Unsafe Water and Inadequate Sanitation
Hungary

**IMPLEMENTATION LEVEL** Local
**SETTING** Community
**DRIVING FORCE** National Public Health and Medical Officer Services - NPHMS
**PARTNERS** Teachers, children, community, public health professionals

### Background

**RATIONALE**
In the last decade drinking water has become more expensive and as a result some people in villages started to re-use old private wells. Water quality of these wells is unknown by NPHMS and users as well. Water pollution is a basic environmental issue since pollution widespread in soil may appear in ground water. Children should be aware that information on soil and water pollution can immediately protect their health in the short run and their water supply, in the long run.

### Planning and Implementation

**MECHANISMS USED**

- In the beginning, communication was established between NPHMS and schoolteachers. This was later passed on by teachers to children and later to the community.
- Information on the dangers of using private shallow wells due to the high nitrate and nitrite concentration was provided to the participants before starting the project. A recommendation on not using wells before water quality is known was also provided.

**DESCRIPTION OF ACTION/IMPLEMENTATION**

- Teachers were provided with information about potential hazards of drinking water from private wells.
- Teachers acquainted children with the above-mentioned in the classroom and this information was later passed on by the schoolchildren to their parents, grandparents or neighbours.
- As a practical stage of project, children took samples from the wells, and at the same time were asked to complete a special questionnaire describing the soil pollution around the wells and the related parameters (depth, animal faeces, etc.).
- NPHMOS gave presents to the participating schools, such as small books and cassettes with songs in English about water pollution and protection, and so that these could be used in different classroom activities (singing or English lessons) and at school events.
- For better illustrating and understanding the problem NPHMS specialists made posters about water pollution, and placed them on the walls of general practitioners’ waiting rooms in the villages.

**NOVELTY OF ACTION**
It was a completely new action.
Evaluation/ Impact

After carrying out the investigation residents of the villages were informed on the results of the measurements, including the exact data related to the nitrate components of the water in their wells. Thousands of inhabitants, who drink water from the village wells, were protected. Children took water samples, learned about water pollution and its hazards. Fifty to one hundred teachers were involved in this project. The teachers received updated information about water pollution while learning more about the NPHMS.

Sustainability

This program was incorporated into the National Environmental Health Action Plan, and in 1999-2000 completed in 9 counties in Hungary. The work is still going on and has spread to several counties with the help of the National Public Health Center.

Transferability

This action can potentially be transferred with minimal change since many countries in the Carpathian basin have problems with water pollution.

Lessons learned

Key factors leading to success

- Teachers who took the responsibility for children’s work and keeping in touch with NPMOS.

Challenges during planning/implementation

- Persuading teachers to take part in the planning.
- Persuading villagers that this investigation would not bring any negative consequences such as fines or penalties when implemented.

If done again, what would be done differently?

Repeating the project in a shorter form every year on “Water day”.

Important aspects to be considered for future planning

Not only nitrates but also high concentrations of arsenic were found in shallow wells in one of the counties. A bacterial test or survey for chemicals such as pesticides could provide useful information about soil and groundwater pollution.

Advice to countries that want to do something similar

- The intervention is not very expensive, yet very effective.

Helpful tools

- Media.

Contacts

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