



WaterAid – water for life

The UK's only major charity dedicated exclusively to the provision of safe domestic water, sanitation and hygiene education to the world's poorest people

Community participation



WaterAid/Abir Abdullah

Community participation is vital to all of WaterAid and its partners' projects. By communities being involved in all stages, from the planning through to the building and managing, of their water, sanitation and hygiene schemes, long term solutions can be found that are suited to their own needs, preferences and resources.

Rather than being imposed by outsiders, projects should solve the communities' own problems in a way that is appropriate and manageable for them. With a detailed understanding of the how and why of their water supply, sanitation and hygiene facilities communities will be committed to their projects and feel a sense of ownership for them.

Ultimately community participation is all about enabling communities to help themselves. By utilising their own skills and resources communities are able to take their first steps out of poverty. And once these basic services are in place and communities develop the skills and resources for changing their environment they continue to further their development.

Getting started

While community participation is vital in all phases of WaterAid's projects it is especially crucial at the beginning during the planning and decision making processes. WaterAid's initial introduction to a community is usually through village leaders, elders or influential people. They then call the whole community together in a large meeting for everyone to hear about the project.



WaterAid/Caroline Penn

As it is often easier for women and less powerful community members to talk in smaller focus groups, household meetings or individually, field workers make sure they reach these people by setting up smaller, more appropriate meetings.

Working with communities is a two-way process. Project staff and villagers work together and learn from each other. Through discussions and meetings the community identify their needs in terms of water supply, sanitation and hygiene and share their knowledge of the local environment and resources.

WaterAid's partners then discuss the range of technical solutions possible in their situation together with information about the costs and the type of service these options provide. At this stage community members can often

visit other similar projects and learn from the experiences of other communities. This information then enables them to make informed choices about their future water and sanitation facilities.

The community then decides on the type of project it needs, where the project should be based, how much it can afford to spend and what each family should contribute. A crucial part of the planning stage is ensuring that the projects are appropriate to everyone in the community and that poorer families can still afford to benefit from the schemes. So, while communities share the costs of projects by making appropriate labour, time or financial contributions to the initial and long-term running costs, the levels or type of contributions depend upon what families and individuals can afford.

People who are disabled, elderly or simply unable to contribute are subsidised by those who are better off.

"People are prepared to pay money to use the latrines as they know the funds pay to keep the latrines clean. If people are unable to pay, for instance if they are sick, disabled or are a lady living alone, then we let them in for free." *Mrs Lakshmi, Karuvattupettai slum, India.*

In Nigeria WaterAid and its partners developed a system to ensure each member of the community contributes fairly. This system ranks community members' levels of poverty according to indicators which they suggest themselves. Examples include the size and type of house they live in, and the materials it is made of, possessions, livestock, clothing and schooling. A community's ranking determines their eligibility for support and the level of subsidy they are given.

This system is just one of a range of participatory techniques and tools that field workers and community members use to plan and monitor the work. Knowledge and information is accessible to both literate and illiterate people by using diagrams, maps and pictures.

Constructing and running the projects

Community members undertake the construction work of wells and latrines by digging and collecting materials such as sand and stones, and breaking rocks down into gravel. They also provide timber and build fences around water points to protect them from pollution from animals.

Individuals are appointed by their community to manage the project and accounts, often through a water committee which oversees the day-to-day maintenance and

collection of water fees where these are charged. They receive training from WaterAid and its partners so that they are equipped to run their projects in the long term. Communities are responsible for the regular maintenance and servicing of their water and sanitation facilities which means they are self-reliant and only call out engineers if they have a serious problem.

In many countries villagers volunteer to attend training courses and become health education workers. Local people are best situated to make decisions about which hygiene messages are a priority for their community and the best ways in which these should be told.

Finally, the community is also involved in monitoring progress and in evaluating the project once it is completed. The results, and communities' solutions to problems, help to improve WaterAid's work and build community confidence to plan other development activities for themselves.

The success of all the work is dependent on the communities making the level of input necessary for a scheme to keep functioning for years to come. Such commitment will only come if their wishes have been respected, they have been given adequate information to make informed choices, have enough training for on-going maintenance and they feel a sense of ownership of their project.

Who is involved?

WaterAid projects seek to involve all members of the communities that they work with. Within each community there are individuals, each with their own interests and priorities. There will be men, women and children, leaders and people with different levels of wealth and of different caste, religions and ages. The biggest

challenge of any project is to ensure that all community members are involved, particularly the poorest and least powerful, so that everyone, especially the most vulnerable, benefit equally.

Women are key participants in successful projects. They place a high priority on water supply and so WaterAid's partners work to ensure that they are consulted about their preferences for project design and where the projects should be sited. Their knowledge about water sources is particularly valuable, for example, in identifying where the nearest, cleanest water sources are and at which time of year they might dry out.

Involving women also has a positive impact on their position in the community. By having such an important and public role as a health promoter or a water committee member, women's skills in the community are enhanced. Ultimately new skills bring more confidence enabling them to become stronger and more respected.

