Message 4 - Sanitation Helps the Environment

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In regions where a large proportion of the population is not served with adequate water supply and sanitation, sewage flows directly into streams, rivers, lakes and wetlands, affecting coastal and marine ecosystems, fouling the environment and exposing millions of children to disease. Particularly in the context of urbanization, domestic wastewater, sewage and solid waste improperly discharged presents a variety of concerns from providing breeding grounds for communicable disease vectors to contributing to air, water and soil pollution.

The results of poor waste management also contribute to a loss of valuable biodiversity. In the case of coral reefs, urban and industrial waste and sewage dumped directly into the ocean or carried by river systems from sources upstream, increase the level of nitrogen in seawater. Increased nitrogen caused overgrowths of algae, which in turn, smother reefs by cutting off their sunlight.

Improved sanitation reduces environmental burdens, increases sustainability of environmental resources and allows for a healthier, more secure future for children.

Key Points:

- Loss of biodiversity
- Water pollution
- Nutrient loading
- Air pollution
- Environmental degradation and unsustainability

Supporting facts and figures:

- About 90% of sewage and 70% of industrial waste in developing countries are discharged untreated into watercourses, often polluting the usable water supply (http://www.un.org/events/water/factsheet.pdf)
- Urban to rural ratio of people globally with access to sanitation: 80% vs. 39% (PFC 5)

Contextualize this message in your country using local data such as:

- Urban sanitation access rates
- Rural sanitation access rates
- Snapshot of current wastewater management: Wastewater and sludge treatment plants in major cities, average household wastewater management systems (i.e. septic tanks vs. sewer lines), quality of discharge from septic tanks, treatment plants, coverage, etc.
- Water quality in major water bodies.