

Child Rights Based Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH)

promoting the survival and development of children



Save the Children

WE ARE the world's leading independent organisation for children.

OUR VISION is a world in which every child attains the right to survival, protection, development and participation.

OUR MISSION is to inspire breakthroughs in the way the world treats children, and to achieve immediate and lasting change in their lives.

WaterAid

VISION WaterAid's vision is of a world where everyone has access to safe water and sanitation.

MISSION WaterAid transforms lives by improving access to safe water, hygiene and sanitation in the world's poorest communities. We work with partners and influence decision-makers to maximise our impact.

Supported by Official Development Aid from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland

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Our Initiative

Save the Children Finland (SCF) has been working on issues around water in South Asia and elsewhere for the last few years. While the interventions have had a focus on children, there was a growing realization that the approach followed was not very different from other Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) programmes. In its pursuit to advance the child rights programming agenda of Save the Children, SCF decided to develop an action research programme in South Asia to better understand how a focus on child rights can result in improved and more sustained WASH outcomes for children, especially the most poor and marginalised. WaterAid¹ sees children as a priority group and recognizes that poor access to sanitation and water has a severe impact on child health, education and overall development. The programmatic focus of WaterAid on equity, inclusion and rights brought together the two organizations and what followed was a strategic partnership of SCF with WaterAid in 2009, for implementing an initiative titled “Child rights based WASH” in Bangladesh, India and Nepal.

Child Rights based WASH is an effort to work with WASH from a child rights perspective to improve services and practices for realizing children’s rights to survival and development on an equitable basis. The initiative has been borne from the realization that blending the technical WASH expertise of WaterAid with Save the Children’s expertise of working with child rights holds the potential to develop a WASH programme that can generate considerable impact for children.

The initiative started as an eighteen-month (July, 2009 – December, 2010) long preparatory phase which focused on developing strategies for implementing WASH, that draw on principles of child rights programming. In the current phase (January, 2011 – December, 2013), the programme will focus on implementing and refining the strategies and approaches developed and initiated. WaterAid country programmes along with their local partners in the respective countries are implementing the initiative. The programme is funded by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland.



Why focus on WASH?

In South Asia, there are approximately 0.8 billion children who lack adequate sanitation facilities and 442 million children who use unsafe drinking water sources.² Children in particular pay a very high price for unsafe drinking water and lack of sanitation and hygiene. Illness associated with unsafe water and poor sanitation kills millions of people annually, with diarrhoea and other water related diseases taking the lives of over two million children in the developing countries every year. Lack of nearby access to safe water also places an additional burden on children, especially girls, who are often made to fetch water from distant sources which prevents them from attending school regularly.

The importance of WASH for child survival and development is well established. The UNCRC also clearly relates the right to water with one of the key principles of child rights, i.e., the right to survival and development (Article 6). However, progress remains uneven and especially limited in areas inhabited by economically and socially weaker sections. Nevertheless, the paramount importance given to WASH for achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) by 2015 is an opportunity for various actors to push for further improvements in the sector. WASH has links with many of the Millennium Development Goals,³ particularly with MDG 4, as it plays a pivotal role in reducing under five mortality rate. This initiative also assumes high relevance to the work of Save the Children International by significantly contributing to improved child survival and child rights governance.

Adopting a child rights approach to WASH means that the rights of children can be highlighted and change in terms of practices and provisions can be pursued more rigorously.

What is Child Rights based WASH?

The key focus in the Child Rights based WASH initiative is to promote transparency and accountability whereby parents, communities and other relevant duty bearers can be held to account for ensuring the WASH rights of children. In practice this means setting up mechanisms and building the capacity of communities so that they are able to provide WASH rights to children and, where necessary, claim it on their behalf from the relevant duty bearers. This also becomes the added value and distinctive feature of a child rights based approach as opposed to a child-focused one. The preparatory phase has shown that such an approach is feasible, practical and effective.

Another key difference lies in the manner in which children are involved. In a regular WASH programme, children are often seen as agents of change and, in the name of child participation, very often end up being burdened with disproportionate responsibility. The child rights approach stresses the need for involving children given their evolving capacities and focuses on creating an enabling environment where a proper interface between children and communities/adults is established so that children's opinions are listened to and addressed. This also leads to creation of WASH facilities that are child friendly and safe.

The preparatory phase has brought consensus among all actors involved - that a child rights approach brings a new dimension to WASH in which it will be possible for children to access improved services and adopt appropriate WASH practices.



A Gram Sabha⁴ (Village Assembly) in progress in Amajhir village, Sehore District, India.



This Gram Sabha was held specially to focus on WASH issues of children. It resulted in sanctioning of the regular piped water supply and improved environmental sanitation in and around the village.

What are the key components of the Child Rights based WASH initiative?

The Child Rights based WASH initiative is based on the following three key components:

COMPONENT 1	COMPONENT 2	COMPONENT 3
<p><i>Develop accountability mechanisms at local government and community level for adequate provision of WASH services and practices for children.</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Work with duty bearers, parents and caregivers to sensitize them on the WASH rights of children.2. Develop community based mechanisms for:<ol style="list-style-type: none">i. Making parents and caregivers responsible for children adopting appropriate WASH practices.ii. Holding to account service providers and local government for providing appropriate WASH services for children.	<p><i>Ensure meaningful participation and involvement of all children in WASH activities, especially the poor and marginalized.</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Build capacity and confidence of children so that they are able to voice their opinion.2. Set up and institutionalize norms for the participation of children according to their capacities; and develop ways of including the most poor and marginalized.3. Develop the skills of field teams to work with children; Create an enabling environment where children can have a proper interface with adults regarding WASH related concerns.	<p><i>Advocate for the adoption of a child rights approach in WASH programming and policy.</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Generate evidence from this action research initiative.2. Influence networks, existing platforms and relevant actors to advocate for child rights based WASH.



A hoarding illustrating norms for meaningful participation of children and other standards of WASH practices in Dillibar, a small hilly village of Rauta Village Development Council, Nepal. Such hoardings have been developed by adults in consultation with children and placed at strategic locations in a number of villages across Rauta.

How will the initiative impact children?

This initiative will reach a total of 45,612 children directly and a total of 20,416 children indirectly. In total, the programme will cover 66,028 children in Bangladesh, India and Nepal. The intended impact of the programme is as follows:

- ♦ 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 realization of children's right to survival, health and education.

However, more than the number of children involved in this undertaking, of paramount importance is the establishment of practical ways to apply a child rights based approach to WASH that can be adapted more widely.



Endnotes

1. WaterAid is an international NGO dedicated to the provision of safe water, sanitation and hygiene education to the world's poorest people.
2. Joint Monitoring Progress Report on Drinking Water & Sanitation 2010. UNICEF and WHO.
3. Ensuring environmental sustainability (MDG 7), Reduce child mortality (MDG 4), Achieving universal primary education (MDG 2) and Promoting gender equality in education (MDG 2).
4. The Gram Sabha (Village Assembly) is a meeting of all adults, above 18 years, in the village. It is the lowest tier of local self governance in India.



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