



# WORLD TOILET DAY NOVEMBER 19

## Ending Open Defecation to Save Lives



# Where do you sh!t? What a question!

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 neighbouring 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 *haja kubwa* (long call). Of course, he was not going to say exactly where he went for the long calls. 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...errr... “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 .... *chieth*. 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. If even just half of their sh!t leaks to the environment that is another 5250 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 empty raw stuff straight to the open drains and rivers!

And where are these people responsible for this nefarious act? Actually all over the

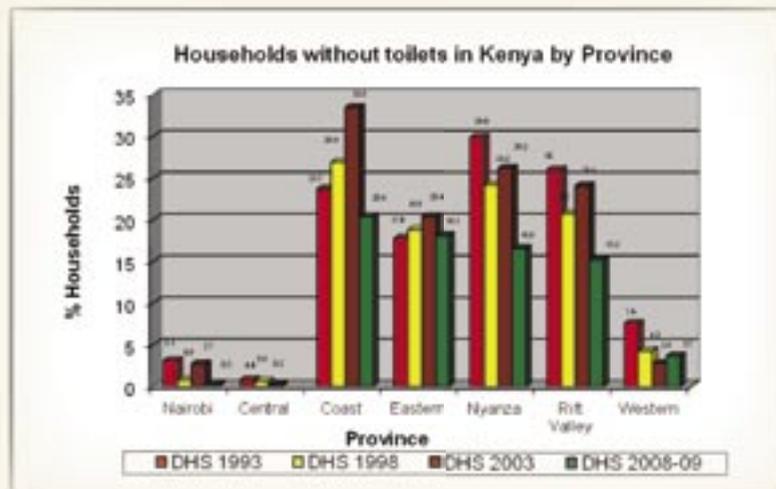
place! It could be that person running late for an appointment who answers nature's beckon at the bush by the footpath. Or the family that has allocated the bushy part of their shamba for private conveniences. Or the slum dweller in Nairobi forced to turn to plastic flying toilets, or to use the helicopter toilet over a Nairobi river.

Sad thing is that even as we approach 50 years after independence, and several hygiene campaigns by the government and NGOs, there has been very little change. A review of figures from recent Kenya demographic and Health Surveys (KDHS) reveal that progress in reducing the percentage of households without toilets has been very erratic even though the last KDHS looks a bit better. Yet we may remember those days when the chief would come around homes to confirm there was at least a toilet!

In terms of percentage of households without toilets, the rural areas have remained consistently worse than the urban. However, if you consider that most households in urban areas are located in informal settlements or the more congested low-income estates – the hygiene conditions in these areas are definitely worse than it is in the rural areas. For instance in Nairobi about 60% (2.6 million out of 4 million) of the population live in such areas. And this is bound to worsen as more people move into the urban areas in search of jobs or for businesses. Even if one looks at the picture at the level of the provinces, between 15% and 33% of households still do not have toilets even though Central, Nairobi and Western provinces appear better.

testinal worms. Do you know that more children younger than 5 years of age die from diarrhoea than do from HIV, malaria and tuberculosis put together? Children living in poor environments often carry 1,000 parasitic worms in their bodies at any time. In the long term, diarrhea and worm infestations impair the intellectual development of these children. Annual sanitation related funeral costs in Kenya are estimated at Sh247 million. In fact, a recent study by the World Bank Water and Sanitation Program estimated Kenya's annual losses due to poor sanitation at Sh27 billion (<http://www.wsp.org/wsp/sites/wsp.org/files/publications/WSP-ESI-Kenya-brochure.pdf>).

