

## Global Handwashing Day in Eritrea 15 October, 2015

**15 October, Asmara-** Global Handwashing Day was celebrated with a variety of activities across Eritrea. The national level commemoration was held in the Sembel Elementary School in Asmara which is a model school on handwashing practice.



Handwashing at the Sembel Elementary School ©UNICEF/Eritrea/2015/Yirgalem

The school has an innovative and simple handwashing facility made from a 5 litre plastic jerrycan, located in each class room. The handwashing facility was introduced by the school director, Mr. Yonatan Zerihun, who got the idea when he attended the Elementary Schools Environmental Education (ESEE) initiative training which took place in over 800 schools across the country. ESEE is an initiative of Ministry of Education and UNICEF supported by the Governments of Japan and the UK (DFID). At part of the ESEE, manuals on healthy schools for school directors and PTA members, WASH activities and Green Clubs are discussed and distributed. The manuals are intended to raise awareness on the links between hygiene and health and provide information on how to improve toilet use and hygiene practices.

The GHD event was attended by students, parents, local government, Ministry of Health and Ministry of Education officials as well as UNICEF.



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Ms. Sitom Sied, of the local government welcomed and thanked guests for the recognition given to the school, adding that she was proud of the model school.

Mr. Amanuel Ghirmatsion of the Ministry of Health who also addressed guests stated that every year 1.8 million children die from pneumonia and 2.5 million die from both diarrhea and pneumonia. The cause of these diseases, he told guests, is related to water, sanitation and hygiene and that these figures could be drastically reduced by simply washing hands. Mr. Ghimastion emphasised the importance of partnerships with all stakeholders to achieve greater results.



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Martin Worth, Chief WASH, UNICEF Eritrea addresses the audience. UNICEF/Eritrea/2015/Yirgalem

Mr. Martin Worth, Chief of WASH, UNICEF congratulated the Sembel Elementary School for its innovative approach to handwashing. “This initiative tells us that achieving handwashing in schools is possible with simple technologies,” he said.

Mr. Worth stated that the simple act of washing hands with soap can significantly cut the risk of diarrhea by up to 44 percent, and that of respiratory tract infections from 21 percent to 45 percent. In addition, he said that “diarrhea is responsible for children missing hundreds of millions of school days every year. By

having children integrate the habit of handwashing with soap in their daily routines, school absenteeism could be reduced substantially,” he stated.

The students of the school performed a variety of entertaining dramatic skits, poems and songs which conveyed key messages on handwashing and disease prevention. The children demonstrated great creativity in presenting how hands get contaminated with disease-causing germs and pathogens. In a song about handwashing they raised posters as flags with different key messages on how to wash hands and prevent these germs. The general knowledge competition among the students was one of the key activities that conveyed messages and



Children sing a song about the importance of washing hands with soap. UNICEF/Eritrea/2015/Yirgalem

information on handwashing with soap in an educational and entertaining way. The winners were awarded prizes which included water storage containers and soap. The school was also awarded with a slow sand filter from the Ministry of Health as a show of appreciation. The Eritrean national TV station, EriTV, was at the school to cover the event and it was broadcast nationally throughout the evening on various news programmes.

In addition to the Global Handwashing Day school activities, UNICEF supported a nationwide mass media campaign aimed at promoting handwashing and other good hygiene behaviour messages. This included radio spots in nine different languages and newspaper messages across Eritrea as well as TV messages broadcast on national television. Dissemination of the radio and TV spots started on 14th October 2015 and continued till 18th October. In addition, key messages were printed in the national newspaper. The Sopo cartoon on handwashing was broadcast on EriTV on Thursday 15th October and Sunday 18th October 2015. The cartoon informs children of good handwashing practices while entertaining them. The mass media campaign was conducted with UNICEF's support to the Ministry of Information in partnership with the Ministry of Health.



The children performed dramas and sang songs about handwashing. UNICEF/Eritrea/2015/Yirgalem



**In the photo from left:** Yonatan Mihreteab, Abiel Samule, Aesrom Yonas and Aedmon Kiflay all grade five students at Sembel Elementary School. They explained “we wash our hands after using the toilet and before eating food.” When they were asked “What is Global Handwashing Day to you?” they replied that it is a day to remind us that “hygiene is the mother of health.” They were also asked why they wash their hands. Abiel said, “we will be sick from Cholera if we don’t wash,” and Aedmon quickly added “we will be sick from diarrhea”. They said that they started the handwashing practice when they were in grade 3 when

the handwashing facilities were erected. In addition they said they practise handwashing with soap in their home too.



Photo: Handwashing demonstration by students, governmental officials and UNICEF. Photo: UNICEF/Eritrea/2015/Yirgalem



Sopo video clip disseminated on National TV

In the Gash Barka Region, Global Handwashing Day was commemorated in the Mogorieb Boarding School. This school has over 8,000 students. Dramatic skits, poems and general knowledge competitions were held and regional government officials participated in the event. Similarly, in the Northern Red Sea Region, a regional level commemoration was held in a kindergarten and an elementary school with a variety of different activities to raise awareness on the importance of handwashing for school children. In the Anseba Region, the Global Handwashing Day commemoration was held in the town of Adi-Tekelezan and was attended by approximately 2,300 students. Adi-Tekelezan was selected to host the event because of the high incidence of diarrhea. As in other regions, dramatic skits, general knowledge competitions and handwashing demonstrations were performed.

In both health facilities and schools nationwide, key handwashing with soap messages were disseminated. Through these different approaches and activities including the mass media campaign, it is estimated that over one million people have been reached with handwashing messages.



UNICEF's office was also well branded with banners to commemorate Global Handwashing Day and highlight the importance of handwashing. Photos: UNICEF/Eritrea/2015/Yirgalem



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