

S is for sanitation



The English alphabet on the wall at Simle school where Y is for Yak.

In the foothills of the Himalayas in Nepal, where rice paddies gleam in the sun and majestic mountain peaks stand in the far distance, scattered villages cling to the tops of hill sides.

For most people living here farming is the main source of income and their crops fill the terraced slopes. But because the villages are spread across the hills schools tend to be built in lower, central areas where more pupils can reach them. For those whose houses sit on the top of hills the journey to school can become an arduous trek.

MAIN PICTURE: Simle School (seen at the centre) nestles at the base of a hill in the Dhading district of Nepal. The sanitation block here is encouraging girls to stay on in school.

Now we don't need to miss our classes and we feel healthier

Fifteen year old Sumita is one such pupil. Her family is from a marginalised group who live and farm at the top of a steep hill. "I walk very fast on the way to school and it only takes 30 minutes," she explains "but on the way back up it takes two hours as it is steep and I get hungry and tired and so have to walk more slowly."

In the developing world girls are less likely to get an education than boys. Nearly a quarter of girls worldwide do not complete primary school and many more do not complete secondary school.

While difficult journeys like Sumita's or pressure to stay at home and help with chores like collecting water are all factors in keeping girls away from school, one simple reason for girls dropping out is that their schools don't have latrines or separate facilities for girls and boys. Teenage girls are particularly affected.

Sumita explains the problem, "We used to go to the bush where there were bamboo plants – we used to hide under the bamboo to go to the loo. It was really difficult especially during our periods or when we had diarrhoea. We wouldn't come to school then and used to stay at home instead."

Finding a private place to go to the toilet was a big issue for Sumita and her friends, especially with teenage boys around. "We used to

Sumita
Simle School, Nepal



WaterAid/Marco Betti

Fifteen year old Sumita stands outside the sanitation block in Simle school. "Now we don't need to miss our classes and we feel healthier than before," she says.

have to run when we saw the boys coming. Sometimes the boys used to see us defecating and then used to tease and embarrass us."

Then, having raced up the hill to find some privacy the girls would have to get to their next class before the bell went, and they found this harder still. "If you aren't in time you miss the class and so when we had our period we often had to attend one class and then miss the next hour of class. We often had to leave class or go home early."

"It used to make us sad to miss school because of this – if we had a toilet we could continue our classes instead. We could save our time and carry on our education as well."

The girls not only faced problems at school, but at home too. "Sometimes our parents didn't

understand the situation – sometimes when we came home early they just told us off," she continues.

But things are different now in Simle school. WaterAid and our partner organisation NEWAH have constructed a school toilet block with separate facilities for the girls and the boys.

"Compared to before it is really very easy now," Sumita explains. "We really struggled before and it's hard to compare then and now as there is so much improvement. Now we don't need to miss our classes and we feel healthier than before. There used to be a chance of getting diseases from the polluted environment but now this has really reduced."

Sumita and her friends agree that without the school sanitation block >



We used to hide under the bamboo to go to the loo. It was really difficult.


they would have attended fewer lessons and have carried on missing school. Now, simply because they have a toilet they hope to finish their studies and go on to have better futures.

"It's a massive change compared to before. We feel very happy that we don't need to leave the class any more and that we can carry on with our studies. Then we will work at home or go and find jobs." ■


HOW SCHOOLS CAN GET INVOLVED

There are many ways that schools in the UK and around the world can help support our work. We have a wide range of resources available for teachers and all sorts of activities for children of all ages to take part in.

Splash Out

 Splash Out is our new fundraising website for kids. It's packed full of fun ideas, games and facts.
www.wateraid.org/splashout

Splish Splash Flush

 TV presenter Adam Hart-Davis brings his unique mix of informative fun to our new children's DVD. Filmed in Bangladesh and the UK *Splish Splash Flush* explains all about WaterAid's work and the vital importance of water and sanitation in helping people overcome poverty and disease.



To find out how your school can get involved or to order a free copy of the DVD please visit www.wateraid.org/schools or call us on 0845 6000 433.

Looking back in Bhumistan

The sanitation block in Simle School was built following a looking back study that NEWAH undertook in this area. Seventeen years before, the village and school had worked with NEWAH to build a gravity flow water scheme here.

As part of an ongoing evaluation NEWAH then revisited the community to ensure the longevity of the scheme. While the water was still flowing, and the community regularly paid money into a maintenance fund it was felt that some additional work was needed to ensure the facilities lasted long into the future.

The original tapstand caretaker had moved to the city, leaving his brother in charge. While he was doing a great job he had never received any formal training, and so spent two days with NEWAH learning how to check the systems and keep the gravity flow scheme in working order. Taps were replaced and some pipes were restored.

Sanitation was also an issue and so NEWAH worked with the



WaterAid/Marco Betti

Sambhu Rija is the caretaker of the village water supply. "Now I check pipes, the joins, fittings, taps and reservoir tanks. Once a week I walk through the village and check everything is working."



WaterAid/Marco Betti

Seventeen years after it was established the gravity-flow scheme in Bhumistan provides the community with safe, clean water.

community to help them understand the links between poor health and the lack of sanitation through events and plays. They then supported families to construct their own latrines and also build the school sanitation block.

Hygiene education sessions are now ongoing at the school and everyone has built their own family latrines. Water flows from all the tapstands and the caretaker carries out weekly checks to ensure everything is working properly. The community contributions to their fund have grown so much that they are now using them to start a small business catering for festivals. ■