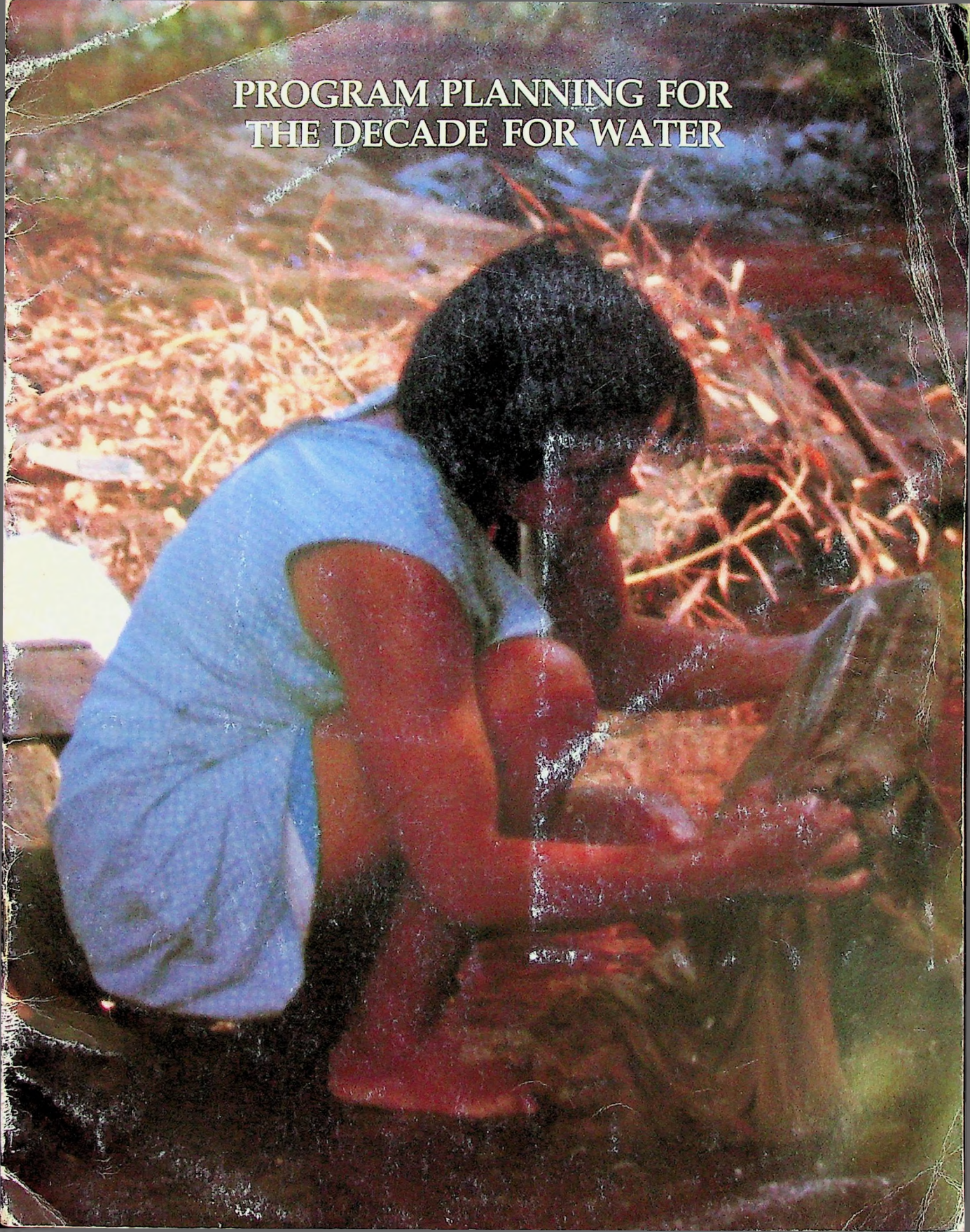
PROGRAM PLANNING FOR THE DECADE FOR WATER



PROGRAM PLANNING FOR THE DECADE FOR WATER

All peoples, whatever their stage of development and their social and economic conditions, have the right to have access to drinking water in quantities and of a quality equal to their basic needs.

