some question slap you in the face! Imagine you are back in the village for the holidays and your peers urged you to attend an open forum on water and sanitation. You reluctantly attend the meeting expecting the usual talk on water and sanitation by some public health specialist probably from the district or provincial headquarters. Instead, you find youth from the neighboring village with a surprising and rather rude manner for engaging the community members. The opening question – where do you sh!t? Yes, the question is “where do you sh!t?” Would you answer them? Without embarrassment and honestly...

I was in such a forum and the answers were hilarious to say the least! An elderly man caused laughter when he responded that he does not “sh!t” but only goes for a hajja kubwa (long call). Of course, he was not going to say exactly where he went for the long call. He only mentioned that it is somewhere on his shamba. On further probing, he however agreed that whatever he produced during that long call was not at all pleasant and was actually... wait for this... err... “sh!t”? Plucky old man! But, hey? How would you answer that question yourself?

In many Kenyan communities the word sh!t is actually considered vulgar and other more polite words are coined for it. What are the real and polite terms for sh!t in your language? In Kiswahili, haja kubwa is preferred to the more vulgar kinyesi or mavi. The Luo prefer to call it oko instead of... charth. Even in English one would rather talk of answering a “call of nature” than going to sh!t. Sh!t is a word you mainly hear from “rude society” or when tempers have risen!

Yet poor handling of sh!t is a major cause of suffering and death across the world. Do you know that worldwide over 2.6 billion people do not have access to a latrine (4 in 10 of the world’s population) and practice open defecation or, better put, sh!t in the open? As Eddy Murphy would say “many are in sh!t because of sh!t!” In Kenya, alone about 54% (19 million) do not have access to a latrine out of which close to 10 million people have to answer to the call of nature in the open fields or bushes! Just figure it out – everyday there are 10 million Kenyans each putting out some half a kilo of kinyesi to our environment. That is about 5,000 tons of sh!t daily! Another 21 million use unhygienic latrines, meaning at some point their sh!t ends up in the environment as well. Even just half of their sh!t leaks to the environment that is another 5,250 tons! That is a total of at least 10,250 tons of the yucky stuff daily! And we have not even thought of the leaking sewerage systems and the “hanging toilets” in the informal settlements such as Mathare and Kibera that employ sewage straight to the open drains and rivers!

And where are these people responsible for this nefarious act? Actually all over the place! It could be that person running late for an appointment who answers nature’s beckon at the bush by the footpath. Or the family that has allocated the bushy part of their shamba for private conveniences. Or the slum dweller has allocated the bushy part of their shamba as a toilet. Expectedly, the poor get much more of the sh!t that the well to do in the community. The yucky stuff mixes with our drinking water when it rains; or dries up and is widely broadcast by the winds. It is there in the many unwashed hands – many belonging to those who sh!t in the open (or do you think they wash their hands?)! Our domestic animals step on it and bring it back home, while some like chicken and pigs even... make a meal of it. In some urban areas, it grows and contaminates healthy green sukuma-weki and other vegetables. Sh!tt!ng in the open really costs us big. An individual without a toilet spends at least 60 hours each year in locating a suitable place to sh!t in or ensuring they are not caught “off-side” by passersby. Contamination of the environment is the main cause of the 3,500 cases of cholera that occur in Kenya yearly costing us about Sh28 million in response alone. Of course, the costs are higher than this if you consider the loss of person-hours due to the sickness, diversion of resources from other essential uses and losses in trade and tourism. Contamination of the drinking water supply means higher costs for water treatment. It also means our children have a high incidence of diarrhoea and intestinal worms. Do you know that more children younger than 5 years of age die from diarrhoea than from HIV, malaria and tuberculosis put together? Children living in poor environments often carry 1,000 parasites in their bodies at any time. In the long term, diarrhoea and worm infestations impair the intellectual development of these children. Annual sanitation related funeral costs in Kenya are estimated at Sh927 million.

As you can observe from the chart above, Coast, Nyanza, Rift Valley and Eastern provinces have consistently posted the highest percentages of households without latrines implying this is where most people “poop-poo” in the fields or bushes. So we produce these 18,450 tons which then can *impede* the forces of nature distribute fairly and equitably to all Kenyans. Oh yeees – even those who have and use a toilet. Expectedly, the poor get much more of the sh!t that the well to do in the community. The yucky stuff mixes with our drinking water when it rains; or dries up and is widely broadcast by the winds. It is there in the many unwashed hands – many belonging to those who sh!t in the open (or do you think they wash their hands)?! Our domestic animals step on it and bring it back home, while some like chicken and pigs even... make a meal of it. In some urban areas, it grows and contaminates healthy green sukuma-weki and other vegetables. Sh!tt!ng in the open really costs us big. An individual without a toilet spends at least 60 hours each year in locating a suitable place to sh!t in or ensuring they are not caught “off-side” by passersby. Contamination of the environment is the main cause of the 3,500 cases of cholera that occur in Kenya yearly costing us about Sh28 million in response alone. Of course, the costs are higher than this if you consider the loss of person-hours due to the sickness, diversion of resources from other essential uses and losses in trade and tourism. Contamination of the drinking water supply means higher costs for water treatment. It also means our children have a high incidence of diarrhoea and intestinal worms with in-
Prior to 2001, the subject of toilets and what we do in the toilet was a taboo topic. Most of us use the toilet every day – an average of six times a day amounting to an entire three years of our lives inside the toilet – yet many of us are unwilling to discuss such a disgusting subject and quickly become embarrassed when this taboo word is uttered. However, it is a fact that what we do not discuss, we cannot improve on. Even most of our politicians, like other politicians the world over, find it embarrassing to talk about the subject of shit and where it goes. They find it more rewarding to be photographed next to a toilet. Over time, this neglect of sanitation and toilets has resulted in a situation where 2.6 billion people globally are without access to proper sanitation and about 1 billion practicing open defecation. Men in India and Kenya with mobile phones more expensive than a pit latrine defecate. Women globally are without access to proper sanitation and result in a situation where 2.6 billion people globally are without access to proper sanitation and about 1 billion practicing open defecation. How can we talk about the subject of shit and where it goes? 6,000 people (5,400 of them children) die every day due to diseases transmitted through faeces. The World Toilet Organization’s main objective was to provoke people to start talking about the toilet openly and begin addressing the widespread poor sanitation. The name of the organization itself initially provoked much mixed reactions but with its unique mix of humour and serious facts, and the fun it played on WTO (this used to mean the World Trade Organization – remember?), it excited the attention of the global media and the imagination of their audiences and readers. The media attention gave the toilet and associated behaviours their rightful place on the centre-stage of global issues. From there, taboo about the toilet and toilet behaviour began to slowly breakdown.

