



# WATER, SANITATION AND HYGIENE EDUCATION ... CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS LEADING THE WAY IN TAJIKISTAN

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***“About 60 per cent of all the freshwater in Central Asia originates in Tajikistan and the Tajik people highly value this life-sustaining resource. However, only 53 per cent of the country’s population have access to freshwater provided by water supply systems and much less, namely 23 per cent have access to adequate sanitation facilities. Water related diseases are among the most common causes of child mortality.”***

Mr. Abduvokhid Karamov, Minister of Environment and Forestry, Republic of Tajikistan at the United Nations 12th Commission on Sustainable Development

## Introduction

Tajikistan is a land-locked least developed country (LLDC) in south eastern Central Asia bordered by the Republics of Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan and the People’s Republic of China and Afghanistan. The geographical terrain is extremely difficult, with 93 per cent mountains, including glaciers, while arable land forms only 7 per cent. The country is prone to frequent earthquakes, floods, mudslides and landslides. Droughts in 2001-2001 were the most severe in 20 years, affecting more than one million people.

In the midst of a continuing struggle to improve the health and welfare of its citizens since declaring its independence from the Soviet Republic in 1991, the Government of Tajikistan has demonstrated strong commitment to local and global issues relating to freshwater and sanitation. President Emomali Rahmonov initiated support for the United Nations ‘Water for Life’ Decade (2005-2015) at the Dushanbe International Fresh Water Forum in 2003, and most recently hosted an International Transboundary Water Meeting in Dushanbe, May 2005. At both international water meetings, UNICEF organized highly successful Children’s Water Forum programmes involving over 500 children and young people from the region in effort to support the impact and effectiveness of youth participation in water, sanitation and hygiene education.

The future of every country is in the development of its children, and in Tajikistan, where slightly less than half of the six million citizens are under 18 years of age, efforts to support and build the capacity of young people and to encourage their leadership are essential toward the development of a sustainable society. To this end, the Ministry of Education, together with UNICEF have developed a comprehensive school based project for youth participation entitled the “School Sanitation and Hygiene Project.” This project has started to tap into an established network of 2 million students in 3,500 schools nationwide, in effort to mobilize schoolchildren as agents of change at home and in their communities.

This case study is designed to highlight participatory activities and interventions that were undertaken by UNICEF Tajikistan in partnership with Republic of Tajikistan government counterparts, locally-based NGOs and young people. Children and adolescents have been engaged for more than two years in the planning and implementation of wide array of participatory activities focused on the provision of water, sanitation, hygiene education and advocacy with activities such as community water testing, health monitoring, internet learning centres, vocational photography, community sanitation and cultural shows.



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*“Teachers will become aware of the country’s commitment to children, women and men to provide safe water and a risk-free environment for improving their quality of life. The teachers will also become aware of the fact that schoolchildren can be easily encouraged to adopt child-to-child, child-to-parent and parent-to-community approaches as an effective way to promote ‘Total Sanitation.’”*

“Training book on School Sanitation and Hygiene Promotion Project”, page 4



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## Issue: Why youth participation?

### Children and adolescents as agents of change.

Tajikistan is a country where limited access to safe drinking water and proper sanitation facilities is exacerbated by lack of knowledge and improper hygiene practices in communities. This chronic situation has translated into frequent outbreaks of water-borne diseases, leading to high child mortality and morbidity rates. The UNICEF 2004 State of the World's Children Report, reports a child mortality rate of 118 children per 1000 live births, which is the 40th worst in the world.



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Representing nearly half of the country's population, children and adolescents hold the key to meeting the Millennium Development Goals in water, sanitation and hygiene by 2015. As active and informed partners in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of sustainable community-based initiatives, child participation is both a process and an end. As a process, it requires inputs, (safe water, sanitation and hygiene messages) and demonstrates certain outputs, effects and long-term impacts (sustained behaviour change and healthy citizens). As a developmental goal, it is an 'end' unto itself, one that builds a feeling of ownership, greater understanding of programme goals and a greater commitment among the future adults of a developing nation.

*The 'Seven Components of Sanitation' are:*

1. Handling of drinking water
2. Disposal of waste water
3. Disposal of human excreta
4. Disposal of garbage and animal excreta
5. Home sanitation and food hygiene
6. Personal hygiene
7. Community sanitation

The quality of participation in Tajikistan, is meaningful and effective, with children and young people at each school actively involved at all stages of programme design and implementation on a daily basis. The interdisciplinary and content-rich 'Seven Components of Sanitation' programme, linking a specific priority focus of participation to each day of the week, involves a high level of collaboration and cooperation between UNICEF professionals, Government counterparts, local NGO field workers and children in a mutually supportive manner.

