

Ending the wait for water

In southern Nepal, a UNICEF-supported effort to help households access safe water is resulting in saved time and better cohesion among community members

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Bara, Nepal: Deepika Sunar remembers well how deeply ingrained the issue of water scarcity used to be in her community. The 14-year-old from the Thanidevi Chakkari village, in the Jeetpursimara Sub-Metropolitan City in Bara District in southern Nepal, says that from as far back as she can recall, much of village life and conversation was defined by this struggle for water.



Deepika Sunar, 14, in her home in Bara District in southern Nepal. ©UNICEF/Nepal/SKLama

She herself had to walk every day to the nearest of the community's three wells to stand in line, pot in hand, to collect water, a chore that took an hour at the very least, much more if the queue was long. "People would cut in line, they'd push each other, and fights would often break out," the eighth-grader says. "It was not pleasant."

Indeed, for the over 300 households in Thanidevi Chakkari, water was a constant worry. Apart from around three months during the monsoon season, the wells held barely enough water for all community members across the remainder of the year, leading to the kind of quarrels that Deepika is referring to.

The hassle of waiting one's turn at the well and walking home with the heavy vessel in hand – a task that fell upon children in most families – also meant losing out on precious time that could be spent on learning and other childhood activities. In addition, families often had to weigh how to best use the limited water supply available to them, and this often resulted in making compromised on hygiene and sanitation.

Recognizing the urgency of improving access to safe water in the community, UNICEF worked with the Sub-Metropolitan City to start a community water project in Thankidevi Chakkari in 2021. The project was funded jointly by UNICEF – thanks to generous support from Armani – together



with the local government as well as the community, and construction started in January.

Over the next months, wells were dug, a system of water pipes laid, and a reservoir tank built as part of the project. Aside from funds, the community also contributed their labour to the construction process, with each household digging certain lengths of the trenches wherein the pipes would be placed. By October 2022, the work was complete, and each of the 307 households individually equipped with a tap stand providing a constant supply of safe water.



Deepika's niece Sabina Sunar, waters the kitchen garden in their home in Bara District in southern Nepal. ©UNICEF/Nepal/SKLama

Since then, given the easy access to water, most families in Thankidevi Chakkari have also started small kitchen gardens in their backyards. And to help repair, maintain and pay salary for a caretaker, so that the water supply system can be well preserved, families pay a monthly fixed fee of NRs. 70 (approx. USD 0.53) and addition NRs. 7 (approx. USD 0.05) for every unit (cubic meter) of water used – measured by water meters installed in each home.

Project benefits have also been extended to the Nepal Rashtriya Basic School, the only school in the community. A water point has been installed in the school premises which provides 24/7 supply of drinking water. In addition, under the UNICEF-supported WASH in Schools initiative, in coordination with the municipality and the School Management Committee, the child club has been mobilized to maintain and improve water, sanitation and hygiene facilities in the school. This has included orienting both students and staff on proper handwashing and cleanliness practices, menstrual hygiene management and other key issues.

What's more, in order to ensure that the quality of the water is being monitored and maintained, there are plans for regular testing of household water supply, as well as assessment of sanitation activities, in the community. This is key in the process to officially certify Thanidevi Chakkari as being a 'water-safe' community. A Water Safety Plan has also been developed in this regard, and Deepika's mother Pampha is one of the team members.

Now that they can simply turn on the tap in their homes to bathe or wash clothes, Deepika and other children have also found that they have enough spare time in the day to spend on homework and other tasks. "No more waiting in line for water," she says. "I feel very happy about that."