



1 May 2014 - What better way to raise awareness about sanitary defecation than a giant anthropomorphic cartoon turd named Mr. Poo? UNICEF has developed possibly the most bizarre and eye-opening approach to encourage the use of toilets and spread awareness of the consequences of open defecation. Mr. Poo, backed up by an upbeat techno tune, funny “bathroom sounds” and animation that would fit in perfectly with the Saturday morning cartoon lineup, encourages Indian children to “[take the poo to the loo](#)”.

The toilet is an integral part of our everyday lives. There are WC’s in our schools, our offices, our homes, our entertainment venues, and almost anywhere public gatherings occur. We see the latrine’s prominence just by the amount of terms that exist to describe it. So having such ease of access is absolutely normal right? Wrong. According to the World Health Organization, 1.2 billion people - 15 percent of the world’s population – do not have access to lavatories, and therefore, are forced to practice open defecation.

In India, an estimated 620 million people practice open defecation, creating a major public health hazard by leaving an estimated 65 million kilograms of waste each day. Indeed, only half the population has access to toilets, and over 28 million children lack access to toilets in their schools. This is of particular concern for children in the country's rural pockets. Reports say poor sanitation is one of the major contributors to India's rampant child malnutrition numbers and that diarrhoea remains one of the top causes of child deaths in the country, alongside respiratory infections.

While there has been a 20 percent drop in the number of people defecating in the open in the last decade, India has a long way to go before it can meet the 2015 Millennium Development

Goal target for sanitation, which requires 75% of the country to have access to sanitation. The Mr. Poo campaign uses “quirky, informative and inspiring language. It also contains humour to better connect with the target audience,” explained UNICEF spokeswoman Maria Fernandez.

The issue of open defecation and the risks it entails has been often overlooked or not mentioned. The unsavoury, and often taboo, subject has recently been pushed into the limelight. If development requires tackling the subjects of poverty, sexual violence and disease then open defecation is a topic that can no longer be avoided. “Toilets are the symbol of dignity for billions of people who still cannot enjoy them,” [said Catarina de Albuquerque](#), the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation, “Let’s cherish them, let’s prioritize them...let’s celebrate them!”

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