

## Glossary of Terms

# Learning from India's Kumbh Mela

2017

This short glossary is designed to accompany two teaching cases prepared by the Global Health Education and Learning Incubator about the Kumbh Mela, a Hindu religious ritual and festival that draws millions of devout pilgrims to sacred bathing in the Ganges River for spiritual purification. The case, “Stampede at the Kumbh Mela: Preventable Accident?” focuses on unintentional accidents and humanitarian response. The case, “Toilets and Sanitation at the Kumbh Mela,” focuses on water- and sanitation-related health risks and response at mass gatherings. The Incubator has also developed companion teaching materials on these subjects, including an annotated bibliography and as a series of lesson plans with instructor’s notes, learning objectives, and suggested discussion questions and classroom activities.

**Note:** Sources for terms below are noted in parentheses at the end of each entry, with additional information at the end of this document.

---

**Accidents:** An unfortunate and typically unforeseen event, a disaster, a mishap. (Oxford English Dictionary)

**Akhara:** In India: A convent or monastery, especially of ascetics. (Oxford English Dictionary)

**Allopathic medicine:** A system in which medical doctors and other healthcare professionals (such as nurses, pharmacists, and therapists) treat symptoms and diseases using drugs, radiation, or surgery. Also called biomedicine, conventional medicine, mainstream medicine, orthodox medicine, and Western medicine. (National Cancer Institute)

**Armed violence:** The use or threatened use of weapons to inflict injury, death, or psychosocial harm, which undermines development. (World Health Organization 2014)

**Ayurvedic medicine:** Of or pertaining to the traditional Hindu science of medicine. (Oxford English Dictionary)

**Cholera:** An acute diarrheal infection caused by ingestion of food or water contaminated with the bacterium *Vibrio cholerae*. (World Health Organization 2017)

**Defecation field:** Designated field for open defecation, typically constructed for excreta disposal in emergencies, that should be located so they are easily reached by the community but do not pollute water supplies or sources of food. (World Health Organization, Water, Engineering and Development Centre 2011)

**Digester:** Closed tank in waste-water treatment plants that decreases the volume of solids and stabilizes raw sludge by bacterial action. (UNdata Glossary 2017)

---

This glossary was originally developed by the Global Health Education and Learning Incubator at Harvard University. It is used and distributed with permission by the Global Health Education and Learning Incubator at Harvard University. The Incubator’s educational materials are not intended to serve as endorsements or sources of primary data, and do not necessarily reflect the views of Harvard University.

# Learning from India's Kumbh Mela: Glossary of Terms

**Ganga:** Hindi name for the Ganges River, regarded by Hindus as sacred. (Oxford Living Dictionaries 2017)

**Green Kumbh:** The Green Kumbh Initiative was an effort to provide portable, eco-friendly toilets for free use by festival attendees in order to improve sanitation at the 2013 Kumbh Mela and to educate the public and the press about the importance and viability of ecologically-sound toilet facilities. (Kumbh Mela 2013)

**Greywater:** Water from the kitchen, bath and/or laundry, which generally does not contain significant concentrations of excreta. (World Health Organization 2006)

**Homeopathic medicine:** A system of medical practice according to which diseases are treated by the administration (usually in very small doses) of drugs which would produce in a healthy person symptoms closely resembling those of the disease treated. (Oxford English Dictionary)

**Improved drinking water sources:** Piped household water connection located inside the user's dwelling, plot or yard. Public taps or standpipes, tube wells or boreholes, protected dug wells, protected springs or rainwater collection. (United Nations 2015)

**Improved sanitation:** An improved sanitation facility is one that hygienically separates human excreta from human contact and can consist of one of the following facilities: Flush/pour-to-flush piped sewer system, septic tank, pit latrine; ventilated improved pit latrine; pit latrine with slab; composting toilet. (United Nations 2015)

**Kalpavasi:** A pilgrim at the Kumbh Mela who has taken an oath to live at the sangam for the entire month of Magh [January-February]. (Maclean 2008)

**Mass gathering:** A gathering of persons at a specific location for a specific purpose for a defined period of time. Public health risks can occur if the number of people attending is sufficient to strain the planning and response resources of the community, state, or nation hosting the event. (World Health Organization 2015)

**Nagri:** Temporary city. (Mehrotra 2014)

**Open defecation:** When human faeces are disposed of in fields, forests, bushes, open bodies of water, beaches or other open spaces or disposed of with solid waste. (United Nations 2015)

**Pilgrim:** A person who makes a journey (usually of a long distance) to a sacred place as an act of religious devotion. (Oxford English Dictionary)

**Pit latrine:** Latrine with a pit for collection and decomposition of excreta and from which liquid infiltrates into the surrounding soil. (United Nations 2015)

**Pontoon bridge:** A temporary floating bridge supported by boats, hollow metal cylinders, or other floats. (Oxford English Dictionary)

**Sangam:** In India, a river confluence, especially of the Ganga, Yamuna, and mythical Saraswati at Allahabad. (Oxford English Dictionary)