Surely, we need to do something fast to ef-



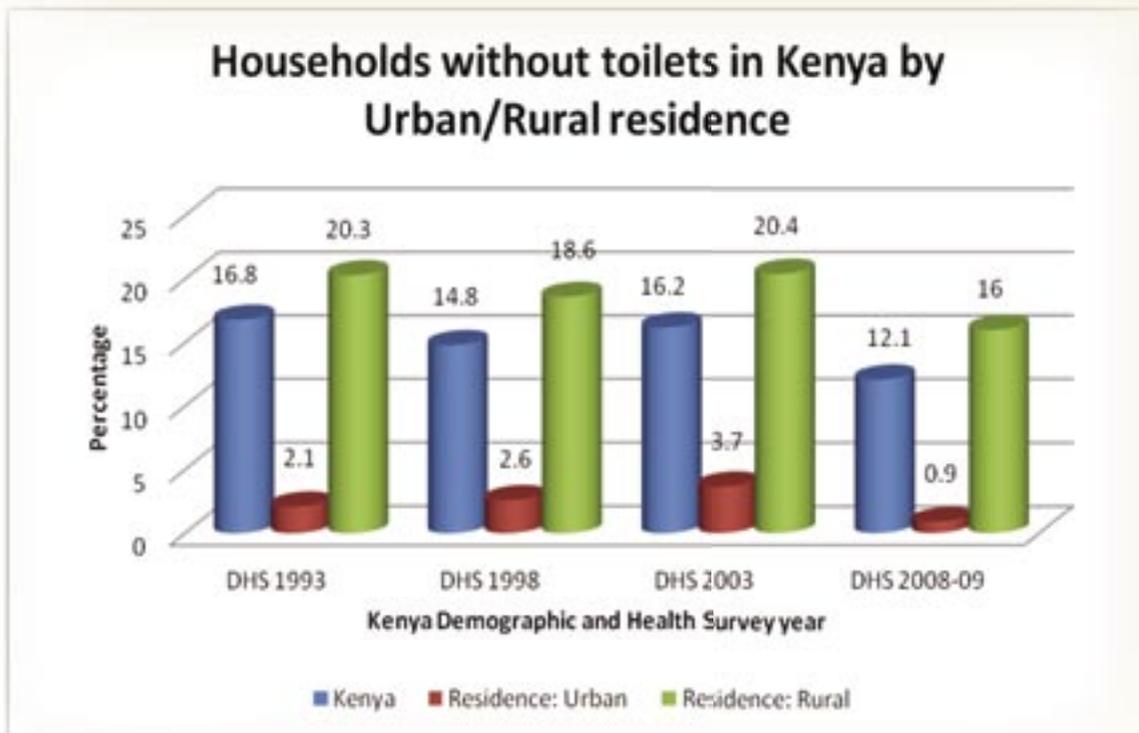
As you can observe from the chart above, Coast, Nyanza, Rift Valley and Eastern provinces have consistently posted the highest percentages of households without latrines – implying this is where most people “pooh-poo” in the fields or bushes. So we produce these 10,250 tons which then the forces of nature distribute fairly and equitably to all Kenyans. Oh yes – 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-wiki and other vegetables.

Sh!tting 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 or in 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 Sh209 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 diarrhea and infestation with in-

fectively address this issue. This takes me back to the story of the little village with a plucky old man. The session that the youth were leading was actually a new approach to encouraging communities to construct and use latrines. The approach, called “community-led total sanitation,” <http://www.communityledtotalsanitation.org/country/kenya> encourages open discussion about sh!t and focuses the communities' attention to the deadly disease cycle involving stool, fingers, flies, and food or water. The community identifies the sh!tting sites and even estimates the monthly sh!t production. They then map out how it flows back to them through fingers, flies, food, water, and etcetera. As they do this, they are revolted by the realization that they are actually feeding on their own stool. Once this happens – no one in the community ever wants to continue as usual. They get motivated to build and use toilets such that no homestead is left without a toilet. Even children monitor to ensure no one goes “out” in the open. They do not need any subsidies nor do they need a chief to force them to build toilets. And once they are through in their village – off they go to the village upstream to ensure they are not eating any yucky exports from there. In fact if your village is one of those where not every household has a toilet, you may soon have determined people from a neighboring village posing to you that same straight question; “where do you sh!t?”

By Dr. Omollo David O.

Images by Ali Yusuf Muwatsahu





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## The History of World Toilet Day

