

**Unilever Announces New Initiative in Progress to Helping 1 Billion People Improve Their Health and Wellbeing**  
**Sunday, October 14, 2012 11:00:00 PM (GMT)**

***Unilever partners with Millennium Villages Project to improve handwashing habits in Africa***

Unilever and the Earth Institute today announced a new initiative to bring handwashing with soap – a lifesaving habit – to the Millennium Villages, a project that works with nearly 500,000 people in rural villages, across 10 countries in sub-Saharan Africa. Prof. Jeffrey Sachs, Director of the Earth Institute at Columbia University and Paul Polman, CEO Unilever, signed the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in New York today on the fifth anniversary of Global Handwashing Day.

The partnership supports Unilever's goal to deliver on one of its commitments under its [Sustainable Living Plan](#) – to help more than one billion people take action to improve their health and well-being. Over the past two years, Unilever has successfully changed the handwashing behaviour of 50 million people in Africa and South-Asia, through its leading soap brand Lifebuoy and partnerships with [Population Services International](#) (PSI) and [UNICEF](#) established through the [Unilever Foundation](#).

Paul Polman, Unilever CEO said: "The big issues the world is facing require new approaches, new business models and new partnerships. Responsible businesses must take a more active leadership role. The MOU with the Earth Institute partnering Lifebuoy with the Millennium Villages Project is one such example where working together will enhance our expertise of addressing hygiene in deep rural Africa and enable us to develop more effective solutions to reduce child mortality."

"It is unacceptable that two million children die every year from infectious diseases when we have easy and cheap lifesaving solutions, such as handwashing with soap, readily available. Innovative partnerships between governments, civil society and business have a critical role to play in promoting better hygiene practices and in tackling the world's deadliest diseases."

The date for the MOU with the Millennium Villages Project – October 15<sup>th</sup> – has been chosen because it is the fifth anniversary of [Global Handwashing Day](#)<sup>1</sup> – a day celebrated in over 100 countries. Today Unilever is highlighting how handwashing with soap can help more children reach their fifth birthday.

**Everybody can help a child – Pledge on Facebook**

Millions around the world are asked to pledge on [www.facebook.com/lifebuoy](http://www.facebook.com/lifebuoy). With every pledge, Lifebuoy and its partners will help more children receive hygiene education through their dedicated handwashing behaviour change programmes.

Jeffrey Sachs, Director of the Earth Institute at Columbia University said: "Diarrhoea and pneumonia are the two leading causes of under-5 deaths, accounting for around 30% of children's deaths globally – more than two million lives lost each year. More than 80% of these deaths occur in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. Addressing these challenges through improved hygiene is a vital and effective step towards saving lives and achieving the global Millennium Development Goal to reduce the child mortality rate by two-thirds by 2015."

Consistent evidence shows that handwashing with soap at critical times - before eating or preparing food and after using the toilet - can reduce diarrhoeal risk by 45%<sup>2</sup> and acute respiratory infections such as pneumonia, by 23 per cent.<sup>3</sup> Studies also reveal that primary school absenteeism due to diarrhoea and respiratory infections dropped between 20% and 50% as a result of better handwashing practices<sup>4</sup>.

"We are looking forward to working with Unilever to ensure that straightforward solutions like handwashing reach the people that need them the most," said Sachs who leads the Millennium Villages Project. The poor need solutions that are affordable, products that are highly effective, and information that is practical and accessible. The benefits can be enormous."

The partnership will be focusing on villages in Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Mali, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Tanzania and Uganda, and aims to: decrease incidence in diarrhoeal diseases, promote gender

equality, increase school attendance and enhance productivity and well-being for all community members. The partnership will also focus on governments. Governments should integrate handwashing with soap into national health and education policy frameworks. Governments and aid donors should ensure adequate finance for hygiene facilities and water availabilities. Business must act too, ensuring their products are even more affordable and varied so that handwashing with soap is done everywhere and by all. Public-private partnerships have a role to play and can help governments harness the power of business for the benefit of their population's health.