**Sanitation:** Improvement of environmental Access to, and use of, excreta and wastewater facilities and services that ensure privacy and dignity, ensuring a clean and healthy living environment for all. "Facilities and Services" should include the 'collection, transport, treatment and disposal of human excreta, domestic wastewater and solid waste and

associated hygiene promotion' to the extent demanded by the particular environment conditions. (United Nations 2015)

**Sanitation:** Improvement of environmental conditions in households that affect human health by means of drainage and disposal of sewage and refuse. (UNData Glossary 2017)

**Sewage lagoon:** Shallow pond, usually human-made, where sunlight, bacteria and oxygen interact and help purify waste water. The term is synonymous with sewage oxidation pond and stabilization pond. (UNData Glossary 2017)

**Stampede:** A sudden or unreasoning rush or flight of persons in a body or mass. (Oxford English Dictionary)

**Unimproved drinking water sources:** Unprotected dug well, unprotected spring, cart with small tank/drum, surface water (river, dam, lake, pond, stream, canal, irrigation channels), and bottled water. (United Nations 2015)

**Unimproved sanitation facilities:** Facilities which do not ensure hygienic separation of human excreta from human contact. Unimproved facilities include pit latrines without a slab or platform, hanging latrines and bucket latrines. (United Nations 2015)

**Violence** is the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation. (World Health Organization 2014)

**WASH:** The collective term for Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene. Due to their independent nature, these three core issues are grouped together to represent a growing sector. While each a separate field of work, each is dependent on the presence of the other. For example, without toilets, water sources become contaminated; without clean water, basic hygiene practices are not possible. (UNICEF 2016)

**Waste water:** Used water, typically discharged into the sewage system. It contains matter and bacteria in solution or suspension. (UNData Glossary 2017)

**Water pollution:** Presence in water of harmful and objectionable material – obtained from sewers, industrial wastes and rainwater run-off – in sufficient concentrations to make it unfit for use. (UNData Glossary 2017)

## SOURCES

*Although the terms included in this glossary have been selected from sources believed to be reliable, no warranty expressed or implied is made regarding accuracy, completeness, legality, reliability, timeliness, or usefulness of any information.*

Global Health Glossary (archived). Kaiser Global Health 2013.

<https://web.archive.org/web/20130127122118/http://globalhealth.kff.org/Common/Glossary.aspx>.

Global Status Report on Violence Prevention 2014. World Health Organization 2014.

[http://www.who.int/violence\\_injury\\_prevention/violence/status\\_report/2014/en](http://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/violence/status_report/2014/en).

Glossary. Health in All Policies: Training Manual. World Health Organization 2015.

[http://who.int/social\\_determinants/publications/health-policies-manual](http://who.int/social_determinants/publications/health-policies-manual).

Glossary of Demographic Terms. Population Reference Bureau.

<http://www.prb.org/Publications/Lesson-Plans/Glossary.aspx>.

Glossary of Human Rights Terms. Child Rights International Network.

<https://www.crin.org/en/library/publications/glossary-human-rights-terms>.

# Learning from India's Kumbh Mela: Glossary of Terms

Health Systems Strengthening Glossary. World Health Organization.

[http://www.who.int/healthsystems/hss\\_glossary/en](http://www.who.int/healthsystems/hss_glossary/en).

Kumbh Mela 2013.

<http://www.kumbhamela2013.org/program-view/toilets>.

Maclean 2008.

[Maclean K. Pilgrimage and Power: The Kumbh Mela in Allahabad, 1765-1954. Oxford 2008. Page 232.](#)

Mehrotra 2014.

<https://worksthatwork.com/4/constructing-the-worlds-biggest-disassemblable-city>.

National Cancer Institute. NCI Dictionary of Cancer Terms.

<https://www.cancer.gov/publications/dictionaries/cancer-terms?cdrid=454742>.

Oxford English Dictionary.

<http://www.oed.com>.

Oxford Living Dictionaries.

<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/ganges>.

The Sustainable Development Agenda. United Nations.

<http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/development-agenda>.

UNdata Glossary 2017.

<http://data.un.org/Glossary.aspx>.

UNICEF 2016.

[https://www.unicef.org/wash/3942\\_3952.html](https://www.unicef.org/wash/3942_3952.html).

United Nations 2015.

[http://www.un.org/waterforlifedecade/pdf/hrw\\_glossary\\_eng.pdf](http://www.un.org/waterforlifedecade/pdf/hrw_glossary_eng.pdf).

World Health Organization 2006.

[http://www.who.int/water\\_sanitation\\_health/publications/gsuweg4/en/](http://www.who.int/water_sanitation_health/publications/gsuweg4/en/).

World Health Organization 2014.

<http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/corporate/Reports/UNDP-GVA-violence-2014.pdf>.

World Health Organization 2015.

[http://www.un.org/waterforlifedecade/pdf/hrw\\_glossary\\_eng.pdf](http://www.un.org/waterforlifedecade/pdf/hrw_glossary_eng.pdf).

World Health Organization 2017.

<http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs107/en>.

World Health Organization, Water, Engineering and Development Centre 2011.

[http://www.who.int/water\\_sanitation\\_health/publications/2011/tn14\\_tech\\_options\\_excreta\\_en.pdf](http://www.who.int/water_sanitation_health/publications/2011/tn14_tech_options_excreta_en.pdf).