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Introductory Chapter: Perspectives on Hygiene

Natasha Potgieter and Afsatou Ndama Traore Hoffman

1. Introduction

According to the 2017 WHO/UNICEF progress report on drinking water, sanitation, and hygiene, adequate data on hygiene aspects globally are still lacking; 159 million people still collect water directly from surface sources such as rivers; and 2.3 billion people still lack a basic sanitation service. After the 2015 Millennium Development Goals (MDG), the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) or Global Goals were formulated as the way forward. In total, there are 17 SDGs with a total of 169 targets and they all formed the core of the SDGs to put an end to poverty, protect the planet, and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity. The main challenges to the SDGs are aspects such as poverty, exclusion, unemployment, climate change, conflict, lack of humanitarian aid, building peaceful and inclusive societies, building strong institutions of governance, and supporting the rule of law [1].

The availability of water and sanitation and the sustainable management of water and sanitation aspects are essential to hygiene. To have access to safe and affordable drinking water is a basic human right and while many people take clean drinking water and sanitation for granted, many others do not have this luxury due to circumstances out of their control. It is believed that water scarcity affects more than 40% of people around the world. With increasing climate change issues, this number is projected to go even higher and it is predicted that by the year 2050, at least one in four people is likely to be affected by recurring water shortages. Water access, quality, quantity, and water point management are largely influenced by seasonality where different factors impact on the outcome. People tend to use different water sources depending on the season. In addition, seasonality also impacts on the quality and quantity of water available for use. During dry seasons people not only tend to collect and use less water but also tend to use alternative sources. People switch between safe and unsafe sources and between improved and unimproved sources based on the availability of water at specific sources [2]. Human dignity is affected by the lack of sanitation services. Globally, billions of people do not have access to even the basic sanitation services and are exposed to harmful pathogens in their drinking water and their food. Inadequate or poor sanitation is a major cause of infectious diseases and it contributes to stunting, impaired cognitive functions, and anxiety. Poor sanitation also affects the well-being through school attendance, especially of woman and girls during their menstrual periods [3].

2. Conclusion

Hygiene is usually seen by people as a condition of cleanliness; however, it is broader than this. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines hygiene as conditions and/or practices that help to maintain good standard of health and prevent

the spread of diseases. Good hygiene is an important barrier to many infectious diseases, and it promotes better health and well-being. Improved hygiene conditions will benefit vulnerable members of the communities, the elderly, children under the age of 5 years, and people suffering from immunocompromised diseases like TB and HIV/AIDS [3–5]. Globally, the most affected lives are those people living in communities with poor water and sanitation infrastructure and conditions. Therefore, tracking inequalities in access to drinking water, sanitation, and hygiene are important for achieving universal access and assuring progressive awareness of the human rights to water and sanitation. In order to achieve the best health benefits, improvements in hygiene should be made concurrently with improvements in the water supply and sanitation, and be integrated with other interventions, such as improving nutrition and increasing incomes.

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