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Sanitation, Our health and Development

Sanitation is about waste disposal and management. Sanitation facilities include toilets, sewers and wastewater treatment plants as well as more simple technologies such as latrines and septic tanks. Sanitation continues to remain one of the key health issues in the developing world.

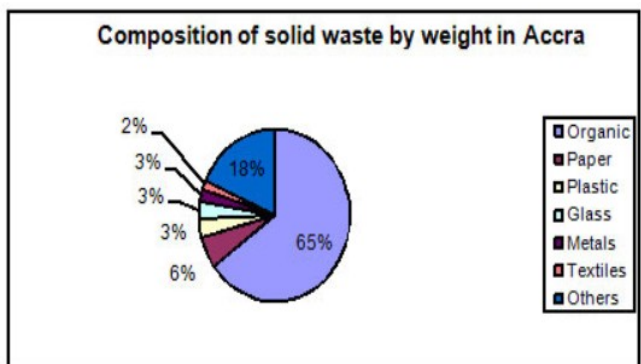
A major developmental issue in Ghana in recent times is sanitation. It is estimated that, (82%) of Ghanaians lack access to improved sanitation (see box 1) (Bensah et al 2010). Out of Ghana's population of 24.2 million, 16 million use unsanitary or shared latrines and 4.8 million have no latrines at all and defaecate in the open (WSP, 2011). Poor sanitation costs Ghana 420 million Cedis each year, which is equivalent to US\$290 million (WSP, 2011). In Ghana today, at least 50 % of the population resides in urban areas of which only 18 percent have access to improved sanitation and 90 percent to improved drinking water sources.



Exposure of children to disease pathogens at dump site

In the city of Accra for instance, poor sanitation resulting from domestic wastewater, solid waste, overcrowding are contributory factors to pollution and unsightly environment as well as impacts negatively on economic development and public health. Accra generates about 1, 500 tons of solid waste per day (EPA, 2002) of which only about 55% is collected and disposed.

Domestic wastewater in Ghana is mostly discharged directly into drainage systems that empty into water bodies such as rivers, lagoon and streams. By 2000 about 80% of sewage treatment facilities in Accra were not functioning thus placing a lot of pressure on the receiving streams and rivers in the city (EPA, 2002). The extent of pollution especially in the Odaw River in Accra is so intense leading to drastic decline in desirable aquatic organisms. It is also estimated that the Chemu lagoon in Tema also receives over 2 million m³ of discharges per day from industries in the catchment area.



Source: AMA (WMD) Accra, 2000

Box 1: Definition: Improved sanitation

- ◆ connection to a public sewer
- ◆ connection to a septic system
- ◆ pour-flush latrine
- ◆ access to a pit latrine
- ◆ ventilated improved pit latrine

Up to 40% of diseases reported at hospitals are directly or indirectly influenced by insanitary environments (Fuseini, 2007). More than 15,000 children die in Ghana annually of sanitation related diseases before attaining the age of five, a United Nations Human Development report has revealed. These sanitation related diseases include Malaria, Typhoid, Cholera and Diahorrhea. Malaria continues to be the number one disease reported in children under five years. 2000 cases and 61 deaths was reported in the last cholera epidemic and all the above mentioned diseases are among the ten top diseases reported countrywide.

Other common diseases related to poor sanitation but not often reported in hospitals include schistosomiasis (bilharzia), ascariasis, hookworm and tricuriasis (worm infections) and ringworm (fungal infection)



Cholera cases being treated in a health facility in Accra

Sanitation deprived people are faced with limited prospects to realize their potentials as human beings. To promote development, sanitation and its management must be high priority on the nation's developmental agenda if we believe in the adage that, "A healthy people make a healthy and prosperous nation". If we accept that the people constitute the most important resource of any nation then their state of health, which drives their energies at enhancing productivity, wealth creation and well-being must be paramount to national development.



Insanitary conditions in a squatter settlement

References and Further Reading

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