

# Achieving Results through Partnerships

## Sri Lanka North East – Water, Sanitation And Hygiene (WASH) Project

October 2014

### OVERVIEW

Almost five years after the end of a three-decade civil conflict, Sri Lanka is now focusing on long-term strategic and structural development challenges as it strives to transition to an upper middle-income country.

Important achievements have been made towards poverty reduction and shared prosperity, as well as towards achieving universal primary education, gender equality and improved maternal health. However, combating other perennial problems, such as malnutrition, high child mortality, unsafe drinking water and limited basic sanitation, remains slow.

In the northern and eastern provinces of Sri Lanka, characterized by small towns and rural communities, access to safe water and sanitation facilities has been affected by underinvestment in water infrastructure due to decades of conflict. Given that the northern and eastern provinces are situated in the dry zone of the country, the community's access to natural sources of water are even further restricted.

The US\$2.01 million North East Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene Project (NE-WASH), supported by the Australian Government's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), has tackled these critical issues of improving access to safe water and sanitation services through building infrastructure which will provide water for both drinking and planting, as well as toilets to improve sanitation.

The project has provided water to at least 8,800 people and has the opportunity of reaching up to 15,800 residents as more of them return to their homes in the northern and eastern provinces. As many as 517 families have benefitted from a sanitation grant to construct latrines. In addition, the project has contributed to strengthening the capacity of local government bodies (in alignment with the Government of Sri Lanka's Rural Water Supply Policy), enabling them to provide infrastructure which will deliver a sustainable water supply to communities in this region.

## CHALLENGES

Despite the fact that most of Sri Lanka's population has access to safe drinking water and sanitation<sup>1</sup>, for many others the lack of these basic services is a challenge that affects their hygiene, health and overall well-being. Key remaining challenges include:

### Providing water and sanitation in post-conflict and rural areas

- In Sri Lanka, water and sanitation service delivery is far less prevalent for communities in small towns and rural areas. The northern and eastern provinces are further affected from prolonged underinvestment in water infrastructure due to the conflict.
- Characterized by small towns and rural communities, the northern and eastern provinces of the country are now also the home of families and communities in transition from a conflict to a post-conflict situation and therefore, and who are socially fragmented and economically deprived.
- Additionally, both the northern and eastern provinces are situated in the dry zone of the country, and therefore, these communities' access to natural sources of water is far more limited than in other parts of the country.

### Strengthening local agencies for service delivery

- With the conclusion of internal conflict in 2009, the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) began to increase investment in development interventions in the northern and eastern provinces to facilitate the resettlement of internally-displaced persons in their original places of residence. As part of this effort, several rural water sector projects have been completed and more are being successfully implemented.
- These projects have also introduced differing concepts for development, operation and maintenance of infrastructure which in few cases were inconsistent with the broader development agenda of the country.
- In response, the GoSL, operating in a post-conflict environment, is trying to strengthen all levels of government, particularly, local government institutions so that they can effectively fulfill

their specific mandates and responsibilities for the delivery of local services. In the water sector, policies and practices are now fully aligned with the GoSL's Rural Water Supply (RWS) Policy, and have led to innovative partnerships between local government, communities and the local service providers and operators.

## APPROACH

The goal of NEP-WASH project was to increase accessibility to safe and sustainable pipe borne water supply and sanitation in order to complement post-conflict housing reconstruction interventions in a selected number of rural communities within two districts of the northern and eastern provinces of Sri Lanka.

The project also contributed towards the strengthening of mechanisms for the provision of sustainable rural (small scale) water supply and sanitation projects in the north and east by designing and piloting appropriate institutional arrangements with properly defined roles for local government institutions, service providers and communities.

A key feature of the project was employing a participatory approach to ensure a more sustainable and efficient service-delivery mechanism which is closer to the people who directly benefit from the service. Therefore, the project design recommended that the water supply schemes be implemented, operated and maintained by stakeholders at the lowest, yet appropriate level of the community.



