

POOR SANITATION COSTS CAMBODIA OVER US\$450 MILLION A YEAR

Cambodia loses more than US\$450 million annually due to poor sanitation and hygiene practices, equivalent to US\$32 per capita or Riels 130,000, according to a recent study “Economic Impacts of Sanitation in Cambodia”, published in June 2008 by the Water and Sanitation Program of the World Bank.

More than 10.7 million Cambodians do not have sanitary and private toilets

Coverage. According to the Demographic and Health Survey in 2005, nearly ten million rural and one million urban Cambodians are living without private sanitary toilets, and of these almost ten million people nationwide are still practicing open defecation.

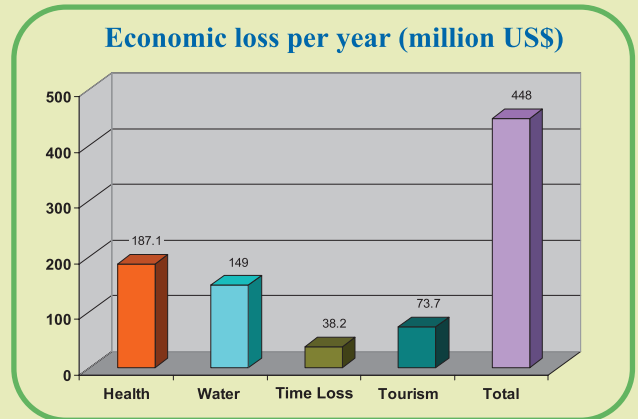


Health. Increased exposure to disease-causing pathogens through poor sanitation and hygiene leads to at least 10 million cases of diarrhea and over six thousand deaths per year, leading to average annual economic losses of US\$14 for each and every Cambodian.

Water. Sewage discharged untreated to water bodies and leaking pit latrines are a major cause of water resource pollution in Cambodia, affecting rivers, lakes and ground water, which serve as the drinking water supply for most Cambodians. Water treatment for drinking and other household purposes, and loss of fish production, together cause average annual economic losses of over US\$10 per Cambodian.

Population welfare. In an increasingly prosperous country with continued population growth and modernization, having to defecate in the field or forest, or share a toilet with many other families, is not considered an improved standard of living. Poor sanitation impacts on well-being of the population, particularly women, when considering aspects such as toilet comfort and cleanliness, convenience, privacy, security, and social status. Equally important, inadequate toilets and hygiene standards at schools are thought to cause higher rates of school dropout and welfare loss, especially among girls. It is estimated that over 600 million hours are lost per year due to waiting time for shared latrines and travel time for open defecation, valued at almost US\$3 per Cambodian.

Tourism. Although Cambodia has strong potential growth in tourism, poor sanitation and hygiene practices are an obstacle to the achievement of the anticipated growth rate in tourist numbers, causing environmental and water degradation, disease, and threatening food safety. Hence, to safeguard future foreign exchange earnings, increased funds need to be allocated to sanitation to make Cambodia a more attractive tourist destination.



What needs to be done?



If the rate of latrine improvement continues at the same pace as the progress between 1998 and 2006, the Cambodia rural sanitation target will be achieved in 2035, which is 20 years after the target year in CMDGs. At the same rate of progress, universal rural sanitation coverage will take another 150 years.

Therefore, the national sanitation target will not be reached without considerably accelerating sanitation coverage by giving greater priority to sanitation.

Given the huge economic costs of not having improved sanitation and hygiene, it is recommended to:

- **Allocate higher investments to sanitation:** The huge economic losses due to poor sanitation make it imperative for the Government of Cambodia to increase investments in the sanitation sector (see Box). This requires further strategy development in the sanitation sector.

- **Improve coordination and cooperation among sector partners:** The support and activities by all sanitation partners needs to be better coordinated by the government in order to achieve the improved coverage in a sustainable way. This includes greater consistency of NGO, donor and government sanitation programs, and linking school and community-based sanitation.



Current and future sanitation funding

Despite huge economic losses and death toll, few funds are spent on addressing poor sanitation and hygiene. On average, only 0.002% of the state expenditure has been used for sanitation programs at national level. Although, the figure is expected to rise to over 0.01% in 2008 – amounting to nearly US\$180,000 – this is still inadequate for Cambodia to scale up sanitation coverage to meet the CMDGs.

- **Give top priority to rural areas and low-income urban areas:** With scarce financial resources for sanitation programs, national investments should target population in rural areas as well as the urban poor. Sanitation programs and selected technologies should be based on the demand of the population.

- **Scale up sanitation and hygiene promotion campaigns:** Politicians, public officials and communities should be targeted with information about the effects of poor sanitation and hygiene, and how to select and implement affordable solutions. The local authorities must have an important role in sanitation and hygiene promotion activities.

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Hard copies of the Economics of Sanitation Initiative (ESI) report are available from World Bank/WSP office, Phnom Penh. "Economic impacts of sanitation in Cambodia" by Kov P, Sok H, Roth S, Chhoeun K, and Hutton G. World Bank, Water and Sanitation Program. 2008.

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