
Way forward

Personal well-being

– key to public progress

Hygiene and health are closely connected to our well-being and also our most private sphere. Therefore, it is often regarded as something that is deeply personal, and not to be discussed in public. Unfortunately, shame prospers in secrecy. The price is paid by the girl who uses dirty rags to cope with her period, the man who cannot leave his home due to a lack of accessible toilets, or the woman who goes to great lengths hiding her incontinence from her children. The highest price is paid by the most vulnerable individuals, but we are all missing out. Investing in hygiene and health means investing in strategic multipliers that enable all of us to live more dignified lives and at the same time make societies more prosperous.

It takes a multidimensional approach of different actors coming together to create a world in which everyone, everywhere can practice safe hygiene and lead healthy lives.

We must listen to, and learn from those whose voices are rarely heard. We need to understand what is actually valuable to them. A person-centered approach is key to ensuring that we start from a point of empathy, and understand how to take everyone's needs into account.

We must give everyone regardless of their physical abilities the practical means to care for their hygiene and health. Whether it is access to clean water, accessible toilets or sanitary products, caring for our bodily functions requires availability of essential means and public policies and other tools allowing for this to happen. At the same time we must be conscious of the environmental impact this can lead to. Hygiene and health products are often disposable, and we must strive to minimize the negative impact and ensure safe disposal.

We must elevate knowledge about how hygiene can affect the well-being of ourselves and others, and how to best prevent and manage ill-health. This knowledge must spread throughout the public society. We all have an important role to play, and decision and policy makers have a special responsibility to make this happen.

We must adjust attitudes and support a more open discussion at all levels. Transforming attitudes and practices will require a broad coalition. National leaders, global policy-makers, senior village and tribal leaders, CEOs, activists and others need to further prioritize menstruation, incontinence and other taboo topics related to hygiene and health far higher on the global agenda.

Partnerships are important to progress hygiene and health. We urge policy-makers and decision-makers at all levels to make this part of their global, national and local agenda, and we call upon all individuals to courageously speak up about topics related to hygiene and health. Together we can make a change.