



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

TAJIKISTAN

SUCCESS STORY

Cartoon Brings Clean Hands, Healthier Lives

USAID media efforts raise health and hygiene knowledge and encourage healthy practices among school children and in communities.



Photo: USAID Tajikistan Safe Drinking Water Project

Schoolchildren in Bokhtar District, Khatlon Province watch a cartoon about handwashing with soap.

USAID's Tajikistan Safe Drinking Water Project supports projects to bring reliable safe drinking water to rural communities that lack water systems. The new water infrastructure is linked with educational efforts to targets at-risk groups and spread key health and hygiene messages to all partner communities. In 2010, USAID supported eight safe drinking water projects to benefit over 14,500 people in eight communities. More projects are underway in 2011 to bring water to rural residents in Tajikistan, and promote health and hygiene knowledge.

Serious illnesses caused by water-borne diseases are a critical health issue in Tajikistan. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), water-borne diseases account for 60 percent of gastro-enteric afflictions, such as diarrhea, dysentery, cholera and typhoid, in Tajikistan. Children are greatly affected. In recent years, 16 percent of deaths among children under age 5 in Tajikistan were caused by water-borne diseases. Many children don't understand the link between lack of hygiene and disease.

In response to the need to promote health and hygiene knowledge, USAID's Tajikistan Safe Drinking Water Project produced a one-minute video cartoon, "When We Should Wash Our Hands with Soap". Produced by local animators, the video was broadcast throughout Khatlon Province, Tajikistan's most populated region, on local television twice a week after the news, from September to December 2010. According to TV market analysts, the message reached more than 500,000 viewers. The cartoon features the character, a drop of water, promoting health and hygiene knowledge through explanations about water-borne diseases and when people should wash their hands with soap.

This kind of brief but targeted message has behavior changing impact, especially with children. There are very few cartoons in Tajikistan that are broadcast in Tajik language. USAID health educators were pleasantly surprised during a monitoring visit to a school in Bokhtar District when they observed how several schoolchildren had begun bringing soap to school. When the children were asked about the soap, they said that they saw a cartoon describing the need for hand washing with soap and the dangers of water borne disease, and they didn't want to be sick and be at the hospital for a long time.

Nusratullo Amirov, Director of the Healthy Life Program within the Ministry of Health, stated: "Thanks to USAID, the cartoon has helped raise children's knowledge about health and hygiene. Handwashing with soap, at home and in school, will greatly help prevent the spread of infections."