Looking to the UN's post-2015 agenda, Polman said, "It will be important to ensure that hygiene takes its place alongside targets on water and sanitation. This partnership with Millennium Villages Project will provide further evidence to demonstrate to policymakers how hygiene public policy can be improved, and help bring to an end the scandal of children dying from preventable diseases."

#### **Notes to Editors:**

Getty Images are covering the Global Handwashing Days events in Jakarta, Mumbai, Johannesburg/Soweto, Nairobi and New York. High resolution photos will be available to download on: [www.unilever.com/mediacentre](http://www.unilever.com/mediacentre)

More information, please contact:

#### **About Global Handwashing Day:**

- This 15<sup>th</sup> October is Global Handwashing Day's fifth birthday. Celebrated in over 100 countries, Global Handwashing Day is an annual awareness day which aims to put the global spotlight on handwashing with soap as a lifesaving habit.
- Unilever, through its Lifebuoy brand, co-founded Global Handwashing Day in 2008 with the Public Private Partnership for Handwashing with Soap (PPPHW) alongside UNICEF, P&G, USAID, the World Bank Water and Sanitation Programme, US Centres for Disease Control and Prevention and the Academy for Educational Development.

#### **About Unilever**

Unilever is one of the world's leading suppliers of fast moving consumer goods with operations in over 100 countries and sales in 190. Consumers buy 170 billion Unilever packs around the world every year, and our products are used over two billion times a day. We have more than 171,000 employees, and generated annual sales of €46.5 billion in 2011.

Working to create a better future every day, we help people feel good, look good and get more out of life with brands and services that are good for them and good for others. Our portfolio includes some of the world's best known and most loved brands including thirteen €1 billion brands, and global leadership in most categories in which we operate. The portfolio features iconic brands such as: Knorr, Hellmann's, Lipton, Dove, Vaseline, Lifebuoy, Omo, Cif, Signal and Domestos.

Unilever's ambition is to double the size of our business, while reducing our overall environmental impact (including sourcing, consumer use and disposal). We are also committed to doing what we can to improve health, nutrition and hygiene, with a target to help more than a billion people take action to improve their health and well-being, as well as sourcing all our agricultural raw materials sustainably by 2020. All of these goals are itemised in more than 50 time-based targets in our Unilever Sustainable Living Plan.

Unilever has led the Food Producers sector in the Dow Jones Sustainability World Indexes for 14 consecutive years. In 2012 we were also named leader of the Food and Beverage supersector. We are included in the FTSE4Good Index Series and attained a top environmental score of 5, leading to inclusion in the FTSE4Good Environmental Leaders Europe 40 Index. In 2011 Unilever led the Climate Counts Company Scorecard and for the second year we topped the list of Global Corporate Sustainability Leaders in the GlobeScan/SustainAbility latest annual survey (2012).

For more information about Unilever and its brands, please visit [www.unilever.com](http://www.unilever.com).

<sup>1</sup> Link to <http://www.globalhandwashingday.org/>

- 2 CHERG 2010. Sandy Cairncross, Caroline Hunt, Sophie Boisson, Kristof Bostoen, Val Curtis, Isaac CH Fung, and Wolf-Peter Schmidt Water, sanitation and hygiene for the prevention of diarrhoea. *Int. J. Epidemiol.* 2010 39: i193-i205.
- 3 Rabie, T and Curtis, V. (2006): Handwashing and risk of respiratory infections: a quantitative systematic review. *Tropical Medicine and International Health*, 11(3), 258-267.
- 4 **Three Studies:** Bowen, A. et al., 2007. A cluster-randomised controlled trial evaluating the effect of a handwashing-promotion program in Chinese primary schools. *The American Journal of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene*, 76(6), pp.1166-1173. Talaat, M., 2011. Effects of Hand Hygiene Campaigns on Incidence of Laboratory-confirmed Influenza and Absenteeism in Schoolchildren, Cairo, Egypt. *Emerging Infectious Diseases*. Available at: [http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/eid/article/17/4/10-1353\\_article.htm](http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/eid/article/17/4/10-1353_article.htm) (Accessed September 14, 2011).

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