lack thereof has on livelihoods. This was in relation to the target in the Sustainable Development Goals - to ensure that everyone, everywhere has access to toilets by 2030. The theme explored how creating access to toilets can transform economies, increase workplace productivity and increase employment.

However, the problems of sanitation are relegated to the corner; regardless of the impact it can have on health, how poor hygiene can snowball into a myriad of problems including school attendance, economic productivity and the spread of disease. To put these arguments into numbers, one in ten people have no choice but to defecate in the open (WHO/UNICEF 2015). In least developed countries, WASH estimates that only half the schools have access to clean water, sanitation and hygiene. The result is that girls often miss up to a week of school every month. Access to adequate sanitation has spatial and gendered dimensions. As illustrated by WASH, toilets can determine the quality of education a girl would receive in comparison to that of a boy. The spatial dimension of access of sanitation is best seen a joint press release by the WHO & UNICEF (2014), which stated that in 2012 80% of the urban population had 47% of the rural population had improved access to sanitation. The statistics show a clear divide in levels of access between urban and rural on an international level, which is replicated in Sri Lanka as well.

The UNICEF has identified Sri Lanka as a country that has fared well in terms of sanitation, with improved sanitation coverage of 86% and with 80%-85% of schools having improved water sources. However, the 2012 WASH briefing sheet highlighted the fact that 19% of schools lack adequate safe water and sanitation facilities, and that 1,299 schools do not have functional sanitation facilities. Additionally, these national level statistics hide stark disparities in access to sanitation, which can be seen in poor levels of sanitation in the estate sector.

The estate sector in Sri Lanka has a history of neglect, poor living standards and limited access to basic amenities. To date, it remains a pocket of poverty, and this can be linked back to the poor standards for sanitation, and the lack of access to sanitation in the sector. It is well known for having low human development indices compared to the rest of the country. Access to safe sanitation in the estate sector is at a deplorable 52% in comparison to the 96% access present in the urban sector. Access to safe sanitation in the estate sector is at a deplorable 52% in comparison to the 96% access present in the urban sector. This is partly related to longterm deficiencies in WASH and therefore SLWP decided to celebrate

World Toilet Day on the 19th of December 2016 by conducting its first full Tamil Language program for estate sector stakeholders. The support given by the NWSDB RSC Badulla is gratefully acknowledged.

The Climate change, Gender and Water program was held in Southern Tamil MV in Demodera, a tea estate area in Badulla district. Seventy participants were expected- but 120 persons eventually turned up !! They listened, asked numerous questions and participated enthusiastically in the group work. Their views and insights will be very useful in planning future programs for this neglected sector.

Leave no one behind !!!

