

# International Year of Sanitation

## ***Editor's note:*** **Toilet is not a dirty word**

It is one of the most basic human acts – going to the toilet – and yet an astounding two out of every five people in the world do not have access to safe sanitation.

Safe sanitation, which includes ventilated improved pit (VIP) toilets, ecological sanitation (such as urine diversion toilets), pour-flush and flush toilets, are about offering people the basic right to dignity and health. Without it, people (mostly children) suffer from incidence of disease and death, women and children remain at risk of attack, school days and work days are lost to the economy, and the environment is increasingly polluted with human waste.

Recognising the importance of sanitation to the overall achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, the United Nations General Assembly declared 2008 as the International Year of Sanitation (IYS). The main objective is to raise awareness and accelerate progress for the 2,6 billion people who still do not enjoy the right to basic sanitation facilities.

The South African government has committed itself to erasing the existing sanitation backlogs (at last count about 19 million people still lacked access to adequate toilet facilities). Yet, there remain many challenges for this target to be achieved. While the funds exist, skills, at especially local government level, remain sorely lacking, while the increasing urban population growth – and subsequent rise in informal settlements – makes for a 'moving target' that is difficult to reach. In addition, sanitation often remains the 'orphan' of government departments, with the departments of water, health, public works and education, often having to share responsibility for sanitation service delivery.

Still, it can be done. A collaborated effort, led by the Department of Water Affairs & Forestry, has resulted in the virtual eradication of bucket toilets in the country in less than two years, from 252 254 households in February 2005 to 49 010 households in December 2007. While it remains to be seen whether the alternative sanitation options provided will be sustainable it is a step in the right direction.

At the recent AfricaSan 2008 conference, held in Durban,



*Only 22% of Africans have reached the top of the sanitation ladder, i.e. they have access to a flush toilet connect to a sewerage system.*

(see article on page 16), sanitation ministers from several African countries, including South Africa, signed a Ministerial Declaration committing themselves to stepping up actions to wipe out existing backlogs in their respective countries. With political will established, the rest of the water and sanitation sector needs to step up its support in ensuring the momentum is maintained, and even increased. 'Toilet' is not a dirty word, we need to keep talking about it if we want to raise the dignity and health of our people.

To make sure sanitation remains in the minds of the sector, *the Water Wheel* has dedicated pages in each edition for the remainder of the year to articles related to sanitation. We will bring you news of progress, new developments and research support from across the world.

To contribute to these pages, write to The Editor at [laniv@wrc.org.za](mailto:laniv@wrc.org.za) or Fax: (012) 331-2565.

## **Swelling shacks pose a sanitation challenge**

North West Premier Edna Molewa has raised concerns that the increasing shacks and buckets will pose challenges to her government's commitment to get rid of the bucket system.

BuaNews reports that, delivering her State of the Province address in February she said that for every shack removed, another one or

more seemed to spring up in its place. "For instance, by the end of November, 16 500 buckets were eradicated across the Maquassi and Matlosana municipalities, yet another large number has mushroomed in the same municipalities," she said.

Molewa added that it was encouraging, however, that according to recent statistics released by Statistics South Africa, there had been huge improvements in households gaining access to piped water, electricity, safe sanitation and refuse removal.

## Last buckets removed in KZN

The last bucket toilets have been removed in KwaZulu-Natal, according to Premier Sibusiso Ndebele.

Delivering his State of the Province address in February, the Premier said the last four bucket units were to be eradicated in the Umzimkhulu Local Municipality that month. "We have progressively eradicated the bucket toilet system in the province. In 2003, we had 13 605 households using the bucket sanitation system. We progressively eradicated the system to 3 226 in 2004 and 101 in 2007."

Despite the huge strides made in KwaZulu-Natal, more remains to be done. Ndebele reported that a million people in the province still did not have basic sanitation, while 31% of households were still without close access to potable water. The municipalities with the most backlogs of water and sanitation are Zululand, Ugu, Uthungulu, Umzinyathi, Umgungundlovu and Umkhanyakude.

