

Putting children's rights to WASH into practice in South Asia

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All children have the right to safe and clean drinking water and adequate sanitation. This is enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and in July 2010 the United Nations General Assembly recognised that water and sanitation are human rights.

In South Asia, diarrhoea caused by dirty water and unsafe sanitation is the second biggest killer of children under five. Whilst children bear the brunt of lack of access to water and sanitation they are rarely consulted or involved in implementing water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) projects in their communities. This lack of participation is compounded by the lack of accountability of duty bearers towards ensuring children's rights. As a result WASH programs often fail to ensure that services are accessible to children or targeted to the most excluded.

To address this WaterAid and Save the Children Finland implemented a three year action research initiative: "Child Rights Based WASH in Bangladesh, India and Nepal" with the Village Education Resource Centre (VERC), Samarthan and Nepal Water for Health (NEWAH). This presentation will share the approaches developed, the key outcomes, challenges and learning.

Two strategies were adopted: to develop accountability mechanisms at the local level for provision of WASH services that meet children's needs; and to ensure children's meaningful participation in WASH activities, especially the poorest and most marginalised.

The initiative promoted opportunities for discussion between adults and children where children were confident enough to express their views and duty-bearers (at home, school and local government) listened and responded to children. The project teams built a good rapport with children by using inclusive and participatory techniques that enabled children of different abilities and backgrounds to take part. The teams also worked with adults to make them aware of children's rights, as well as helping them to see that children's participation in decisions can lead to better and more sustainable WASH outcomes.