



# Water, sanitation and poverty reduction

## DEVELOPMENT ISSUE

Many women in developing countries spend hours each day collecting water. This prevents them from doing vital domestic or income-generating work ▶▶



WATERAID/CAROLINE PENN

### 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.

**E**vidence shows that improved access to water and sanitation reduces poverty both directly and indirectly. Poverty reduction strategies therefore must include effective water and sanitation interventions if they are to achieve long-term success. *Looking Back: The long-term impacts of water and sanitation projects*, a study carried out by WaterAid in 1999/2000 in four countries showed significant changes in household income as a result of:

**Time saved** being used for increased

- Agricultural production
- Agricultural product processing
- Manufacture of goods
- Sale of services

**Money saved** by

- Reduced cost of water
- Reduced cost of medical treatment

**Water availability** for increased

- Livestock production
- Crop production
- Fruit and vegetable production
- Food and drink vending

### Experiences from the field

#### Time saved

With improved access, the time taken to collect water can be measured in minutes rather than hours or days. Women choose to spend their extra time and energy on activities which ensure family income rather than just family survival. For example Zeini Batti of Iteya Shaki (Ethiopia) says that 'I used to devote five hours a day to fetch water. I now can do other activities like basket weaving and making utensils. I now [regularly] save a minimum of Birr 21-24.'

In Ghana, time saved translates into increased farming activity, palm-wine tapping, cola nut processing, food vending, hairdressing and pottery production.

Similarly in Tanzania, the study found that people could 'increase the pace of engaging themselves' in tree-planting, establishing tea rooms, selling groundnuts and cassava, once

the burden of long-distance water collection was removed.

### Money saved

Household disposable income increases in two ways after gaining access to safe water and sanitation.

People no longer have to pay premium rates to commercial water vendors. Mzee Siwa of Tandala village (Tanzania) describes how 'money saved from buying water at exorbitant prices can now be used for other [basic necessities] such as sugar, kerosene, soap bars and school uniforms.'

Money is also saved as there is less need to seek medical treatment for illnesses like diarrhoea, scabies, intestinal worms and conjunctivitis that are all caused by inadequate water and sanitation. In Hate Tulu (Ethiopia) the demand for medicines for these common ailments has dropped so much that drug vendors have moved their businesses to other areas.

### Water availability

Higher crop yields and larger livestock populations, are common consequences of increased water availability, providing poor families with both increased food security and surplus produce for sale.

Water plays an essential role in other economic opportunities too. Esther Yayaa of Mpraeso Aman from (Ghana) says that 'With the well, people are able to sell ice water. This could not have happened when there was no potable water.'

In Tanzania a local butcher from Songambe reported that because cleanliness of his shop had increased, more customers were attracted to come and buy meat.

Improved quality and quantity of water enables people to sell home-brewed beer in Ethiopia and Ghana; while in India, kitchen gardens



WATERAID/JENNY MATHEWS

### With less time spent collecting water women are able to spend more time working to earn money

irrigated by water run-off from the new water points produce fruit and vegetables that are sold by the women who tend the gardens.

economic opportunities and household disposable income.

For both these reasons, poverty reduction strategies must include effective water and sanitation interventions if they are to achieve long-term success.

### Conclusion

On this evidence it is clear that:

- Access to water and sanitation is a necessary precursor to other forms of development. Without easy access to these facilities, time spent on water collection, household income spent on medical treatment and water purchase, all contribute to keeping people in the poverty trap.
- Water and sanitation interventions themselves significantly impact on poverty by increasing both

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