# **The health consequences of open defecation to many households in SSA**

# By Rachael Nagaddya, 18th August 2025.

Open defecation (OD) is both the disposal of human faeces and the practice of defecating in open fields, waterways, bushes, forests, open bodies of water, and other open spaces. The 2021 [WHO and UNICEF joint monitoring program](https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240030848) reports that globally, 494 million people practice open defecation; nearly half of whom live in sub-Saharan Africa. This degrading vice not only results in several gastrointestinal diseases but also exposes girls and women to increased sexual exploitation and a lack of privacy when they are menstruating. The determining factors for OD include; remoteness, demographic and geographic factors, absence of sanitation facilities, financial constraints, rocky or unstable soil conditions, large household size and social norms or behavioural pattern. Monitoring the percentage of households practicing OD is relevant in achieving SDG 6.2 Sanitation and Hygiene that focuses on achieving access to adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene for all and end open defecation, paying special attention to the needs of women and girls and those in vulnerable situations.

Data from some SSA countries shows that in Uganda, the better performing country, household members that are five years and older in 4 out of every 100 households dispose their faecal matter in the open. This implies that toilet facilities are still a crucial development amenity in order to recognizes access to clean water, sanitation, and health (WASH) as a human right.