This is the fourth year Kenya will be celebrating this day. Kenya has been celebrating the day in villages where communities’ resolve has succeeded in stopping open defecation and promoting good hygiene practices. The theme this year is End Open Defecation, the taboo against speaking about defecation. Make sanitation a part of your work with poor communities. Advocate for environmental protection through better sanitation. Lend moral authority to sanitation campaigns: add sanitation component to your religious missions and charitable work.

Civil Society Organizations:
- Include sanitation and hygiene in your health programs; help to generate community demand for toilets. Generate demand for sanitation by triggering communities to understand the economic benefits. Use sanitary improvements as an entry point for community building and empowerment. Look for win-win sanitation interventions that improve the lives of the poor people while protecting the environment. Lobby government to operate proper disposal facilities for faecal sludge. Support community-based approaches that use social marketing techniques and respond to local preferences. Learn how to facilitate Total Sanitation approaches that benefit the entire community. Partner with the private sector.

Teachers:
- Teach children that using a toilet and washing their hands keeps them healthy. Encourage them to spread the message in their families. Advocate for girl-friendly toilet facilities at your school. Encourage parents to join forces to construct toilets for the school. Use your position to push local NGOs and businesses to work in sanitation. Ensure that environmental education stresses the importance of sanitation. Work to keep your school environment clean and safe. Stress the benefits of using toilets and washing hands to create lifelong habits and increase demand for sanitation.

Community:
- Build community consensus to eliminate open defecation. Mobilize as a community to demand sanitation services and infrastructure, build consensus about the need for toilets for all, and ensure that the poorest also have access. Join forces to demand sanitary services from municipal authorities; work together to eliminate open defecation. Help the poorest and least to benefit. Ensure that community environment projects include a sanitation component. Take collective action to improve sanitation.

Success in sanitation depends on you, as there is something you can do at your level/capacity

Politicians and Policy makers:
- Promote and protect public health and sanitation. Become champions of ending open defecation in your constituencies. Make sanitation an important political agenda and allocate adequate resources for sanitation promotion and education. Make economic case for sanitation to your constituents and colleagues. Protect water quality through better sanitation services and greater regulatory and enforcement capacity.

Private Sector:
- Ensure that your workers have toilet and hand-washing facilities. Treat waste as an economic good. Capitalize on the demand for safe, clean and public toilets. Bring affordable products to the market. Use commercial marketing techniques to expand your sanitation business and accelerate progress. Join with environmental groups to demand sanitation.

Faith-based organizations:
- Help your congregants understand the health benefits of better sanitation and use your moral authority to encourage behavioural change. Help alleviate the poverty of your followers with projects that deliver clean and safe toilets managed by the community. Break the taboo against speaking about defecation. Make sanitation a part of your work with poor communities. Advocate for environmental protection through better sanitation. Lend moral authority to sanitation campaigns: add sanitation component to your religious missions and charitable work.

Civil Society Organizations:
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About Plan

Plan International is a child-centered organization whose vision is of a world in which all children realize their full potential in societies that respect people's rights and dignity.

Media:
- Stories related to sanitation, lack of toilet use and/or lack of structures are everywhere you turn. You too have a role to play.

TITBITS
- Did you know that there are people who value human shit? Did you know that shit is an important indicator of wealth? Yes in some communities, people defecate near their compound, so that when visitors make a call in their homes, they can appreciate the wealth on display. Indeed, we even have, if you see there is no abundance of human dung in your compound, no one will let their daughter get married to a son from such poverty-stricken family.
- Did you know that some communities cannot defecate in a latrine because it is practically the same as to be burying their bodily waste? And that if you bury part of your body, it is as good as provoking the gods to take away your life? Believe it or not, this is a sacred belief in some communities and that is why they on purpose defecate in the open so in latrines.
- Is it true that all human beings defecate? No! That is the surprising answer that you will get from some communities. They believe that it is only children and women who defecate! Men don’t defecate. To sustain this macho image created around men, a man must therefore carefully find his way deep into the bush to answer the call of nature! It is a task that takes time, energy and imagination to accomplish.
- If you were a man would you share the same latrine with your mother-in-law? Probably yes. But do you know that it is taboo in some communities to share the same latrine with your in-law? Why, because undressing in the same place as your in-law is interpreted to mean having “sex” with...