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FOR ALL IN A FAST CHANGING WORLD****Capacity building and training services in the
WASH sector in Afghanistan***M. A. Barat, B. Bhandari & S. Wali, Afghanistan***BRIEFING PAPER 1856**

High mortality and morbidity rates are prevalent in Afghanistan and one of the causes being lack of access to safe drinking water, safe sanitation and adoption of good hygiene practices. Furthermore prospects for the support to the population are limited due to the low level of knowledge and capacity of those who normally should or could help. Danish Committee for Aid to Afghan Refugees (DACAAR) started capacity building services since 2005 and established a Water Expertise and Training Centre (WET Centre) in 2010 in partnership with a Canadian organization, Centre for Affordable Water and Sanitation Technology (CAWST). DACAAR WET centre acts as a hub for data, information and research as well as a vehicle for training and technical support to government agencies, NGOs and the private sector to accelerate the knowledge management, networking and capacity building in WASH sector. As a result of WET Centre training workshops, seminars and consulting support provision to organizations, seven new organizations implemented WASH projects in Afghanistan in 2012 and ten in 2013.

Introduction

Afghanistan has the second highest rate of under-five mortality in the world, with thousands of children dying every year. The under-five mortality rate (U5MR) is 101 per 1000 live births, the infant mortality rate (IMR) is 73 per 1000 live births and the neonatal mortality rate (NMR) is 36 per 1000 live births. (unicef.org). Though in recent years Afghanistan has made a good progress in providing access to safe water in the country, still 44 % of the rural population lack access to improved water sources and 77% of the rural population lack access to improved sanitation facilities (JMP Report 2014).

It is worthwhile to note that, in Afghanistan, different kinds of conflicts are ongoing since 1979, more than 35 years. In this context, DACAAR, an apolitical, non-governmental, non-profit development organization has been working to improve the lives of the Afghan people for the last 29 years with focus on Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH). Access to safe drinking-water is a fundamental requirement for good health and is also a human right. Implementation of effective and efficient WASH project is instrumental to bring positive changes in the human health of the community members. DACAAR started capacity building services within the organization and other partners in 2005 and established the WET Centre in 2010. The WET Centre provides an opportunity for DACAAR to use their long and rich experience from implementation of WASH activities in rural parts of Afghanistan. Through participatory action research, these experiences systematized and turned into knowledge, which is then disseminated by the WET Centre through training, technical support, seminars, learning exchanges and other capacity building initiatives. DACAAR WET Centre is closely working with a Canada based organization called Centre for Affordable Water and Sanitation Technology (CAWST) which has conceived and established a WET Centre Network (WET-NET) among eight countries in the world (Annual Report CAWST, 2013). The technical and managerial capacity of the WET Centre is being developed in partnership with CAWST, and through the membership of International WET Centres Network (WET-NET).

Material and methods

DACAAR WET Centre shares training calendars on monthly bases with all client organizations to send their appropriate and needy staff to join the training workshops. DACAAR has a two- page-training outline for all types of training. This training outline portrays the contents and methodology of the workshop based on which the interested organizations select appropriate staff for training.

Based on DACAAR WETC's four-year experience, we have the following process to enhance the technical and managerial capacity of our clients.

Delivering Training: Training workshops aimed at building the capacity of local stakeholders is the main activity of DACAAR WET Centre. WET Centre trainings are unique in Afghanistan. Our training sessions are playing an instrumental role in enhancing the technical capacity of government agencies and NGO's working in the water, sanitation and health sectors. All our trainers are competent in effective facilitation skills and they create a safe learning environment during the workshop. Trainers conduct quick assessment sessions to identify the learning styles of the participants to adopt the teaching methods based on the participant understanding level.

Our trainers always start the session through an introduction exercise to draw participant's attention towards the topic. Explaining the expectations in each session creates conducive learning environment by keeping all participants in their comfort zone. We believe on adult education approach; therefore participants are encouraged to contribute in group exercises, experience sharing, games, technology demonstrations and operating practice.

Consulting Support: WET Centre does not believe that participating in one workshop can build a competent WASH Expert. Many WASH issues look simple in the training hall but overcoming different technical and managerial challenges during the implementation process is not that easy. Therefore, DACAAR WET Centre has a mechanism to provide consulting support to our participants. Any participants who are facing difficulties or technical problems in the field during project implementation, WET Centre is ever willing to provide troubleshooting services.

