

Learning for Health

Hygiene Promotion and Education by NEWAH

The first of a series of leaflets describing the work and philosophy of Nepal Water for Health (NEWAH), currently the largest NGO in the country specialising in the rural water and sanitation sector.



The Benefits of Water

For many people easy access to a plentiful supply of clean water can mean a transformation in their quality of life. Being able to collect clean water suitable for drinking without a long walk or wait, can lead to a marked reduction in drudgery, and a major improvement in possibilities for general cleanliness. But the potential benefits of a water supply are much greater than this. Clean water can be crucial for improving the overall health of the population, in particular by reducing the incidence of excreta and water-related diseases. But simply providing water does not necessarily lead to any marked improvement in general health. And although helping people build latrines will help, it is also not enough.

To really benefit from having clean water, people must first understand the link between disease and hygienic behaviour. Thus behaviour change and improved personal hygiene are crucial elements of a successful water and sanitation project. This leaflet describes the hygiene promotion and education programme developed by NEWAH.



NEWAH Information

Series, No. 1

The full benefits of water and sanitation projects can only be realised where good hygiene practices are known and used.

The population needs to be aware of the causes and routes of transmission of disease, and to practice preventative hygienic behaviour. If this is not the case, then it will be necessary to provide appropriate education.

NEWAH's hygiene promotion and education programme is an integral part of its water and sanitation projects.

Project proposals are only accepted if the community agrees to participate in the hygiene education programme.

The NEWAH Approach

NEWAH has recognised the need for hygiene promotion and education as an integral component of water and sanitation projects since its inception in 1992. Over the last ten years, NEWAH has developed an extensive programme for hygiene promotion and education in its project districts that has proven very successful. Through this comprehensive programme, communities are empowered to control the incidence of diseases transmitted by faeces or water. The programme is

- tailored to the special needs of rural Nepal,
- takes the constraints posed and opportunities offered by the varied multicultural and geographic situation of the country into account,
- covers a wide range of topics - from helping people understand the need for latrines, through a knowledge of why and how to wash hands properly, to knowing how to treat diarrhoea and dysentery and prepare rehydration solutions.

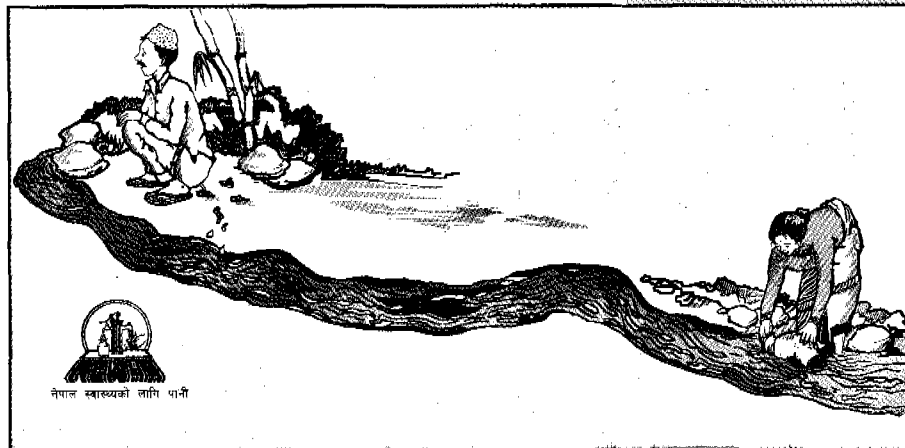
Past experience is used in a continuous process to update the approach to both hygiene promotion and provision of water and sanitation facilities.

Hygiene Promotion

Hygiene promotion is a holistic activity that includes the supply of water and help in building latrines as well as raising awareness of what hygiene is and what hygienic behaviour can do for the community. Hygiene promotion starts before water supply construction during discussions with the villagers about the existing situation and their perceived needs. Baseline information about hygiene attitudes, knowledge and practices in the village, and the incidence of certain faecal-oral diseases, is collected using a combination of PRA and questionnaire survey techniques. The collection of information is itself used to encourage discussion about the importance of factors such as proper sanitation, and to increase the awareness of villagers of their present situation, and the potential for change. Many people simply do not realise that their behaviour (hygienic practice) can have a big impact on the health of their family and the whole community. Recognition of this in itself can provide the motivation to learn more. One of the main components of hygiene promotion in NEWAH projects is a semi-formalised system of education about specific topics related to hygiene.

