Indonesia: rural water issues

In the rural villages of Flores (see the maps on page 18 and below), access to safe drinking water is a major problem. Typically women have to walk 30 minutes to collect 10 litres of unclean water from a well. This means that women spend much of their day collecting water, and carrying the water on their heads causes neck and shoulder problems. The unclean water also causes health problems such as diarrhoea and skin infections. This also means that children miss out on school and education. Another consequence of not having access to clean water is that it is difficult to find teachers who want to come and teach in their schools.

In 2005, several villages began to work with World Vision to improve the communities’ water supply and knowledge of hygiene and sanitation practices. Improving access to clean water for the villages was a challenge. A natural spring was identified that could supply the water. However, it was 27 kilometres away, on the side of a volcano, and belonged to the people of Hewa village.

With funding and advice from AusAID and World Vision, the villagers built a 27 kilometre pipeline to the village. The construction took 16 months to complete. The communities receiving the water pay the Hewa village $120 per year for the water and work to protect the water source from contamination. They also formed a management committee that has maintained the pipeline since completion in 2007.

The project has benefited over 6,000 people, with improved access to safe water, sanitation facilities and knowledge of basic hygiene. By 2008, it was found that the number of children under the age of five suffering from diarrhoea reduced from 38.1 percent to 11.7 percent.

As some of the villagers said:

“We now find it easy to do the laundry, the washing and cooking. Also we can water plants and grow small gardens close to our homes. Now we have more time each day to meet with mothers and look after children.”

“Instead of spending two to three hours collecting water, we can now use our time more productively and mothers do not have to work so hard or walk so far to get the water.”

“We are very proud of our hard work because now we have access to clean water and our children rarely get sick.”

“With better access to water, we now have 30 brick-making businesses in the area. This has improved income and housing.”

The community learnt more about hygiene and sanitation through classes for school children, and new sanitation facilities were built. For the water and sanitation project to be sustainable, a management committee was set up, which now collaborates with local government to maintain the pipeline.

The project has also improved the villagers’ sense of pride in their community. The communities have been encouraged to improve income in a sustainable way, which has been done through brick-making. This has in turn reduced child labour and has maintained the pipeline since completion in 2007.

The project has improved access to education, gender equality, and reducing poverty.

For you to do

1. Read the case study and identify five ways the water and sanitation project has impacted the community either economically, socially or environmentally. With a partner, compare your mind maps.

2. In pairs, draw a mind map showing the connections between clean water, improving health, education, gender equality, and reducing poverty.

3. Complete the map reading activity at worldvision.com.au/schoolresources