

HEALTH AND HYGIENE – SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY OF MEDIA IN CREATING AWARENESS

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ABSTRACT

Despite significant investments over the last 20 years, India still faces the most daunting sanitation challenge than any other country in South Asia. Sanitation is the most neglected and most off-track of the UN's sector MDG targets. Water Aid's studies show that sanitation is vital for poverty reduction and a driver for development. The official coverage for rural sanitation is 26% and for urban it is 83.2%¹ An estimated 400,000 children under five years of age die each year due to diarrhoea. Several million more suffer from multiple episodes of diarrhoea and still others fall ill on account of Hepatitis A, enteric fever, intestinal worms and eye and skin infections caused by poor hygiene and unsafe drinking water. Unhygienic practices and unsafe drinking water are some of its main causes. More than 122 million households in the country are without toilets. Even though toilets are built in about 3 million households every year, the annual rate of increase has been a low 1 per cent in the past decade. The lack of toilets also affects girls' school attendance. Of India's 700,000 rural primary and upper primary schools, only one in six have toilets, deterring children - especially girls - from going to school.²

Thus there is an urgent need for awareness of health and hygiene among the rural poor where an effective media can raise the awareness level and can also bring about sustainable behavior change thereby reducing vulnerability of the rural poor from unhealthy and unhygienic conditions. Media possess a social responsibility in bringing out the deprived class in light and to create awareness among them on health and hygiene.

In this paper, an attempt has been made to bring out the poor hygienic conditions and its ill effects on health of a rural village of Puducherry and the effective role played by the media in bringing out awareness on improving the health and hygiene among the rural poor.

¹ (Source: 2005-06 NFHS data).

² (UNICEF, INDIA)