The main purpose of the hygiene education programme is to establish a link in people's minds between disease and unhygienic practices, and to provide information about what constitutes hygienic behaviour.

A series of simple pictorial messages portray the most effective primary and secondary physical and behavioural barriers to the transmission of pathogens via faeces. Singing and dancing, role play, puppets, games, storytelling, videos, demonstrations and practical exercises are all used to help participants understand the information.



Cloth poster used in teaching sessions

The Way Forward

Despite the considerable success of the programme, there are still outstanding questions and areas with room for improvement.

- Individual project areas have been identified where the improvements in hygienic behaviour are clearly less than average. These are being studied to identify possible ways of improving the programme.
- Ways are still being sought to help those people who are convinced of the need for a latrine but have no land and/or no money to build one.
- The programme for teaching in schools is being extended in the expectation of improving long-term changes.
- The long-term impact of the programme still needs to be monitored.
- Motivation to participate in hygiene education sessions is sometimes low. In households living from subsistence farming, women may have little time to spare for such activities. Possibilities for increasing motivation, like linking with literacy classes, are being explored.

Hygiene Promotion in Water and Sanitation Projects

The NEWAH experience shows that integrating hygiene promotion and education with water and sanitation projects is a very successful approach to maximising the benefits to a community of a supply of safe water. Involving the community from the beginning in programme planning is essential for success, and the likelihood of acceptability is increased by using people from within the community to carry out education and training. The design of a basic programme appropriate for the needs of the country that can be tailored to suit the individual situation in a project area is very cost effective. Teaching materials can be prepared on a large scale, and training of motivators performed on a regional basis. Having a single basic programme also ensures that no important aspects of hygiene promotion are overlooked.

Monitoring of the programme is an integral part of the process. Besides ensuring effectiveness, the process of information collection and presentation of information to the community itself helps in creating awareness, and the results provide the information needed for continued improvement of project implementation.



Effective hygiene promotion comprises provision of water, help in building latrines, and passing on knowledge about hygienic behaviour.

Impact Monitoring

The immediate impact of hygiene promotion is monitored through collection of data on hygiene attitudes, knowledge and practices and the incidence of selected diseases at the start and after completion of the water and sanitation project. The results of these studies are used

- to tailor the needs of hygiene education to the specific situation in a project village,
- to assess the impact of hygiene promotion in a particular project area and discover whether there is a need to continue the programme,
- to assess the overall impact of hygiene promotion in all projects for the year,
- to identify any problems and develop suggestions for modifications and improvements in the implementation of the projects, and in particular in the hygiene promotion programme.

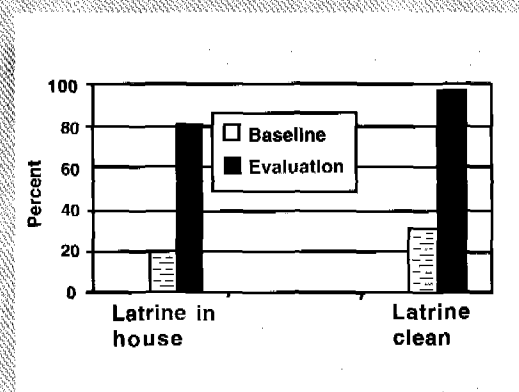
A detailed study of the impact of hygiene education in the projects implemented between April 1995 and April 1996 showed that the hygiene education programme had been very successful, and had had a major impact on people's knowledge about and attitudes towards a whole range of hygiene practices. After hygiene education the majority of people had

- understood the need for and knew how to store water hygienically;
- realised the importance of washing their hands at critical times, of isolating faeces from the environment, of protecting leftover food from contamination, and of disposing of refuse in one place;
- learnt the value of using waste water to develop a kitchen garden;
- understood much more about the causes of diarrhoea, how to prevent its transmission and how to treat it.