<sup>1</sup> In Sri Lanka, 78% of the population has access to safe drinking water and 85% has access to sanitation

The project from the beginning of its planning realized that simply building these facilities may not maximize their effectiveness. To provide local communities with a greater voice and input into their decision-making processes, Water Users Associations (WUAs) were established to make decisions and to advocate about the social, economic, and health benefits of safe drinking water and sanitation at within their community:

- Community discussions were held in villages to provide basic knowledge and understanding of how a water supply scheme is operated and maintained by WUA and village community and how to strength community participation for project sustainability.
- In order to cover the expected monthly expenses, a tariff plan was suggested by the community, taking into account the needs of different community members, which often consist in the middle classes and the poor, marginalized groups.
- Residents provided some labor to build the water infrastructure, organized themselves into Water User Associations (WUA) to make decisions, and benefited from hygiene education and awareness programs.

“Community input, and involvement is critical to the success of the project. These rural water supply schemes are managed and maintained by the communities after construction, so adequate training for the community to take on the operation and maintenance of the scheme is also critical for long term operations and sustainability of their schemes,” said project leader Shideh Hadian.



## RESULTS

The NE-WASH project was implemented in 16 conflict-affected communities within the district of Mannar (ten villages) in the Northern Province and the district of Trincomalee (six villages) in the Eastern Province, where internally-displaced persons have returned to build their lives and livelihood.

By enabling access to water services, the NE-WASH project has contributed to the improvement of hygiene practices and to the overall health and quality of life for over 4,400 households in Sri Lanka. Specific results include:

- Nine water supply schemes were designed with the capacity of providing water to over 4,400 households (or over 15,000 people), of which 30% were women-headed households) increasing access to water services in 16 villages in the Northern and Eastern districts.
- 571 toilets were built by communities using the Sanitation Revolving Fund.
- 11 schools were provided with improved water quality and latrines which has enhanced student comfort and health. Students were also educated in hygiene habits such as the washing of hands before and after eating meals at school. The latrines were built by the School Development Society with supervision of the project’s engineers and technical officers.

The project has contributed to strengthening the capacity of local government bodies enabling them to deliver sustainable water supply infrastructure in alignment with Sri Lanka’s Rural Water Supply Policy (If possible, include number of stakeholders have benefited through capacity building).

### TESTIMONIAL: A RESIDENT IN THE VILLAGE OF NILAPOLA

“I did not have a toilet before. The Water User Association helped me, through incentive sanitation grant, to construct a toilet next to my home for the convenience of my children. I dream of having a tiled shower attached to the toilet.”

## PARTNERS

The NE-WASH project was financed by the Australian Government's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) (total contribution US\$ ) and the World Bank (total contribution US\$ ). Both institutions have collaborated on working in the post-conflict regions of Sri Lanka with a focus of improving local service delivery, particularly, for people returning home after the long period of conflict. Special attention has been given to improving access for vulnerable groups — including women, disabled individuals and other socially-excluded persons.

Key partners in the implementation process of the project were the Sri Lanka National Water Supply and Drainage Board of the Ministry of Water Supply and Drainage, the Pradeshiya Sabha's (Local Government Authorities), the Water User Associations as representatives of the communities. The North East Housing Reconstruction Programme assisted Sri Lanka's authorities in the pre-selection of the villages participating in the project.

## MOVING FORWARD

Although the NE-WASH Project closed on June 30, 2014, the project team is in the process of preparing a scale-up project in Sri Lanka's lagging regions and districts, with particularly high levels of poverty, to increase access to sustainable piped water services and sanitation and to improve general hygiene behavior. The planned project has an investment component for piped water supply and improved sanitation in about seven districts for small towns, rural and Estates sub-sectors. These districts are identified through objective ranking based on access to water supply and climatic conditions (i.e., those in the dry zone). The project also includes a technical assistance (TA) and capacity building component for the stakeholders.



## PARTNERS



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