

The Rational Behind School Water supply Pestalozzi Children's Foundation (PCF) Ethiopia

The importance of water for living things including human beings is understandable as existence of living things with out water is unimaginable. Human beings use water for drinking, cooking foods, sanitation and other purposes. I liked to cite here sayings of the community, where we are operating regarding their belief about importance of water for life. They say "Wiha Nefis New" literally translated, as water is life.

In spite of the efforts of the Ethiopian government and NGOs, 74.8% and 18% of the Ethiopian rural and urban population respectively lack access to clean drinking water (WMS¹, 2005). The lack of so large percentage of the population to clean drinking water has a critical health, economic and social implications. About 80% of the rural population is known to have been sick because of water related diseases. Children are especially the victims of water born diseases. Incidence of water born diseases among children accounts for 82% of all sickness of children (Canadian Medical Association, 1998). Furthermore, reports have revealed that diseases caused by the use of unclean water for drinking occurs frequently. This causes share of significant proportion of limited resources of the household for medical treatment that could have been used for asset building. Hence, it impacts the economic situation of a given household.

Inaccessibility of water have also gender and age implications. Culturally, house related activities like fetching water, firewood and cooking food usually rests on the shoulder of the women and children. The amount of water required for a given household is also high as there are big household sizes in rural areas averaging 5 people per household. Under most cases, fetching water requires walking on foot for very long hours/distance. It is mostly children particularly female who are assigned to fetch water required for the household, since adults have to carryout other household activities. Such activities are generally time and energy consuming; but considered non productive as it may not result in immediate gain of income for the household.

Therefore, this has a direct implication for education of children especially girls. The problem of water is found to be one of the main factors behind girls low school enrolment rate, high drop out rate and poor educational performance. In addition to the responsibility of fetching water, diseases caused by the use of unclean water for drinking, forces children to quit their education or to have poor school performance. The intervention of Pestalozzi Children's Foundation (PCF) in areas of clean water supply has its root in the analysis of this problem among other justification.

PCF is an international, Swiss based NGO working to improve the well being of children all over the world. It basically works on improving the accessibility of quality primary

¹ Welfare Monitoring Survey of Ethiopia

education for children using alternative approach. Through its local partners PCF has been supporting projects on clean water supply as well as hygiene education around Alternative Basic Education centers.

Supply of clean drinking water around the school environment or alternative basic education (ABE) centers have four main benefits.

First, it is one way of increasing accessibility of the community to clean drinking water. All children in the ABE centers can be accessed to clean drinking water. Moreover, the water around these centers is not meant only for children but also to be available for the communities in the surroundings. As a result of this intervention, the health, economic and social problems that have its root in inaccessibility of water can be minimized.

Second, it improves the ability of children to effectively attend their education. Because of their access to clean water, the vulnerability of children to water born diseases will be reduced and the health status of the children will be improved. Improvement in the health condition of children in turn implies enhanced capacity of children to perform at school. Similarly, the burden on children to fetch water from very long distance significantly reduces facilitating opportunity to attend schools effectively.

Thirdly, children will get a good opportunity to integrate what they are learning at schools about sanitation with practical demonstrations of clean water. In this respect they will also bring these learnt practices to their families.

Fourthly, the sustainability of the project can be ensured with the involvement of the school, the community, and District water Desk. Over the past experiences we have observed that the joint effort among these actors can contribute a lot in sustaining such projects. Women are held responsible to manage the use of this water since they are the one who have been affected most by the problem. The District Water Desk is there to provide maintenance service when any damage happens to the project or parts of the machine. The school plays a facilitative role among the actors and provides protection to the project.

The clean water supply project involves construction of borehole and installation of hand pump that makes fetching water easy for both adults and children. The total cost of a single project ranges from CHF 12'000.00 to CHF 15'000.00 depending on the depth of the sink to find water. This includes community contribution that is usually made in terms of labor and locally available construction materials. This type of project can potentially benefit 300 school children and 30 households around the school.

Therefore, PCF would like to extend this innovative school based supply of water on the experiences and lessons drawn so far. It wishes to work with not only ABE centers but also in the partner schools which are government run formal schools.

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