

Summary of Child Rights and WASH programme

Introduction

The child rights and WASH programme was developed jointly by the South Asia Regional teams of WaterAid and Save the Children Finland, and was implemented from 2008-2013 in Nepal, India, and Bangladesh with national NGO partners NEWAH, SAMARTHAN and VERC. Its aim was to explore how the WASH experience of WaterAid and its partners could be combined with the child rights expertise of Save the Children to develop a way of implementing WASH programmes that would generate a deep and lasting impact for children, leading to improved child survival, health and education.

Aims and intended impact

The intended impacts of the initiative were:

- All children in the project areas of the three countries have better access to WASH services and practices
- An enabling environment is created, where children, their parents and communities claim and respect WASH rights
- Improvement in WASH services and practices will help the realisation of children's right to survival, health and education

Activities

The actual activities of the programme have been different in each country, but all have the same basic components:

1. Analysis of WASH rights of children
2. Developing meaningful and ethical participation of children in WASH decisions at community level, and with local government
3. Developing support structures in the community
4. Working with local government to be responsive to child rights
5. Engaging with other child rights and WASH policies and networks at National level

There was an 18 month pilot phase in each of the three countries that enabled a long and flexible process of trial and error. This allowed each country to develop ways of working for the different social, political and cultural contexts, based on the local analysis, and drawing on the different strengths of partners in each country. This was an intense period of learning and very well supported by WA and Save the Children with external support from consultants with expertise in child participation and rights.

Meaningful and ethical participation of children

In each of the three countries the programme has operated in slightly different ways to develop the meaningful participation of children in schools and communities and bring their collective voice to the duty bearers.

In Bangladesh Informal child groups were newly formed in communities with a focus on being inclusive of all children – both in and out of school, from poorest households, and including children who are disabled. *Children's platforms* at Ward and Union Parishad (UP) levels are formed with representatives from each community group.

The main methodology has been the “joyful sessions” with children. These ensure that children of all ages can raise their issues about WASH and other subjects and are designed to develop children’s confidence to raise their voice.

Members of Citizens Action Committees in the communities have been trained by the project staff to facilitate the joyful sessions and then take the issues raised by children to the UP to be addressed through WASH plans and budgets.

In India informal children’s groups were formed to discuss WASH and child rights issues in communities, based on existing groups, mainly from schools. In primary schools the groups are mixed, but older girls’ and boys’ groups meet separately with support from animators.

They raise issues through community notice boards and meetings to which they invite members of the Gram Panchayat including the *sarpanch*. Some children have also written a local newspaper to publicise issues that concern them in their community.

Adult support groups were been formed in the villages to facilitate the child groups and take their issues to the Gram Panchayat and school management committees.

In Nepal Children’s clubs in communities and schools are facilitated by project staff and supported by the Ward level WASH Coordination Committees. Representatives from these groups form child clubs at ward level and a child club network at VDC level which directly engages with the VDC as members of the VWASHCC.

Children and their families, especially from poor and marginalized groups are encouraged to participate in the process of developing local development plans and play a watchdog role to make WASH a priority.

Evaluation

The programme was evaluated by WaterAid and Save the Children staff in 2013 to assess the extent to which it has brought about changes in relation to child participation and improved accountability for WASH at local government and community level. The evaluation also aimed to provide learning for all those involved in the project and for others involved in WASH and in children’s rights.

Findings

There is evidence from all three countries that the child rights programme has helped to activate a transformational change in children's awareness of their rights to WASH, urgency amongst them and their parents to improve their situation, and an awareness amongst duty bearers at local and district level of their responsibilities. The various groups, forums and committees from village to ward levels seem to have established sustainable mechanisms for on-going demand and holding governments to account. There is evidence of change in facilities on the ground that are more appropriate for children of different ages, including better provision of menstrual hygiene management facilities for teenage girls. There is also evidence of people linking WASH with other rights for children.

Conclusions

Whether or not we use a "child rights approach" children are involved in and will be affected by all WASH projects and should have an opportunity to participate in development processes and in WASH.

The approach

- **Has significantly increased the confidence and ability of children** to participate meaningfully in decisions about WASH services,
- **Has resulted in child friendly WASH services** that are more suited to the specific needs of children of different ages
- **Has brought about a shift in mindset amongst stakeholders** instilling awareness of the links between WASH and children's rights.
- **Promotes sustainability** and use of WASH facilities by developing an accountability framework in institutions and communities.
- **Appears to provide good value for money, and effectiveness.** The partners have started to use aspects of the approach in other projects
- **Components of the approach** can be gradually incorporated into other WASH programmes,
- **The process of joint innovation** has promoted healthy partnership, strong ownership by communities, and competency in WASH and child rights amongst staff, partners, community and children's groups.

Recommendations

- The whole approach, or elements of it, should be incorporated in other WASH programmes, especially those aimed at children, such as school WASH. All rights based WASH programmes should address child rights.
- WaterAid needs to develop its capacity, with guidelines and training to promote ethical and meaningful participation of children in WASH and should roll out a supporting policy on child safeguarding.
- Children's engagement must be institutionalised to sustain this level of awareness in WASH, in schools, government institutions and communities, engaging families through existing links such as

health centres and schools. Some level of ongoing support/facilitation is needed to sustain the community support mechanisms and children's groups and future projects need to develop phasing out strategies from an early stage.

- Lessons about the importance and practice of ethical and meaningful participation of children should be applied to other members of communities, especially the most marginalised.
- The detailed and participatory process of analysis at the beginning of the project is critical to the depth and traction of subsequent work. This should identify who is the most marginalised, issues of accountability at local and national levels, and key stakeholders in relation to WASH and other relevant rights. It should establish existing policies and resources that can be leveraged through a rights based approach, and assess existing knowledge amongst children and adults about WASH and human rights.
- Build national level linkages from the beginning with other stakeholders whose policies impact on accountability and rights at community level.
- The use of qualitative baselines and monitoring in this project can inform the development of PME methods suitable for measuring longer term systemic change and outcomes of rights based approaches.
- Emphasise the relevance of this initiative from the perspective of sustainability, sector strengthening and district wide approaches, link the learning with that from other rights based approaches, including governance and transparency, equity and inclusion, and the Special Rapporteur's handbook on the Human Rights to Water and Sanitation.
- Make clear linkages to WaterAid's Global Strategy 2015-2020 and to ongoing work on WASH and Health, Menstrual Hygiene Management and School WASH.

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