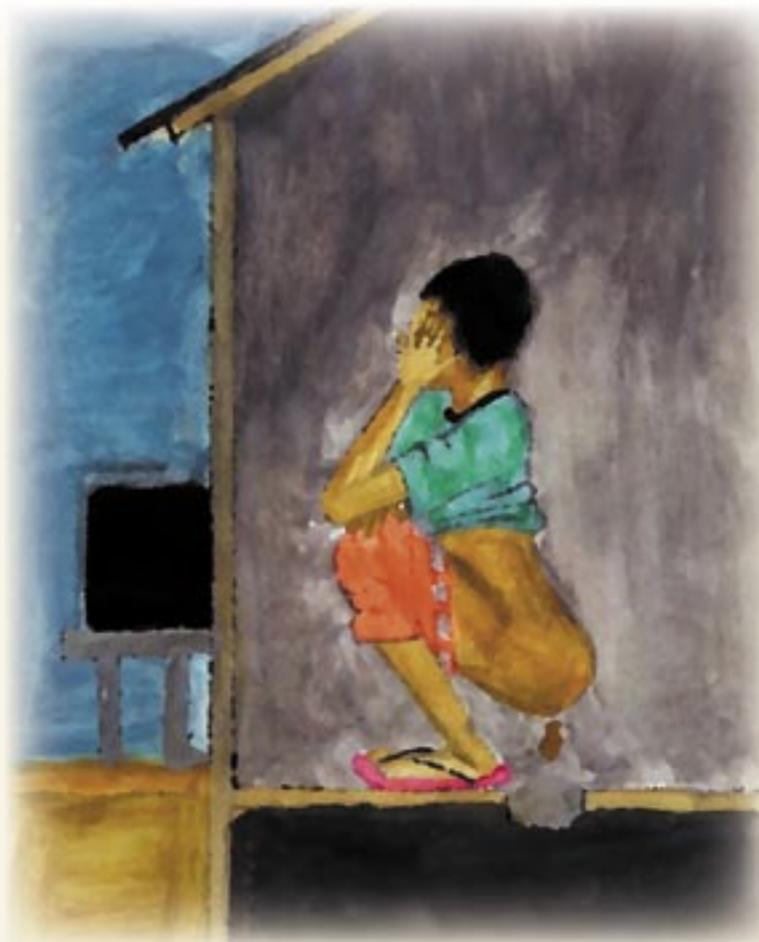
Prior to 2001, the subject of toilets and what we do in the toilet was a taboo topic. Most of us use the toilet everyday – an average of six times a day amounting to an entire three years of our lives inside the toilet – yet many of us are unwilling to discuss the subject for fear of embarrassment or appearing disrespectful.

From a young age, most of us learnt not 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 sh!t and where it goes. They find it more rewarding to be photographed next to standpipes with happy children fetching water. Very few are willing to be photographed next to a toilet. Over time, this neglect of sanitation and toilets has resulted to 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 latrines still practice open defecation! The conse-

quences? 6,000 people (5,400 of them children) die every day due to diseases transmitted through faeces.

On the 19th November 2001, the World Toilet Organization (WTO) was founded in Singapore. The WTO'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 then, taboos 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,



Save Live.

We would like all Kenyans to know that shitting in the open is harmful while shitting in the toilet saves lives. The Minister of Public Health and Sanitation will preside over the day's climax in Siaya County. Mama Kayai, Mzee Ojwan'g and the Vitimbi crew will be among the groups that will perform there. Mama Sarah Obama and Officials from the Ministry of Public Health and Sanitation will also grace the day.

As we celebrate this important day on our calendar, we need to know and appreciate that sanitation is vital for human health, dignity and respect. The Kenyan Constitution recognizes sanitation as a right. The Ministry of Public Health and Sanitation is committed to creating an enabling environment for all Kenyans to live in a clean and hygienic environment. Towards this commitment, in May 2011, the honourable Minister for Public Health & Sanitation launched "Open Defecation Free Rural Kenya by 2013" campaign whose aim is to end open defecation in rural Kenya by the year we commemorate our 50th anniversary since independence. This goal can only be realized if we all play our part. What will you do to end Open Defecation in Kenya?

### About Plan

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

<http://plan-international.org/where-we-work/africa/kenya>

*email: [planworldtoiletday@plan-international.org](mailto:planworldtoiletday@plan-international.org)*



**Success in sanitation depends on you. Here is what you could do:**

### Politicians and Policy makers

Fund and promote behaviour change approaches such as Community-Led Total Sanitation and sanitation marketing. Become champions of ending open defecation in your constituencies. Make sanitation an important political agenda and allocate adequate resources hygiene 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, cheap and clean 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. Offer affordable toilet designs and sanitation technologies that communities want and can afford.

### Faith-based organizations

Help your congregants understand the health benefits of better sanitation and use your moral authority to encourage behaviour change. Help ameliorate 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 netter sanitation. Lend your 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 its 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 life-long habits and increase demand for sanitation.

### Communities

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 able to benefit. Ensure that community environment projects include a sanitation component. Take collective action to improve sanitation.

### Households

Invest in household toilet and teach children proper hygienic behaviour, such as hand

washing. Invest in household toilet; join with others to demand sanitation infrastructure in your community. Tell NGOs and health extensions working in your community that toilets and hand washing facilities are a high priority. Ensure the isolation and safe disposal of faeces to protect local water resources. Take the lead. Demand change. Seek to achieve "open defecation free community"

### Media

Stories related to sanitation, lack of toilet use and/or lack of structures are everywhere your 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 woe unto you, if 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 that is practically the same as burying part of their bodies? 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 not 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? If you were a lady would you go to the same latrine as your father – in - law? Probably yes. But do you know that it is taboo in some communities to share the same latrine with your in - laws? Why, because undressing in the same place as your in - law is interpreted to mean having "sex" with them.