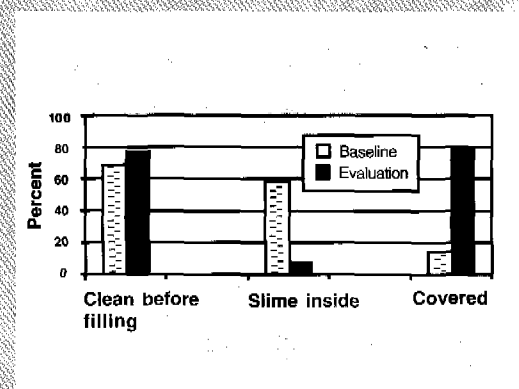
Few households (less than 1% in the hills and 11% in the Terai) thought a latrine was unnecessary, although particularly in the Terai lack of land or money meant that not all those who would like a latrine were able to build one.

People reported 58 deaths from diarrhoea in the project areas in the year before project implementation. This number was reduced to zero in the following year.

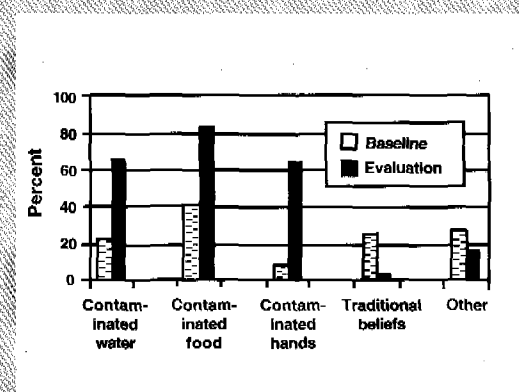
The impact of hygiene promotion in all hill projects completed in 1996



Latrines



Water container hygiene



Perceived causes of diarrhoea

The Hygiene Education Programme

Hygiene education starts before water supply construction and continues beyond its completion. One or more health motivators (mostly women) are appointed from within the community for each project. The health motivators are provided with extensive training (3 weeks) both in the subject and on how best to convey the message. They are provided with teaching materials and supported by a health educator, a long-term professional responsible for a number of projects. In addition one female health volunteer is appointed by each user group (usually 6-10 households) and also given one week of training.

The hygiene education is divided into separate topics (see box). The local health motivator holds a series of between six and ten half to one day teaching sessions with each water point user group introducing each topic separately. Ongoing education is provided by the health volunteer. Whenever possible, the health motivators also visit all local schools and hold sessions for schoolchildren covering the basic principles of transmission of excreta and water-related diseases and hygienic behaviour.

The major points covered in the hygiene education programme

- the safe disposal of excreta (including from children), preferably through construction of a household latrine which is kept clean
- hand washing at critical times - after defecation, after cleaning children's bottoms, before handling food, before eating and before feeding children
- disposal and use of waste water
- prevention of contamination of water in transit and in the home
- food hygiene - protection by covering, and use of a dish rack
- attention to domestic and environmental hygiene - proper disposal of household refuse and housing of domestic animals
- knowledge of paths of infection and treatment of diarrhoea - oral rehydration therapy
- simple domestic medical treatment using clean water, e.g. water cooling of burns, saline rinse for eye infections

Health motivators are recruited directly from the local community. They speak the local language or dialect, and know of any special cultural features. They are often more acceptable as educators than someone from outside. They are provided with extensive training in the subject and in teaching methods, and any lack of expertise is compensated for through support from the health educator. Their knowledge remains in the community after project completion.



Preparing for a puppet show

Nepal Water for Health (NEWAH) is a national non-government organisation (NGO) established with the help of the British NGO WaterAid in 1992. NEWAH is now a fully independent agency with funding from a variety of sources including WaterAid, DFID (Department for International Development, UK), UNICEF, His Majesty's Government of Nepal (through VDC funds), IRC (International Water and Sanitation Centre, The Netherlands), CECI (Canadian Center for International Studies and Cooperation), the Australian Rotary Club, and MS-Nepal. It is currently the largest NGO specialising in the rural water and sanitation sector in the country. WaterAid continues to provide expert advice and assistance in programme development, as well as providing a direct link with developments worldwide.

NEWAH forms partnerships with locally based NGOs, Small Farmer's Groups, Women's Credit Groups and community groups to implement integrated water, sanitation and hygiene education projects in all five regions of Nepal. Projects are located in both hill and Terai districts. Activities are decentralised, and carried out by regional offices in each of the regions. Since 1992, approximately 318 projects have been completed benefiting a total of around 435,000 people (status 1998). Currently NEWAH implements around 50 projects a year in communities with beneficiary populations from as few as 150 to more than 5000 (average 550 in hill projects and 3500 in Terai projects).

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