Competency Validation: We believe that trainer should be competent in terms of knowledge, skill and attitude to have an effective workshop. Our WET Centre follows a competency and validation process developed by CAWST to certify and validate technicians and trainers. Learning is a continuous process; therefore all trainers do self-assessment after each workshop. Participant can assess themselves and prepare an action plan to enhance their skills. Technical and Educational Advisors from our partner (CAWST) have been working closely with the trainers of the WET Centre to build the competency and validate the trainers. The competency validation process is quite time consuming; however it ensures the quality and consistency of the workshop.

Participatory Action Research (PAR): We are encouraging all our partners in Afghanistan to share their successful and failure stories in the WASH Sector. Based on participant and our parent organization's need, we design and carry out participatory action research on different problems faced during project implementation. All findings are disseminated through national learning exchange seminar and water and sanitation technical working group meeting.

National Learning Exchange: DACAAR organizes a national learning exchange workshop in Kabul every year. All interested WASH related organizations including government and UN Agencies have participated in the learning exchange seminar. Interested organizations have an opportunity to present and share their successful and interesting stories. DACAAR WET Centre always presents their PAR findings in the national learning exchange seminar.

WET-NET Learning Exchange: This seminar is organized by CAWST every year in a different country. CAWST reviews all the relevant and latest scientific papers on WASH topics. CAWST prepares a digest of the relevant scientific papers and simplify the issues and findings in simple way, which is understandable to all partners working in developing world. All WET Centres have an opportunity to share our lessons learned and practical experience in the WET-NET learning exchange workshop. In addition, CAWST provides technological update in WASH Sector. WET-NET Learning exchanges are very valuable experiences to

DACAAR WET Centre staff that in turn disseminate the learnings in Afghanistan through training and consultancy support to different organizations.

Results

Training workshops on WASH thematic Area

DACAAR WET Centre conducted 48 training workshops in 2013 on different WASH thematic areas. Totally, 751 people from clients' organizations participated in training workshops of which 636 were male and 115 were females. At the end of each training workshop hard and soft copies of the training materials were provided to participants. The trainers' contact addresses provided to the participants for any required follow-up, consulting or technical support. 91% of the participants were satisfied with the training delivery and training contents. Based on WET Centre training workshops and technical support, seven new organizations implemented WASH projects in 2012 and 10 organizations implemented projects in 2013 (DACAAR Annual Report 2013).

DACAAR WET Centre is competent to deliver training on the following topics: Well Construction, Gravity-Flow Piped Network, Drinking Water Quality Testing, Bio-sand Filters Product Manufacturing, Bio-sand Filters Project Implementation, Community Health Promotion, Low Cost Sanitation, Effective Facilitation Skills for Trainers, Operation & Maintenance of Rural Water Supply, Quality Assurance of Handpumps and Pipes, Social Aspects of Water Projects, Project Cycle Management and Mainstreaming of Cross-cutting Issues in WASH Program .