"Since we have had the new water source life has changed in so many amazing ways. My status as a woman has now been finally recognised. When I stand up now in a group meeting I am not an animal. I am a woman with a valid opinion."

Nakwetikya, Ndedo village in the Kiteto region of Tanzania.



WaterAid/Alex Macro

WaterAid programmes always include hygiene education and in this area children have proved invaluable. Hygiene education is often given through schools. Children are more open to discuss and change hygiene habits than adults whose behaviour has been ingrained over a lifetime. Children who learn the importance of good hygiene practices will pass these on to their families, younger brothers and sisters and ultimately their own children.

Caste is also a challenge which WaterAid aims to address within its programme work. In India and Nepal, where this is a particular issue, WaterAid attempts to help break barriers imposed by caste systems by ensuring that people within the lower castes, who are normally discriminated against, have an equal standing within projects as those of a higher caste.



WaterAid/Martin Argles

"I used to feel very inferior. I was afraid. But after learning mechanical skills I started talking to the upper-caste villagers. When they installed a borewell I offered to help them. Some of them didn't want me to touch the well. But in the end they agreed." Durga Rao, 23, a lower caste dalit, was trained by WaterAid's partner SVDS as the handpump mechanic in Seetanagaram village, Andhra Pradesh.

Factfile:

The keys to community participation

- Participation involves joint planning and self-analysis
- Men and women, of all levels of wealth in the community are involved in decision making and receive equal training opportunities
- Local people's knowledge and views are actively sought
- Community members explain their priorities and identify available skills, resources and appropriate contributions to the project. This process motivates people to take action to bring about changes in their lives
- The involvement of local people from the outset ensures that projects are more responsive to communities' needs, resources and abilities
- By putting time, effort and savings into a scheme, communities will be more determined to maintain it
- Local people are trained to manage and maintain their water and sanitation services
- Water committees are formed to ensure that tariff rates, spare parts and mechanical costs, as well as the quality and frequency of maintenance, are kept at a suitable level

Case studies:



WaterAid/Somesh

Community sanitation funds

WaterAid's partner REEDS has recently helped the Chilamalamailaream villagers in the Mahabubnagar District of India to form self help groups, construct latrines and bathrooms and learn to adopt good hygiene practices. The community now has its own sanitation fund where each self help group member pays contributions to the scheme.

Shakanamma, 40, lives in the village and now has a new latrine and bathroom. "Two months ago we constructed this bathroom. We all helped by making the bricks. First we paid 100 Rupees each into the sanitation fund then we got sand ourselves and dug the pit. Now we are repaying the rest of the costs at 50 Rupees per month.

Two adults and two children use this bathroom and latrine. I used to spend a lot of time on the roadside going to the toilet. I was afraid to go at night so would wait until dawn. I was afraid of snakes. I now save time having the latrine very close to my home and I am no longer afraid. All four of us clean the latrine after using it.

I have also planted a kitchen garden which I water with wastewater. Before I didn't know how important kitchen gardens could be. I used to have to spend 100 Rupees on vegetables and now I can get them for free."



WaterAid/Jon Spaul

Mobilising people

Regina Mayor is on the water committee in Kantchentche in the Salima District of Malawi. "The biggest problems we have are not enough latrines, wells, clinics and schools in this area. Diarrhoea is a big problem during the rainy months and the irony is that that's the worst time to try and get to the clinic because the roads are usually impassable.

I've been chosen to be on the development committee in this village and we're encouraging one another to look at our water and sanitation problems. I'm also training people to construct pit latrines and helping them to make bricks and prepare concrete slabs for the latrines. I think it's the best way to carry out development by working together for a better future.

WaterAid is the one that suggested a committee and already I can feel its power. We're mobilising people to come together and we can now see a way forwards. Before this committee I had a big sense of us all sitting here dormant, waiting for something to happen that would improve our lives. We didn't know how to instigate anything ourselves or what to do next.

Now I can imagine a brighter future. A future where I could earn good money and my children are always healthy would be the best future possible. If all goes well I can see that happening to me and the rest of the community."



WaterAid/Jon Spaul

Working together

Winnie Miyando Cheolo is part of the Mwachingwala focus village women's group in Zambia which demonstrates how to build latrines and run hygiene education schemes within their community. "We started looking at the issues of sanitation and hygiene when we met with the D-WASHE (district committees which put into practice the government's policy for rural water projects to be community owned and managed). The first thing that we did was build the demonstration latrine – the D-WASHE provided cement and we contributed the other materials and labour.

As a group we do many things to promote good hygiene within our community – for example dish racks, rubbish pits and washing facilities. This new hygiene status has reduced diseases here, especially cholera. We didn't get an outbreak this year while other communities nearby still did.

The women spearhead the whole campaign. We have taught our children about good hygiene, like how to wash their hands properly. Since we have done this the levels of diseases have gone down dramatically.

We collect 500 kwacha a month from each of the households in the village. There are 80 households here and we have 800,000 kwacha. This money is for emergencies and repairing the pump if anything goes wrong."



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