Successful youth participation offers a unique and important opportunity for the voices of youth to be heard by way of intergenerational dialogue, both at a grassroots community level and at key international events, where stakeholders and officials at high policy levels become accessible for communication and interaction with children.

## Action: Youth participation in WES programme in Tajikistan



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All youth participation programmes in Tajikistan are based upon a child-friendly interdisciplinary curriculum focused on lifeskills, community service activities and peer-to-peer interaction. The 'Sanitation and Hygiene Promotion through Schools' project is a hands-on approach to teaching and learning about water, sanitation and hygiene. The project employs a package of seven components, aligned with a day of the week: i) Monday: safe handling of drinking water, ii) Tuesday: safe disposal of waste water, iii) Wednesday: safe disposal of human excreta including child excreta, iv) Thursday: disposal of solid waste, v) Friday: home sanitation and food hygiene, vi) Saturday: personal hygiene and vii) Sunday: community sanitation through the Global Education Project. School meets six days per week and the Sunday activity of community cleanup is a very popular component among students who take pride and joy in civic responsibility.

<sup>2</sup> Trasi, R./JunctionSociale, *Measuring Adolescent Participation in Bangladesh*, August 2003, page 71.

***“Participation is a process in which children and youth engage with other people around issues that concern their individual and collective life conditions. Participants interact in ways that respect each other’s dignity, with the intention of achieving a shared goal. In the process the child experiences itself as playing a useful role in the community.”***

‘Children’s participation in community settings symposium’ – Oslo, Norway, 2000

In each of the participating schools, student peer groups are formed to involve students in child-to-child promotion of water, sanitation and hygiene activities. There is one peer group for each of the seven components and each group consists of an average of seven children. Children are trained in the holistic approach promoted through the seven components of sanitation and hygiene and led to understand the importance of their role in hygiene promotion. Each peer group member receives an identification badge to reinforce the value of her/his individual and collective role as a member of the school and community. Students are responsible for organising various events in school relating to sanitation and hygiene, including running Hygiene Corners and disseminating hygiene messages in the community. To date, 1,400 peer groups have been formed in 280 schools with approximately 11,000 students involved, of which over half are girls.



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For most of the girls, this has been the first time they have been given an opportunity to exercise leadership skills in basic education. This participation has enabled girls to be a core integral part of all school activities. The approach thus also supports wider societal efforts to combat gender discrimination by providing opportunities for girls to define activities and take a leadership role in their implementation.

*“I have made ten black and white photos of our village’s garbage. We are talking about hygiene and sanitation, always asserting that sanitation facilities got better in our village. My photos prove that we still have a lot to do.”*

*Sattorov Alisher, grade 11, school # 43, Bokhtar*

### Photography workshops

Special photography workshops provide an opportunity for students to engage in interdisciplinary mapping skills learning how to take and develop pictures. Peer group members in fifteen schools were outfitted with cameras and black and white photo studio equipment. Students were asked to photograph vocational images in and around their community and to write an essay reflecting on dimensions of the various skills that are required in a functional society. Following the interest of the child in a career area, the students added the dimension of water, sanitation and hygiene, looking at how the chosen vocation is affected by lack of sanitation facilities and/or poor hygiene. Student photographs have helped many adults to visualize their problems in having access to a better hygienic environment.



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### Lessons learned:

This thoughtful process provided a platform for personal expression and creativity, an interdisciplinary experience in adding the arts, science, social studies to a core lifeskills and hygiene education agenda.

### Safe handling of excreta

UNICEF, together with NGO partner Safo, are working with 960 students, parents and school administrators in six schools in the B. Gafurov District in the northern area of Tajikistan to provide slab latrines to all homes that surround the school area. Recipient families learn about proper use and maintenance and are required to dig their own pit according to specifications.



**Lessons learned:** Students in this district were also involved in the H<sub>2</sub>S water testing, thereby fully integrated into all phases of water, sanitation and hygiene education, including site planning, construction, monitoring and advocacy.

### Community Water Testing

In partnership with the Sanitation Epidemiological Station (SES), a department within the Ministry of Health, the “safe handling of drinking water” peer group uses H<sub>2</sub>S strips to introduce water quality monitoring activities within their community. The H<sub>2</sub>S test indicates the presence or absence of faecal coliform bacteria in water. A positive test result will cause the water sample to turn black within 48 hours.

