

# Rural Integrated Water and Sanitation Project

Country: Sri Lanka



## Millennium Development Goal:

**Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women**

**Goal 7: Ensure environmental sustainability**

**Goal 8: Develop a global partnership for development**

**Duration:** November 2005 to March 2009

**Beneficiaries:** 90,000 people in 11 rural communities

**Partners:** CIDA, World Vision Sri Lanka, Sri Lankan government ministries (Ministry of Local Government and Provincial Councils, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Urban Development and Water Supply, Ministry of Health), district and local governments, The Asia Foundation, International Relief and Development (IRD), the Community Self-Improvement Foundation (COSI), UNICEF

**Total project funding:** CDN\$7,740,000

**Funding source:** Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA)

**Project goal:** To contribute to a healthy, safe and productive rural population in Sri Lanka's Batticaloa and Ampara districts in the Eastern Province

## What we have tried to accomplish:

1. Improved implementation of the government of Sri Lanka's decentralized service delivery and funding policies for water and sanitation
2. Strengthened local government capacity and ability to draw on broader fiscal resources for the effective delivery of water, sanitation, hygiene and solid waste management services to communities in a sustainable manner
3. Improved, sustainable and gender-sensitive water, sanitation, hygiene and solid waste management infrastructure in prioritized communities within the project area

## Project Overview

Since the 2004 tsunami, the coastal regions of Sri Lanka have been the beneficiaries of much aid from both the central government of Sri Lanka and international governments as well as non-governmental agencies. World Vision has played a leading role in delivering aid to people affected by the disaster.

In 2005, World Vision's tsunami efforts moved from aid delivery to more sustainable programming and community development. As part of this empowerment process we identified gaps in the capacities of the local government and community-based organizations to provide basic water, sanitation and hygiene systems.

Even before the tsunami, only 70 per cent of the population had access to clean water and just 64 per cent to safe sanitation facilities. Families without access to safe water were forced to rely on water drawn from unprotected shallow wells

and streams or ponds, most of which are potential sources of disease.

Sri Lanka aims to provide clean water and safe sanitation to all of its citizens by 2025. However, progress has been hindered by a centralized delivery system, inefficient processes between different levels of government and limited capacity at the local level to manage water and sanitation systems.

The government of Sri Lanka has taken steps to address these obstacles through a National Policy for Rural Water Supply and Sanitation (RWSS). The RWSS policy aims to shift the responsibility for the delivery of water and sanitation services from the central government to the local government, civil society and private sector organizations. The rationale behind this approach is to allow the delivery of these services to be more responsive to the needs of local communities and allow greater

participation of citizens in the process, especially women.

However, when the tsunami struck, the government had yet to make significant progress toward successful implementation of this policy.

## Helping deliver on the promise of safe water and sanitation

World Vision's Rural Integrated Water and Sanitation Project (RIWASH) supported the implementation of the government's RWSS policy in 11 rural communities in Sri Lanka's Batticaloa and Ampara districts in the Eastern Province. In partnership with the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), World Vision worked with various levels of government, community-based organizations (CBOs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to create effective systems for the delivery of



*The CIDA-funded RIWASH project broke new ground in its efforts to help various levels of government and communities work together.*

water, sanitation, hygiene and solid waste management in these communities.

Ideally, for the provision of water and sanitation services, funds would flow from the central government to the local government, and communities would then work with authorities at the local level to implement, operate and maintain these services. Working alongside the community, an NGO's role would be to facilitate and support these efforts.

Like many developing countries, there was no functional system in place between the various levels of government in Sri Lanka to deliver water and sanitation services to communities. To fill this gap, World Vision had been funding and implementing water and sanitation projects in its ADPs – a model that is not sustainable as provision of these basic services is rightly the government's responsibility and World Vision's presence in the community eventually has to come to an end.

Through the RIWASH project, World Vision worked directly with the government to foster cooperation between the national, district and local levels as they strive towards realizing the goals of the government's RWSS policy. World Vision helped form steering committees at all three levels of government and helped them negotiate a Memorandum of Understanding with the Ministry of Local Government and

Provincial Councils, which governs the process for the provision of services. Based on this agreement, World Vision worked with the steering committees to design a mechanism to facilitate fund transfers from the national treasury to the local governments for water and sanitation projects. World Vision "primed the pump" by providing a portion of the project funds to the central government for allocation within the local government which in turn provided funding to the communities.

In tandem with these efforts, the project helped build the capacity of local communities to manage their own water and sanitation systems. CBOs, composed of an equal number of men and women, were mobilized in 11 communities. Since women play a central role in water and sanitation activities, one of the project's goals was to empower women to have a stronger voice in decision-making, resulting in better program outcomes. Over 500 women became active members of CBO committees and were directly involved in the operation and maintenance of water and sanitation projects. Working through local NGOs, World Vision trained CBO members to identify community needs, seek government grants for new infrastructure and supported them in their desire to establish user fee systems that provide a mechanism for sustainable funding of new systems.

