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World Health Day is April 7

Food for the Hungry Improving the Health of Kenyan and Ethiopian Villages through Sanitary Defecation Practices

PHOENIX (April 2, 2015) – Tuesday, April 7 is World Health Day, a day originally created to recognize the founding of the World Health Organization. Today, organizations like Food for the Hungry (FH) celebrate World Health Day by recognizing the successes of global health programs like the establishment of defecation-free zones in Ethiopia and Kenya.

Those living in communities where public restrooms are a fact of life may have a hard time understanding the risks and challenges associated with public defecation.

In villages in Ethiopia and Kenya, however, it is common practice for people to go to the bathroom outdoors, behind a bush and not wash their hands afterward, leading to the spread of disease and water contamination. The human waste then seeps into the stream or spring the village uses for drinking, which then contaminates even the best water systems. If a village doesn't protect the watershed from contamination, greater quantities of water will never decrease the rate of serious water-borne diseases that can kill children.

FH helps communities with water programs that protect their villages by first educating them about the causes of diarrhea and sickness and helping the village build both a latrine and a hand washing station to cut down on disease transmission.

Such a program had a significant impact on 35-year old Ethiopian mother of four, Melkie Yaregal.

Speaking about the FH hygiene and sanitation program in her village, Yaregal said “[This] training has brought significant change to the community. Each household prepared pit latrines and avoided open defecation. If FH did not construct these water facilities, we would continue to suffer from our illness that we keep getting from our filthy water source.”

“For latrines to be effective, widespread adoption of the practice is essential,” said Gary Edmonds, FH President and CEO. “FH is motivating communities in Ethiopia and Kenya to establish this practice, and we are seeing amazing results.”

Once a village has attained the goal of 100% participation, it is declared an “open defecation free zone” – complete with celebratory parties and the installation of a sign clearly indicating that the village has been declared a potty-free zone.

“In 2014, our goal was to have 80 villages declared open defecation free zones,” said Edmonds. “In actuality, we were able to have 601 villages certified. People really jumped on the bandwagon.”

Founded in 1971, Food for the Hungry provides emergency relief and long-term development programs with operations in more than 20 countries to help the world's most vulnerable people. Learn more by visiting www.fh.org. Social connections include www.facebook.com/foodforthehungry and www.twitter.com/food4thehungry.

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