

WASH - PROMOTING SAFE DRINKING WATER, SANITATION AND HYGIENE EDUCATION THROUGH SCHOOLS IN TAJIKISTAN

ISSUES

The water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) situation in Tajikistan is of critical concern. Water supply coverage is low and service levels are deteriorating. Tajikistan's official water supply coverage rate of 61 percent is significantly lower than the rates in neighboring Central Asian countries, and 15 percent lower than the developing country average. Water quality problems inherited from Soviet-era agriculture and industrial practices threaten water sources. And on the horizon is the increasing impact of climate change, which is already affecting water supplies and is likely an underlying cause of the extreme weather events that plague the country. Sanitation facilities in households are basic. Only 14.7% of the population use sanitation facilities that can be considered adequate, as defined by the WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme. In rural areas, only 2.7% of the population use adequate sanitation, with the vast majority relying on simple, unimproved pit latrines.

Along with malnutrition, **lack of safe water supply and inadequate sanitation remain major causes of high mortality and morbidity in the country.** Out of every 1,000 children born alive, 45 die before their first birthday. And 53 of them don't survive to the age of five (TLSS, 2007). According to the latest analysis from The Lancet Child Survival series (Global, regional and national causes of child mortality in 2008, Black et al, 2010), 19.2 percent of under-five mortality in Tajikistan is due to diarrhoea - just behind pneumonia at 21 percent. This is far higher than the rates in neighbouring countries, higher than global average (15%) and about the same as the average for Africa (19%). Poor water, sanitation and hygiene is also a primary cause of Tajikistan's high incidence of helminth (worm) infestation (a 2004 MoH, UNICEF and WFP survey indicated that 63% of children aged 6-11 are infected). Worm infestation is associated with both physical and mental stunting, seriously affecting children's intellectual development and education success, as well as their health.

The sanitation and water situation in institutions is a special concern. The available data suggests very low coverage levels. One sample survey from 2009 showed that only 55 percent of schools had any kind of water supply (not necessarily safe) and only 17 percent had sanitation facilities. Children's water and sanitation knowledge and practices are also worrying. KAP surveys in schools show that only 28% of children drink boiled water. While over 90% of children know of appropriate hand washing practices, only 20% of children wash their hands with soap after using the toilet. The lack of safe and private toilets in schools is a contributing factor to gender disparity in education, raising absenteeism and drop-out of girls in secondary school. Health facilities and other public institutions also often lack access to safe water and adequate sanitation.

UNICEF APPROACH

UNICEF's approach to the challenge of poor water, sanitation and hygiene and the resulting challenges for children is to provide a comprehensive WASH package in schools, combining tangible improvements in water and sanitation facilities with hygiene and life skills education, teacher training, mobilization and community outreach. This comprehensive approach has proven its effectiveness in Tajikistan in the UNICEF WASH in Schools programme, started in 2002, which has presented a significant improvement in children's knowledge and practices on sanitation and hygiene issues. A KAP survey shows that 89% of children in the target schools practise hand washing with soap after using the toilet – more than four times the baseline figure of 20%. In project schools, 65% of students drink boiled water – more than twice as much as the baseline of 28%. There is also evidence that children actively relay key messages on water, sanitation and hygiene to their families and community members, thus ensuring that the reach of these activities is well beyond their school.

There are three main reasons why UNICEF invests in water, sanitation and hygiene education in schools:

1. WASH projects reduce child morbidity, thus boosting school attendance and learning achievement.
2. Adequate sanitation facilities for girls and boys in themselves are also known to improve school attendance, particularly for girls. As such, WASH interventions in schools are one way to address gender inequality in school enrolment and attendance.
3. School children will convey their learning on water, sanitation and hygienic behavior to their parents, siblings and others in their communities. Children can be important advocates and change agents.

Through the WASH in Schools programme, UNICEF has already provided 220,000 boys and girls in 375 schools across the country with access to safe drinking water and improved sanitary facilities. In addition, 300,000 students have improved knowledge and skills in sanitation and hygiene and 1,200 teachers in rural schools across the country know how to promote hygiene and sanitation. Beyond school pupils, 100,000 people in rural areas have access to safe drinking water through rehabilitation and construction of water supply systems in hospitals and communities. Three thousand people in emergency-affected Khuroson district have access to a new drinking water supply.

UNICEF's long-term engagement in education, health, and water and sanitation, combined with its mandate to work for the wellbeing of children, enables it to work towards the strengthening of WASH in schools. UNICEF is centrally involved in relevant policy making processes and combine this upstream work with the delivery of results for children in the most disadvantaged districts. The synergy between policy work and direct delivery is a strength of UNICEF's approach. UNICEF is focused on the sustainability of its interventions and is introducing lower cost technology to ensure WASH interventions are replicable and can be maintained in future from Government's own resources. In addition, UNICEF is promoting more intensive community involvement in WASH interventions, which will build ownership and enhance sustainability.

WHAT MORE NEEDS TO BE DONE?

While the achievements are considerable, the 375 schools covered with WASH interventions so far represent a mere fraction of the total number of schools in need of this kind of support. UNICEF aims to expand the number of schools with a WASH programme, to give more children a chance to learn better, live healthier and become agents of change in their communities. By the end of the 2010-2015 UNICEF Tajikistan country programme, UNICEF would like to expand the WASH programme to another 100 schools in UNICEF's priority districts.

By 2015, UNICEF aims to:

- Provide secure access to safe drinking water supply to about 60,000 children and 140,000 community members in and around 100 schools;
- Provide access to new sanitation facilities and relevant hygiene education among 60,000 students in 100 schools;
- Organise extra-curricular activities in 100 schools on hygiene and sanitation (with a focus on girls) to enhance children's participation and leadership;
- Prevent water-borne infectious diseases in the most vulnerable communities through organisation of hygiene promotion campaigns with emphasis on water quality, personal hygiene and safe sanitation;
- Strengthen water quality surveillance through community water quality monitoring techniques and activities, including laboratory analysis in and around 100 target schools;
- Strengthen the impact of WASH in schools on the wider community around these schools, thus contributing to wider rural development.

These activities should result in tangible improvements in hand washing behaviour, reductions in the incidence of water-borne diseases, an increase in school attendance and a reduction in school dropout.

In addition to better WASH in schools, Tajikistan also has urgent needs in improving access to safe drinking water, adequate sanitation and hygiene promotion in the community, and in social service facilities such as hospitals and other public institutions. UNICEF is getting ready to expand its WASH activities in this direction.