

Children Lead the Way to Safe Water and Improved Sanitation in Madarhawa, Nepal

SUMMARY

In 2020 UNICEF Nepal's implementing partner COSDER, Gorkha observed that Madarhawa village (480 inhabitants and 1 school), Nepal (located 60km northwest of Lumbini) was without improved WASH infrastructure and that its inhabitants were not observing improved sanitary and hygiene practices.

COSDER, Gorkha decided to act and trained the children of Madarhawa on WASH related issues and solutions. In return they spurred the repair and reconstruction of WASH facilities across the town. Without any subsidization, motivated by the children, 72 households improved their access to sanitation and safe water; exhibited improved WASH practices; began testing water quality; established a sustainable operation strategy; and signed a sustainability compact agreement with local governments, all pre-conditions to the declaration as a Water Safe Community.

Thanks to leadership by local children, Madarhawa was officially recognized by authorities as a Water Safe Community on 3 January 2021.

Background

For a community to be water safe, it must be open defecation free with an improved source for drinking water meeting national quality standards (e.g., free from faecal contamination, with no risk of arsenic and fluoride contamination).

Nepal has made significant progress in expanding access to water and sanitation in recent decades despite tremendous challenges including poverty, difficult terrain, and conflict.

Despite this, 6.2 million people in Nepal do not have access to basic sanitation and 1.5 million do not have access to basic water services.¹ Only 25

per cent of the water supply is reported to be fully functioning and nearly 40 per cent of it requires major repairs.

Moreover, 75 per cent of all water sources (and 91 per cent of those used by the poorest quintile) are contaminated with *Escherichia coli* (E.Coli) bacteria.² In Nepal in 2019, 49.6 per cent of households had access to a piped water supply.³

In Nepal UNICEF is advocating for safe water initiatives aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as defined by the Joint Monitoring Programme (JMP) and the government's commitment to deliver safe water to the entire population by 2030.

KEY STATISTICS

- Population of Nepal (2021): 29.7 million
- 28.1 % of Nepal's population is aged 0-14 (2021)⁴
- 75.3 % of population is accessing a water source that tested positive for E.Coli contamination at the source³
- Poverty headcount ratio at national poverty lines (% of population): 25.2⁵

As per Nepal's 2019 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS), only 19 per cent of the population has access to safe water through piped water systems and 34 per cent of the population is served via hand pumps, often contaminated with E.Coli and arsenic. To improve access to safe water for those populations, UNICEF initiated interventions to improve household level drinking water supply that is meeting the national drinking water quality standards.

Story

In 2020, during an assessment visit to the community of Madarhawa, Nepal (located in Shivaraj Municipality, 60km northwest of Lumbini) UNICEF Nepal's implementing partner COSDER, Gorkha observed several concerning issues including stagnant water puddles around hand pumps, damaged platforms, litter around houses, and lack of access to improved sanitation infrastructure. Madarhawa lacked the improved WASH infrastructure needed to ensure access to sustainable and safely managed drinking water. Its inhabitants were therefore also not observing improved sanitary and hygiene practices.

COSDER, Gorkha attempted to engage the local community to address the concerning WASH situation to no avail. Even members of the local Water and Sanitation Users Committee (WSUC), were not convinced of the need to invest their resources in constructing WASH infrastructure. But just when things seemed too difficult to overcome,

change came to Madarhawa from a most unexpected group: its children.

When COSDER, Gorkha first approached children about water safety and reforming the local WSUC, they were uncertain if children would be interested. But the children of Madarhawa surprised COSDER, Gorkha with a level of interest, passion, and leadership they could not find elsewhere in the community.

Five children were trained extensively with COSDER, Gorkha on water safety planning, water quality testing, and water quality monitoring. After being trained, 16-year-old secondary-school student, Maya Ram Tharu, called for a gathering of all his family members and insisted on constructing an improved WASH facility for his extended family. Maya's uncle, Mr. Khushi Ram Tharu, reflected on his nephew's thoughts. He said that it was in that moment that he realized the connection between improved sanitation, health, and his own family's dignity. Mr. Tharu said, *"I learned that toilets and sanitation should come before anything else; if I am to be alive."*

Figure 1: Maya Ram Tharu (left) accompanied by two other child club members collecting sample in Whirl Pak Bag



Source: UNICEF/Nepal

The day after the children received their training Maya Ram gathered his family together, Mr. Tharu

began energetically working on constructing improved WASH infrastructure: cleaning toilets; cleaning water gallon bottles from inside and out; plastering a boundary wall alongside hand pumps; sheathing a newly-constructed cemented platform; replacing the missing nut bolts of hand pumps; and constructing a soak pit to drain grey water. He was creating the opposite of what the COSDER, Gorkha team had observed during their initial assessment visit.

Maya Ram's enthusiasm turned out to be contagious in Madarhawa. It spurred repairs and reconstruction of WASH facilities across the small town. Within 10 days, without any subsidization, 72 households in Madarhawa had improved access to sanitation and safe water triggered by Maya and his friend's enthusiasm. They started to show improved WASH practices and the community began aggressively testing water for faecal and arsenic contamination, led by Maya Ram and other WSUC members.

Today, Madarhawa has a sustainable operation strategy and has signed a sustainability compact agreement with local governments clarifying the roles of each respective stakeholder preparing it to tackle future WASH challenges. On the 3rd of January 2021, Madarhawa became the second community in the Lumbini province to be officially recognized by authorities as a Water Safe Community.

Thanks to the leadership of five local children, Madarhawa stands out as a model example for water safety in Nepal.

Figure 2: Construction work ongoing at Maya Ram's Uncle's hand pump (Source: UNICEF/Nepal)



References

- [1] UNICEF Nepal
- [2 and 3] Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, Nepal, 2019, https://www.unicef.org/nepal/media/9076/file/NMICS_2019_-_Key_findings.pdf
- [4] UNFPA, Data overview, UNFPA Nepal, 2021, <https://www.unfpa.org/data/NP>
- [5] World Bank, Global Poverty Working Group, Poverty headcount ratio at national poverty lines (% of population), World Bank, 2021, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SI.POV.NA.HC?locations=NP>

Photo Credits

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