

## Effectiveness of a rural sanitation programme: finding the gaps

The study by Clasen and colleagues<sup>1</sup> does not have enough evidence for the effectiveness of the sanitation programme, but denotes the clear message that the health benefits might not be assumed only by construction of latrines. We doctors, having grown up in villages of Odisha, are aware of the practice of many people using latrines initially and then moving to a nearby pond to clean their anal orifice with their hand. These practices lead to contaminate water, hands, and soil. Poor adherence to toilet use at home can also be attributed to the traditional habit of defecating in the open air while visiting field crops. Many children aged 6–18 months defecate on the floor and then take their contaminated fingers to their mouth.

Transformation of sanitation-related knowledge into routine practice is hindered by traditional mindsets and the absence of awareness and an attitude to learn. Poverty has been described as a barrier to following safe hygiene practices.<sup>2</sup> Regular use of footwear is equally important for the prevention of soil-transmitted helminth infection.

Personal and domestic hygiene practices are difficult to improve without upgrading basic amenities, such as water supply, waste water disposal, and solid waste management.<sup>3</sup> Health education could be a very promising approach to improve awareness and encourage the adoption of good hygienic practice. The integration of health education and practice to fill the gaps of understanding of what works and what does not work is needed. We also need to keep focused on the important task of winning the battle for rural sanitation.

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- 1 Clasen T, Boisson S, Routray P, et al. Effectiveness of a rural sanitation programme on diarrhoea, soil-transmitted helminth infection, and child malnutrition in Odisha, India: a cluster-randomised trial. *Lancet Glob Health* 2014; **2**: e645–53.
- 2 Barrett R, Randle J. Hand hygiene practices: nursing students' perceptions. *J Clin Nurs* 2008; **17**: 1851–57.
- 3 Nath KJ. Home hygiene and environmental sanitation: a country situation analysis for India. *Int J Env Health Res* 2003; **13** (suppl 1): S19–28.