The SES trained 240 teachers, schoolchildren, and parents in 58 schools in six districts. Each school repeated testing at three intervals and most students found extremely high levels of contamination. The highest in Isfara of Sugdh region with 92-98 per cent failure and the lowest in Vakhsh of Khatlon region at 89-94 per cent. As a result of these alarming test-results, the children engaged in neighborhood drama productions and public advocacy programmes to teach their parents and neighbors to boil water before drinking. SES held seminars on healthy lifestyle and hygiene promotion, emphasizing the need for immediate chlorination of water at sources of distribution. According to its final report of the project, SES believes that a subsequent decrease in water-borne diseases in these communities may be attributable to the monitoring activities. The Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education are now planning to adapt the water Quality Monitoring Project for city schools.<sup>1</sup>

**Lessons learned:** Initially, local and district level officials doubt the capacity of children to perform the H<sub>2</sub>S tests and to collect reliable data. Resistance is also found when officials perceive that the project will impose additional roles and responsibilities on their already busy day. Continued project success and reliability of youth participants will likely settle these concerns over time.

### Monitoring and impact assessment

In many schools children are involved in monitoring, as well as graphing and tracking the impact of results. For example, students measure how many new pour-flush water seal household latrines have been constructed, how many less water and excreta borne diseases occurred during the year as well as community knowledge, knowledge attitude and practice (KAP) surveys.

**Lessons learned:** Results of KAP surveys in 250 schools, showed that 67 per cent of school latrines are fully in use, 25 per cent are partly used, due to water constraints and 8 per cent are not in use because there is no water. Most schools proudly display these and other statistics, updated on a regular basis, integrating the study of mathematics, statistics and graphing into the sanitation and hygiene curriculum focus.

### Tajikistan internet learning centre

In December 2004, in partnership with Relief International, UNICEF began an Internet learning programme entitled “Empowering Youth in Rural Communities.” The goals of the project were to increase computer and internet capacity and skills among youth and to increase knowledge and awareness of water, sanitation and hygiene issues in remote regions of Tajikistan. 180 students and teachers were trained in basic/intermediate computer skills as well as in the content materials of the seven components. As a result of this training a project website was created and students in remote areas were able to connect with one another. Although the project has ended with the funding cycle, the internet centre still exists and students are able to use the computers during regularly scheduled hours.



**Lessons learned:** Relief International is an experienced provider of internet learning centres in remote areas, adults were pleasantly surprised at the speed and capacity of which the children were able to grasp computer and internet knowledge.

<sup>1</sup> Narrative report, On “Water Quality Monitoring 2003” project, Sanitary Epidemiology Station, Ministry of Health, Tajikistan

*“States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.”*

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 12

## Conclusion: The way forward

A joint survey conducted by Tajikistan Government ministries and UNICEF, indicates that children and their families do have basic hygiene knowledge, but they do not practice what they know. This valuable information combined with chronic prevalence of water-related disease and unmet need for provision of basic water and sanitation facilities, further support UNICEF’s commitment to the participatory approach introduced in this case study. Youth participation in water, sanitation and hygiene education is a unique and powerful means, not only to strengthen the knowledge, attitudes and practices of the children who are involved in the programme, but also to provide valuable advocacy, monitoring and support toward sustainable and healthy behaviour change of families and communities at large.

The Tajikistan School Sanitation and Hygiene Promotion Project is currently reaching 11,000 schoolchildren in 280 schools. However, with a national student population of 2 million enrolled in 3,500 schools, we have a long way to go. There is an urgent need for scaling up these popular and effective hands-on

*“The programme will lead to a self-monitoring process where children will monitor each others behaviour changes toward good hygiene practices. Similarly, the children should be asked to monitor behaviour change in hygiene practices among their family members and community.”*

A Guidebook on the School Sanitation and Hygiene Promotion Project in Tajikistan, page 46

sanitation and hygiene school programme. Closely related to the need for funding, is the urgent call for concentrated action research, as the results of youth participation in the sector to date are largely anecdotal. Although student monitoring offers promising opportunity for community-based data collection, there is a need to coordinate activities, due to the fact that the accountability is currently dispersed over several departments within three ministries (Health, Water and Education). Increase coordination and cooperation between district level departments of various ministries would streamline the effectiveness of data collection and programme effectiveness.

The impact of youth advocacy and outreach to promote safe water, sanitation and hygiene can make significant impact on the overall health and capacity of a growing nation and there is no shortage of energy or ideas. Student journalists in Isfara District who have been publishing a widely read newsletter, have requested support to produce a weekly state-wide television broadcast on the seven components. As a goal of development in itself, youth participation is inherently linked to the individual and collective capabilities, opportunities and access to information which help to construct an empowered society that is able to develop itself and is less dependent on outside assistance. These efforts not only serve to support the expansion of youth participation in Tajikistan, but also to shine a guiding light for other countries who are new to the participatory approach.



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