



WATER & ENVIRONMENTAL SANITATION

Over two million children die each year of diseases that result from poor quality drinking water and inadequate sanitary facilities. Plan is committed to working with communities in developing countries to ensure that a child's environment is as healthy as possible. This work includes, amongst other activities, providing safe drinking water, all forms of waste management, pest control and training on food hygiene.

Background

Access to safe water and environmental sanitationⁱ are vital for the dignity and health of all people, and it is especially important in ensuring the healthy development of children. Yet every year around 2.2 million children die from diarrhoeal related diseases. The majority of these diseases are contracted as a result of poor quality drinking water, inappropriate hygiene practices or inadequate sanitary facilities. This rate is equivalent to one child dying every 15 seconds.ⁱⁱ

Although the situation has improved in the last decade, there is still great need; at the beginning of 2000, over a billion people lacked access to adequate and safe water supply and around 2.4 billion people still lacked basic safe sanitation facilities. The majority of these people live in rural Africa and Asia, where they have an especially hard time accessing water, often fetching it from distant and polluted sources. Women and children usually collect the water, and the time spent on this task leaves less time for other activities such as income generation, household work or school attendance.

Plan's Response

Plan makes work on water, sanitation and hygiene a priority in all of the countries where it has development programs. Plan believes that local people should be actively involved in the process of identifying water and sanitation problems, designing solutions and managing systems in their own communities.

Mali

Plan staff worked with community members to improve the design of household water storage pots. Previously the pots were of a simple open-top design which meant that water could be contaminated either during storage (from flies, for example) or when being accessed (through dirty pots or hands). The pots are now sealed and water is accessed via side taps. Diarrhoeal disease rates have fallen in households with the new pot design.

In addition to technical assistance for improved water and sanitation infrastructure, Plan also provides information, education and communication activities so that communities can manage those systems in the future.

Sri Lanka

Plan staff worked with the villagers of Delunthalamada to help them manage their own water and sanitation projects. Villagers established a strong water committee who could decide on priorities and actions. The committee then worked with the community to identify what type of water supply system would be best, and how easy it would be to build and maintain. Plan staff offered technical advice during this process.

The International Context

The right to clean water and environmental sanitation services is included in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and in the commitments made by the member states of the United Nations in the Millennium Goals. The importance

of water and sanitation for the health and dignity of all was affirmed at the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio, and again at the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg.

Summary

Plan's long-term goals for water and environmental sanitation are:

- To increase public awareness of hygiene and to pay particular attention to educating primary school children about hygiene
- To equip schools with facilities for sanitation and hand washing
- To increase the percentage of people with access to hygienic sanitation facilities
- To increase the percentage of people with access to adequate quantities of safe water
- To reduce the incidence of diarrhoeal disease

Plan is a humanitarian child-centred organisation working in 45 developing countries with families and their communities to help children realise their full potential in life.

ⁱ Environmental sanitation is a term that includes issues like safe excreta disposal, solid waste management, medical waste management, wastewater management, site drainage, personal hygiene facilities, vector and pest control and food hygiene.

ⁱⁱ WHO & UNICEF *Global Water Supply and Sanitation Assessment 2000 Report* (Geneva & New York: WHO/UNICEF, 2000) p. 2