## New African sanitation network formed

A new African network of professionals and academics in the sanitation field has been launched.

The African Sanitation Knowledge Network (ASKNet) was officially launched at the AfricaSan 2008 conference, held in Durban, in February. The network emanated from a meeting of leading African and European academics and practitioners in the field of sustainable sanitation held in Uganda last year, at which an unanimous need was expressed to enhance the profile of African academia in this field, and to increase the output of young professionals with the necessary skills to manage implementation projects on the ground.

According to founder member Dr Nicola Rodda of the School of Biological and Conservation Studies at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, the objectives of the network are three-fold: to increase the numbers of African professionals skilled in sustainable sanitation; to enhance the relevance, quality and profile of sustainable sanitation research in Africa; and to promote sustainable sanitation and its implementation in Africa.

A networking conference will take place in Maputo, Mozambique, in December. For more information, contact Dr Rodda at Tel: (031) 260-3015; E-mail: [roddan@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:roddan@ukzn.ac.za) or Visit: [www.asknet-office.net](http://www.asknet-office.net).

## Cholera still burdens developing countries

Researchers estimating cholera incidence in endemic areas have found that the disease has a substantial burden, with the highest impact on young children.

Such estimates are important, they say, in deciding where interventions – such as water supply and sanitation improvement, should be targeted. The study was carried out in three sites: Kolkata in India, Jakarta in Indonesia and Beira in Mozambique.

The international team tested for cholera among people of all age

groups who presented with diarrhoea at health centres in these areas. They found that the lowest overall cholera rate was in Jakarta, with 0,5 cases per 1 000 people per year. The incidence was three times higher in Kolkata (1,6 per 1 000 people per year) and eight times higher in Beira (four per 1 000 people per year).

In all sites, children were the most affected, with rates highest in those children under five years of age. "The study implies that cholera is still a major problem in developing countries," said Dipika Sur, Deputy Director at the National Institute of Cholera and Enteric Diseases in Kolkata. According to Sur, children tend to have the disease more in endemic areas because adults develop immunity.

Dr Jo Barnes of the Faculty of Health Sciences at the University of Stellenbosch reported that Mozambique is at high risk from cholera due to ongoing flooding and poor infrastructure. "People have been displaced and are living in refugee-like accommodation."

The disease can remain dormant in the environment for years, she warned, and resurface as soon as conditions were right. "What is needed urgently are pit latrines, clean drinking water and education about hygiene," Dr Barnes concluded.

Source: *SciDev.Net*

## Tackling AIDS challenges through proper services

The hygienic use of appropriate water and sanitation facilities is essential, particularly for people living with HIV/AIDS.

Municipalities have an important role to play in ensuring that water and environmental health services address the implications of HIV/AIDS. The provision of water and sanitation services that are affordable, accessible, reliable and used with appropriate health and hygiene practices can help people with HIV to stay healthy longer; increase the effectiveness of home-based care for people with HIV/AIDS; support people's livelihoods and are vital for community growth and development.

The Water Research Commission (WRC) has published a new guide on water and sanitation services and HIV/AIDS for local government councillors and officials responsible for water, sanitation and municipal health services.

The report, based on a project undertaken by Mvula Trust and funded by the WRC, is intended to assist local government water services and environmental health officials with planning and implementing water and sanitation services, together with health and hygiene education, to reduce the impact of HIV/AIDS. It sets out a framework for municipal responses to the disease and highlights ways in which HIV/AIDS can be mainstreamed into water and sanitation planning, regulation, implementation and provision. In order to clarify the institutional complexities in water and environmental health services, the report provides a model, strategies and indicators for implementing project-related health and hygiene education in the context of HIV/AIDS.

A complementary DVD is also available. To order the report and/or the DVD, contact Publications at Tel: (012) 330-0340; Fax: (012) 331-2565; or E-mail:

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