

CASE STUDY

Washing Away Barriers to Social Inclusion through Improved Access to Clean Water



Community taps and pumps save women and children in rural Nepal from trekking long distances to fetch water. Photo exclusively licensed to the Asian Development Bank until 2021.

A water project includes a gender, caste, and minority ethnic strategy to promote the rights of marginalized groups in Nepal.

Overview

Lack of access to clean water places a disproportionate burden on people especially women and girls who tend to be the primary collectors of water for the family in many countries, including Nepal.

Recognizing the need to improve water supply, sanitation, and community health services in the more remote and poorer areas of rural Nepal, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) provided assistance for the construction and rehabilitation of related facilities and services.

Project snapshot

<p>Dates</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • September 2003: Approval Date • April 2011: Closing Date
<p>Cost</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$36.9 million: Overall Project Cost

Institutions and Stakeholders

Financing

- Asian Development Bank: Loan: \$24 million
- Government of Nepal: \$7.6 million
- Local government/water users: \$5.4 million

Executing agency

- Ministry of Physical Planning and Works, Government of Nepal

Development Challenges

In the early 2000s, 30% of Nepal's people had no ready access to clean water, and only 17.5% of homes in rural areas had proper sanitation facilities—an outdoor latrine or indoor toilet. Women bore much of the burden of fetching water, and members of disadvantaged castes and ethnic minorities were sometimes denied equal access to the more convenient water sources.

Context

In rural areas, family members, usually women or children, must hike great distances to shallow wells, ponds, streams, or rivers to fetch water—work that can often take 4 or more hours each day. Because of this, women forgo opportunities for income generation while girls reduce school attendance.

For people of lower castes such as Dalits and other disadvantaged groups who are usually the poorest, water has become unaffordable.

Without sanitation facilities, some residents including women were forced to go to the fields or forests after dark to relieve themselves. Open defecation leads to pollution and waterborne diseases that are particularly dangerous for children. According to the United Nations Development Programme, diarrhea has in the past accounted for up to one-quarter of childhood deaths in Nepal.

Women and the marginalized castes are among those gravely affected by the lack of water supply, but they were excluded in community resource management and decision-making processes.

Solution

The Community-Based Water Supply and Sanitation Sector Project supported the Government of Nepal's efforts in expanding the coverage of piped water supply and sanitation facilities to poor and remote areas and improving the health and hygiene practices related to waterborne and sanitation-related diseases. It constructed and rehabilitated facilities through water user groups, built household latrines, and strengthened the capacity of the Department of Water Supply and Sewage and district development committees.

In addition, the project gave special attention to bridging inequalities based on gender, caste, and ethnicity.

Gender, caste, and ethnic-sensitive consultative and participatory processes

- Conducted awareness-raising orientation for user committees, communities, and community-based organizations with participation from women, Dalits, Janajati, and other minority ethnic groups.
- Implemented awareness and confidence-building activities for water users' and sanitation committees on issues related to gender equality and social inclusion.
- Used participatory approaches to identify households by gender, caste, ethnicity, and socioeconomic group.
- Undertook gender analysis and consultation with women in all subproject activities.

Concrete targets for increased participation by marginalized groups in committees and in training/capacity building

- Required that women make up 50% of executive and general positions in water users' and sanitation committees and proportional representation of all castes and minority ethnic groups that reside in the community.
- One out of two (50%) village maintenance workers trained as paid workers should be women.
- One out of two (50%) sanitation masons trained should be women.
- Increase participation by women in health and sanitation training by 50%.
- Involve women when making decisions on the number, location, and position of water points, and design modifications to meet practical needs for washing and bathing.

Specific provisions to address the practical needs of women

- Construction of water and sanitation facilities in schools must include separate toilet cubicles for boys, girls, and teachers.
- Extend the promotion of hygiene and sanitation to out-of-school children.

Specific provision for poor people

- Provide affordable sanitation options to all socioeconomic groups and subsidies to 10% of the poorest households.
- Give subsidies to poor communities in remote and mountain areas for rural water supply and sanitation.
- Set up community-based revolving funds for sanitation, which provide affordable loans for building latrines, with appropriate repayment schedules.

Actual Outcomes

The project was completed in 2011 and brought clean water through community taps or pumps and improved sanitation to more than 568,000 people, most of whom live in poor and remote areas.

Water supply coverage in project districts grew 89% in 2010 from 72% in 2002. The number of households without latrine facilities dropped to 34% from 83% over the same period. Residents continued to build latrines on their own initiative even after the project was completed.

Women gained more time for other activities

One of the significant project results for women and children was the reduced time required to fetch water. The average time saved per household in 14 subprojects surveyed was estimated at 1.8 hours per day. As a result, women had more time for other activities, including household chores and childcare.

Likewise, contributions of women in farm-related activities, off-farm income-generating activities, and vegetable gardening have increased.

Improved sanitation and security

The project provided a direct sanitation subsidy to 10% of the poorest households. With this support, 8,909 poor households constructed latrines. Access to latrines near their homes improved convenience and security, especially for women and girls. This also meant a clean environment with lower incidence of waterborne diseases, such as dysentery, cholera, and typhoid, especially among children.

Engaged women and disadvantaged groups

The project achieved the targets set for the representation of women and minority ethnic groups in water users' and sanitation committees. Women held 51% of key positions (chair, treasurer, and secretary). They were also active as general committee members, making up 52% of the committees. Women, Dalits, and minority ethnic groups played active roles in community activities and in decision-making due to their involvement in the committees.

Improved women's status

Participation of women in training events, maintenance of pipes, checking of water quality, and collecting

of water revenues from the users increased their management capacity and enhanced their leadership qualities. The reports from the field mention improved the capacity of women users to voice their demands without hesitation to the relevant authorities such as the Village Development Committee, Water User's and Sanitation Committee, and others. This has strengthened the bargaining position of women both within the household and at the community level.

Lessons

- Affirmative action, such as setting a quota for the participation of marginalized groups in the water committees, is an effective strategy when it is mandatory.
- Involving women in water and sanitation projects can enhance community ownership, as women are primarily responsible for fetching water in households and also because they are the direct beneficiaries of these projects.
- The meaningful participation of women in leadership positions can be achieved through mandatory representation quotas supplemented by tailor-made, capacity-building programs. The training programs are an important support to women in new positions.
- Women from Dalit and ethnic minority groups need additional support to bring them into the decision-making process. Low level of education is a hindrance to rural women and an obstacle to their meaningful participation in decision-making.
- Health and sanitation awareness programs should include men to motivate them to share the responsibility of women in family care and sanitation.
- Very poor and disadvantaged communities cannot spare time to participate in meetings and training. Thus, efforts to boost participation should be accompanied by income-generating activities.

Resources

Asian Development Bank. 2012. *Completion Report: Nepal – Community-Based Water Supply and Sanitation Sector Project.*

ADB. 2015. *Gender Equality Results Case Study: Nepal Community-Based Water Supply and Sanitation Sector Project.* Mandaluyong.

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ADB. 2015. *Clean Water Improves Health, Breaks Down Barriers in Nepal.*



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