Conducted formal WASH awareness seminars

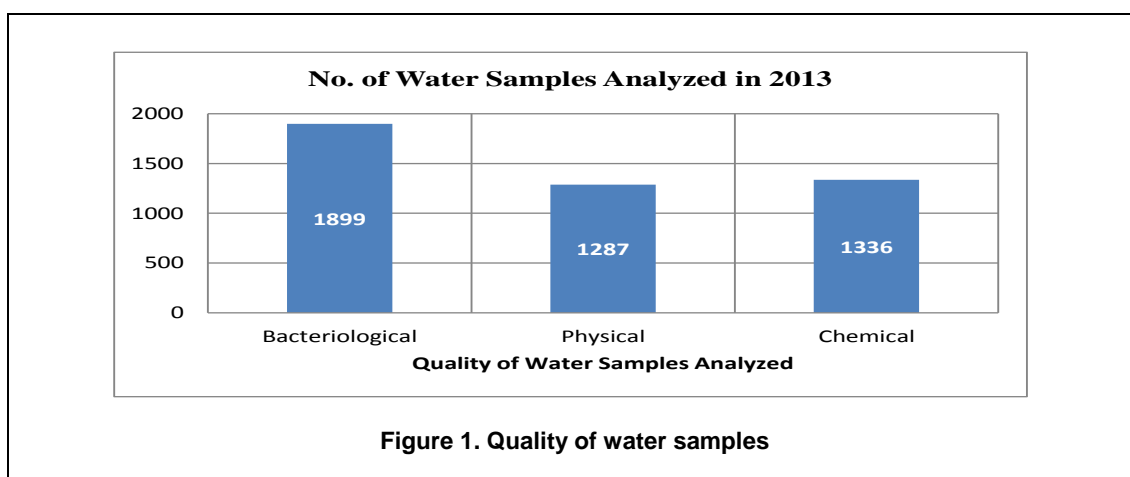
Totally, 13 WASH awareness seminars were conducted for school teachers, NGOs employees and communities in which 374 people (Males=37, Females=337) participated (DACAAR Annual Report 2013). School teachers and school management committees appreciate our awareness rising programs conducted at school and community level. It is an opportunity to work with school and community to transfer participatory tools and techniques for WASH awareness. School teachers are using some of techniques and materials in their teaching sessions at school and they inculcate good hygiene practices among the school children. The hygiene and sanitation message learned by the students is also transferred to their parents and other members in the community.

Consulting and technical support

In the last one year, 57 times consulting support were provided to 21 organizations implementing WASH project in Afghanistan through meetings, visits, emails, phone calls, and project visits on WASH thematic areas which is in the domain of the WET Centre (DACAAR Annual Report 2013). Our clients expressed that our technical consulting support provided confidence to implement and or enhance the quality of WASH projects in different parts of Afghanistan.

Drinking water quality testing

WET Centre has a well-equipped Water Quality Testing Laboratory which provided 1,899 bacteriological, 1,336 chemical and 1,287 physical water quality tests of drinking water in 2013 (DACAAR Annual Report 2013). We provided water quality testing services to all government, non-government organizations including private sectors. Thus, DACAAR WET centre is able to create and enhance the awareness on the importance of water quality and its consequences on human health.



National and international learning exchange and networking

In 2013, a National Learning Exchange was organized and conducted in Kabul in which 42 representatives from 21 organizations participated and shared their best practices, technical papers, project evaluations and lessons learned on WASH (DACAAR Annual Report 2013). Most participants realize that sharing their experience enhances their confidence levels and help in wisely using the scarce resources for the community development.

Participatory action research

Studies are conducted on existing WASH technologies and practices in order to identify weaknesses to recommend improvements. Two action researches were conducted on the adaption of bio-sand filter technology and solar pumping network system which were successfully completed and results were documented and disseminated in the national learning exchange seminar. Based on these studies, different organizations such as Relief International, Solidarities International and Action Contre Le Faim have added Biosand Filters to their program portfolio.

DACAAR-CAWST annual survey

Every year DACAAR and CAWST conduct an annual survey to take feedback from the client organizations and assess the impact of services delivered by the WET Centre. In 2013, 25 organizations/clients out of total 90 clients have returned the survey. The total number of people impacted cumulatively by these 25 organizations/clients with improved access to water and sanitation in 2013 was 672,500.

Conclusions

Based on DACAAR's experience on capacity building activities, the following conclusions can be drawn:

- First, and most importantly, it is the way in which WASH trainers and technicians have an opportunity to improve their knowledge and skills through continuous coaching and consulting support from DACAAR WET Centre staff and CAWST staff
- Secondly, it is an important part of shifting from a passive and conventional training (focusing on numbers) to practical and shared learning. Afghan WASH Organizations have an opportunity to enhance knowledge and skills in a range of WASH subjects to implement effective and efficient projects.
- Thirdly, through CAWST support, WET Centre trainers and technicians have an opportunity to update the state-of-art approaches and technology information, which were developed by the scientific communities such as university and research institutes. These learnings are happening through the WET NET network and annual learning exchange seminars.
- Fourthly, an Afghan organization's capacity is built and sustained to deliver training, technical support and participatory action research in WASH areas to different organizations in Afghanistan.
- Last but the least, the cumulative impact of the organizations and people trained and supported by DACAAR/CAWST is multiplied by many folds and reached a total population of 672,500 by the end of 2012 and it could be more but many organizations don't respond to CAWST-DACAAR annual survey.

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