

UNICEF warns lack of toilets in Pakistan tied to stunting

March 8 2015



In this Tuesday, March 3, 2015 photo, a Pakistani villager builds a toilet in Thatta district, Sindh province, 100 kilometer (62 miles) southeast of Karachi, Pakistan. More than 40 million people in Pakistan do not have access to a toilet, forcing them to defecate in the open, which in turn is a major contributor to stunted growth in the country, a top UNICEF official said. UNICEF is working with the Pakistani government to improve sanitation by doing things like encouraging people to wash their hands more often and working with communities to help them build toilets. (AP Photo/Shakil Adil)

More than 40 million people in Pakistan do not have access to a toilet, forcing them to defecate in the open, which in turn is a major contributor to stunting in the country, a top UNICEF official said.

"There are 41 million people who do not have access to a [toilet](#) in Pakistan and as a result they are defecating in the open. And open defecation has significant health and nutritional consequences," said Geeta Rao Gupta, deputy executive director at UNICEF. She recently spoke to The Associated Press during a trip to Pakistan to draw attention to the problem.

"Open defecation is a major contributor to stunting and that's why we've got to do all we can to stop it," she said.

Pakistan is the third-largest country when it comes to people going to the bathroom in the open, behind India and Indonesia. The problem can spread disease and lead to [intestinal infections](#), which can contribute to stunting in young children, she said.

Stunting means children don't grow as tall as they would otherwise, and it can also affect a child's [brain development](#). Stunted children are more at risk of disease, don't do as well in school and stunted mothers can also give birth to stunted children.

UNICEF is working with the Pakistani government to improve sanitation by doing things like encouraging people to wash their hands more often. They're also working with communities to help them build toilets so they don't have to use the bathroom in a field or elsewhere.

Building more toilets is also vital for empowering women and girls and keeping them in school, Gupta said. If women have to walk long distances to find a private place to relieve themselves, they are more vulnerable and exposed to attack. They're also less likely to go to school

if there are no toilets.

"Having toilets is a big advantage to girls," she said.



In this Tuesday, March 3, 2015 photo, a Pakistani worker constructs a toilet in Thatta, Sindh province, 100 kilometer (62 miles) southeast of Karachi, Pakistan. More than 40 million people in Pakistan do not have access to a toilet, forcing them to defecate in the open, which in turn is a major contributor to stunted growth in the country, a top UNICEF official said. UNICEF is working with the Pakistani government to improve sanitation by doing things like encouraging people to wash their hands more often and working with communities to help them build toilets. (AP Photo/Shakil Adil)



In this Tuesday, March 3, 2015 photo, a Pakistani volunteer, left, explains the importance of hygiene to villagers in Thatta district, Sindh province, 100 kilometer (62 miles) southeast of Karachi, Pakistan. More than 40 million people in Pakistan do not have access to a toilet, forcing them to defecate in the open, which in turn is a major contributor to stunted growth in the country, a top UNICEF official said. UNICEF is working with the Pakistani government to improve sanitation by doing things like encouraging people to wash their hands more often and working with communities to help them build toilets. (AP Photo/Shakil Adil)



In this Tuesday, March 3, 2015 photo, a Pakistani volunteer explains the importance of hygiene and construction of toilets to villagers in Thatta district, Sindh province, 100 kilometer (62 miles) southeast of Karachi, Pakistan. More than 40 million people in Pakistan do not have access to a toilet, forcing them to defecate in the open, which in turn is a major contributor to stunted growth in the country, a top UNICEF official said. UNICEF is working with the Pakistani government to improve sanitation by doing things like encouraging people to wash their hands more often and working with communities to help them build toilets. (AP Photo/Shakil Adil)



In this Tuesday, March 3, 2015 photo, a Pakistani volunteer instructs a student how to wash his hands at a local school, in Thatta district, Sindh province, 100 kilometer (62 miles) southeast of Karachi, Pakistan. More than 40 million people in Pakistan do not have access to a toilet, forcing them to defecate in the open, which in turn is a major contributor to stunted growth in the country, a top UNICEF official said. UNICEF is working with the Pakistani government to improve sanitation by doing things like encouraging people to wash their hands more often and working with communities to help them build toilets. (AP Photo/Shakil Adil)



In this Tuesday, March 3, 2015 photo, a Pakistani villagers washes her hands at a local school in Thatta district, Sindh province, 100 kilometer (62 miles) southeast of Karachi, Pakistan. More than 40 million people in Pakistan do not have access to a toilet, forcing them to defecate in the open, which in turn is a major contributor to stunted growth in the country, a top UNICEF official said. UNICEF is working with the Pakistani government to improve sanitation by doing things like encouraging people to wash their hands more often and working with communities to help them build toilets. (AP Photo/Shakil Adil)



In this Tuesday, March 3, 2015 photo, Pakistani villagers fetch clean water for their homes, in Thatta district, Sindh province, 100 kilometer (62 miles) southeast of Karachi, Pakistan. More than 40 million people in Pakistan do not have access to a toilet, forcing them to defecate in the open, which in turn is a major contributor to stunted growth in the country, a top UNICEF official said. UNICEF is working with the Pakistani government to improve sanitation by doing things like encouraging people to wash their hands more often and working with communities to help them build toilets. (AP Photo/Shakil Adil)

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Citation: UNICEF warns lack of toilets in Pakistan tied to stunting (2015, March 8) retrieved 20 September 2024 from

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