



Water, sanitation and education

DEVELOPMENT ISSUE

Many children spend hours each day collecting water which means they don't have enough time to attend school ▶▶

Water for life

WaterAid is the UK's only major charity dedicated exclusively to the provision of safe water, effective sanitation and hygiene promotion to the world's poorest people.



WATERAID/CAROLINE PENN

Children's education opportunities are profoundly affected by the availability of safe water and sanitation in their community. When there is easy access to safe water and sanitation, school attendance rates rise, while absenteeism and drop-out rates fall. Combined with higher quality teaching, these create valuable opportunities for greater academic achievements by children, particularly girls. *Looking Back: The long-term impacts of water and sanitation projects*, a study carried out in four countries by WaterAid in 1999/2000 found there were three main impacts on education common to communities who had benefited from water and sanitation interventions:

- Increased school enrolment
- Reduced school absenteeism and drop-out rates
- Easier teacher recruitment

Experiences from the field

School enrolment

Following the water and sanitation interventions, significant increases were recorded in the number of children, particularly girls, attending primary school. This was attributed to two factors.

Firstly, the rise in household income resulting from the economic benefits of water and sanitation¹ has enabled families to pay for school fees, equipment, and uniforms they could not previously afford.

Secondly, children have the time available to attend school as they no longer have to

¹ WaterAid development issue sheet 'Water, sanitation and poverty reduction'



WATERAID/SALLY PHARO-TOMLIN

The reduced incidence of water and sanitation related diseases means that children are well enough to attend school.

spend hours searching for water. Mzee Kityangile of Songambebe Village (Tanzania) reported, 'It is now difficult to find school-going children loitering around the village looking for water, which was common in the past as everyone had to use extra hands to collect as much water as possible from distant sources.'

Research² has also shown that girls' attendance at school in Bangladesh increased by 11% per year after sanitation facilities were provided in the schools.

School absenteeism and drop-out rates

School absenteeism was found to fall due to the reduction in time spent collecting water and the reduced incidence of water and sanitation related diseases.

According to the head teacher of Tandala village (Tanzania) 'Water availability lowers school absenteeism, especially of the girl child. [When] water is far from the home, girls would go for water with their mothers till noon.'

In Atwedie Village (Ghana) it was observed that, not only had overall attendance improved, but children also arrived more punctually and no longer left school early in the day to go and search for water. In Ethiopia, too, hours spent on school-related activities increased from just a few hours (if any) to between seven and nine hours each day.

The availability of safe water was found to reduce the incidences of debilitating diseases associated with inadequate water and sanitation, such as bilharzia, diarrhoea, intestinal worms and conjunctivitis. This significantly reduces absenteeism as children are in good enough health to attend school.

Schoolchildren of Mpraeso Amanfrom told how they know when someone has bilharzia: 'They often urinate blood or have bloodstains in his/her panties. But among them presently, nobody urinates blood.' Incidences of children suffering snakebites, previously common, have also reduced now that children no longer need to walk through the bush in the early morning to collect water.

The number of children dropping out (ie leaving school before taking exams) significantly reduces after

improved access to water and sanitation is achieved. In Arappalipatti and Panjapatti (India) this has resulted in all children now going on to high school.

Teacher recruitment

Higher academic achievements would not be possible without sufficient numbers of adequately trained teachers. In the past, recruitment was often difficult for communities without easy access to safe water and sanitation, sometimes resulting in schools being closed for days or weeks at a time. The headteacher in Mpraeso Amanfrom (Ghana) was pleased to be able to say that, following the project intervention 'Teachers posted to teach at the community primary school do not hesitate to come.' The quality of instruction has also improved in Songambebe village (Tanzania), a fact attributed to the increased number of lessons taught per day and the time that teachers have available to devote to the curriculum.

Conclusion

The evidence is clear - improving access to water and sanitation also improves children's access to formal education. School attendance rates go up, while absenteeism and drop-out rates go down. Combined with increased teaching quality, these create valuable opportunities for greater academic achievements for all children, but particularly girls.

**WaterAid, Prince Consort House,
27-29 Albert Embankment,
London SE1 7UB, UK
Tel: +44 (0) 20 7793 4500
Fax: +44 (0) 20 7793 4545
Email: wateraid@wateraid.org.uk
wateraid.org.uk
Website: wateraid.org.uk
Charity registration number
288701 November 2001**

2 Cairncross 1999, Why promote sanitation? Technical brief, Water and Environmental Health at London and Loughborough (WELL)