Equally important to the project was building the capacity of local government officials to undertake and support sustainable management of water, sanitation and hygiene projects. As the institutional capacity was extremely limited, it was necessary to launch an intensive program with high impact activities so the local authorities were able to respond to the different components of the project with an acceptable level of interest, capacity and commitment.

The RIWASH project also supported the development of new water systems in nine communities. World Vision assisted CBOs to prepare master plans to meet water and sanitation needs, oversee construction and mobilize water-user committees to maintain the systems. In partnership with UNICEF and the Ministry of Health, community education programs were also conducted to promote good hygiene practices.

### **Making government work for rural communities**

Working with the three levels of government, local communities, NGOs and the private sector, the RIWASH project has been instrumental in designing a process to effectively deliver water and sanitation services to rural communities in Sri Lanka. The ground-breaking fiscal transfer mechanism that was developed provided a grant of \$330,000 to fund solid waste management systems in 11 local communities. Such a transfer of funds from the central treasury through the district level to local communities had never been achieved previously in Eastern Sri Lanka.

The fiscal transfer simulation also provided a highly effective context in which to build the capacity of local communities to manage water and sanitation systems. Each CBO was engaged in the process of securing the grant and implementing the solid waste management systems as part of a comprehensive master plan. As a result of this "real time" training, CBOs now have the knowledge, skills and public confidence to manage and develop water, sanitation and hygiene systems.

The RIWASH project has also supported the development of new water and sanitation projects in 11 rural communities. Among the projects supported and managed by the CBOs, are rainwater harvesting and sanitation facilities for 3,000 students across a total of seven schools.



*Children and families gather to celebrate the inauguration of the water system in Panama South.*

Through the project, CBOs in each community have established a system of affordable user fees that provide revenue to sustain new water and sanitation systems. More than \$35,000 in sanitation

fees have been collected from users in 11 communities. These experiences suggest that the RIWASH project represents a viable model for creating sustainable access to water and sanitation in all communities where governments are committed to a decentralized process.

### **Sustaining good health**

Among the promising outcomes of the RIWASH project are the partnerships that we have helped to establish among a wide network of stakeholders. New working relationships at the national, district and local levels have made it possible for the government to deliver

on its promise to citizens. Every community in Sri Lanka stands to benefit from this important legacy.

Already, the RIWASH project has made a significant impact on the lives of 90,000 people in 11 rural communities. In addition to the health benefits of clean water and good hygiene, we have helped the community find its voice and take ownership of their water and sanitation needs. The community has also been strengthened by the involvement of women who are now enabled to participate in the decision-making processes that affect them.

### **Results to date:**

1. Working with the central government, a fiscal transfer mechanism was established to support local government capacity in the budgeting and planning process as well as funding community water and sanitation projects.
2. Local democratic governance was enhanced through greater citizen involvement and improved working relationships between community-based organizations (CBOs), local government and line ministries. Thirteen project steering committees, consisting of government and CBO representatives created strong networks and working relationships between all stakeholders while at the same time promoting community ownership.
3. The project increased access to social services through the establishment of 12 CBOs and 16 user committees to deliver, operate and maintain water and sanitation services to communities. Services included water supply (1,722 families), toilets (1,257 families), school projects (3,971 students), hygiene awareness events (5,408 beneficiaries) and solid waste management programs (92,774 beneficiaries).
4. Local environmental governance was enhanced through increased local regulation and control of water by user groups, including sustainable financing of water and sanitation services through local government user fees.

### **Policy influence:**

1. Input to the Rural Water Supply and Sanitation (RWSS) policy through 12 Project Steering Committees at the national, district and local government levels.
2. The World Bank has shown interest in replicating the Rural Integrated Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (RIWASH) model.
3. Supported the implementation of Policy Reform Circulars to reinforce collaboration and strengthen existing working relationships and mechanisms among the three levels of government in Sri Lanka.

### **What we learned from this project:**

- A key factor in project success is the need for extensive community empowerment and engagement. Efforts were made to enable local government to lead in the process of developing community-based plans and establishing community servicing priorities.
- Training happens most effectively through “learning by doing”. It became evident that extensive coaching and mentoring of district and local government representatives and community leaders, rather than “classroom style” training, was a far more effective approach.
- Partnering with other INGOs, consultants and private sector contractors allowed existing expertise to be drawn on without duplicating efforts. It also helped to create linkages between these partners, CBOs and local government. It would also be mutually beneficial for future multilateral projects to involve an NGO as organizations such as the World Bank have strengths working with central governments whereas NGOs are experienced in working with communities.