Resolution on
Community Water Supply
United Nations
Water Conference 1977

This language, and the recognition of the problems in developing nations that occasioned it, was the spur for the creation of the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade. Declared by the United Nations, the Decade has as its goal clean water and adequate sanitation for all people by 1990. As of mid-1982, 81 nations have established Decade committees to develop countrywide plans for meeting this goal. National governments, private foundations, and bilateral and multi-lateral donor agencies have joined the effort with plans, programs, technical assistance, equipment, and money.

Perhaps shielded from view by all the things being done are the basic questions of *why* a given country should do anything about the Decade for Water and *how* it should do it. There are, after all, competing needs for scarce resources, and water and sanitation facilities development is a complex process, given the numbers and limited coordination of the participants. Nonetheless, there are solid reasons for national investment in this process.

The "Why" of Water Supply

Improved water supply and sanitation facilities make an important contribution to healthier populations, more productive economies, and more vigorous societies. These are adequate long-run reasons for national investment. At the same time, governments undertaking such investment can also reap short-run political rewards, always a consideration when spending priorities are being established.

E-130

Health Benefits

The number of water taps per 1,000 persons is a better indication of health than the number of hospital beds.

Dr. Halfdan Mahler
Director-General, World
Health Organization

Many diseases, including the scourges of cholera, typhoid, and the many diarrheal and dysenteric diseases, can be reduced by adequate water supply and sanitation. In the developing countries, diarrheal diseases are among the leading causes of death, especially among children. In many of these countries, one of every four children dies before his or her fifth birthday. The role of water supply in improving health is not limited to diseases transmitted directly through ingesting water in food or drink. With adequate water supplies for bathing, washing of clothes and cooking utensils, food preparation and other purposes, reductions can occur in diseases of the eyes and skin, diseases caused by parasites, diseases

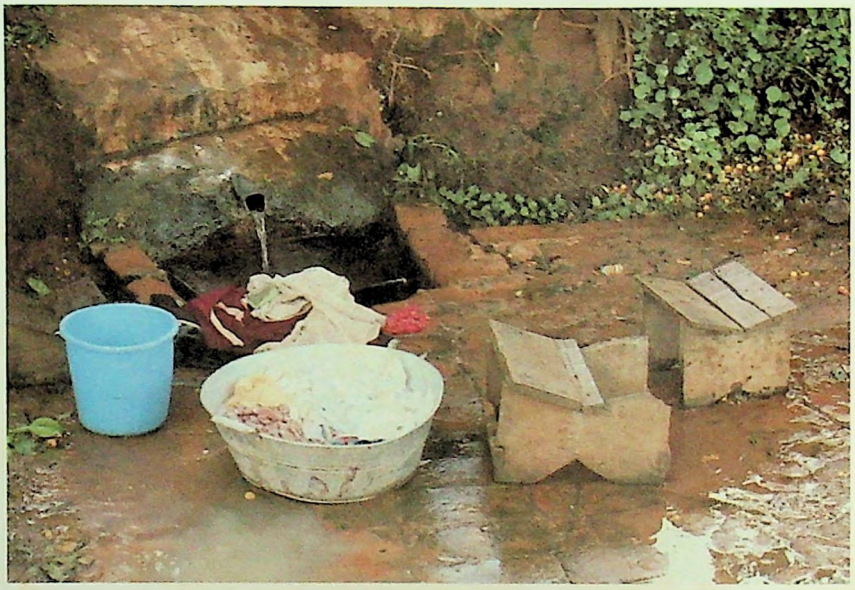
transmitted by insect vectors, diseases associated with water contact, and food-borne diseases.

While the precise measure of the effect of water supply and sanitation on disease may be a matter of dispute, there is no question that adequate facilities are associated with a healthier population. Water-related diseases are invariably among the leading causes of death in countries that do not have adequate water supplies and sanitation. Most of these countries are developing nations.

Economic Benefits

The degree of efficiency of water supply systems can be used as an indicator of the standard of development a community has reached.

Colombian Ministry of Health



Somewhat like health benefits, the economic development impacts of water and sanitation facilities are difficult to measure but few people doubt that such impacts exist. For example, industries are not attracted to rural villages simply because they have good water supply and sanitation systems, but we know that industries do not locate in villages that *lack* these facilities. Water supply and sanitation facilities can be viewed as part of the essential infrastructure of a community without which economic development will never occur.

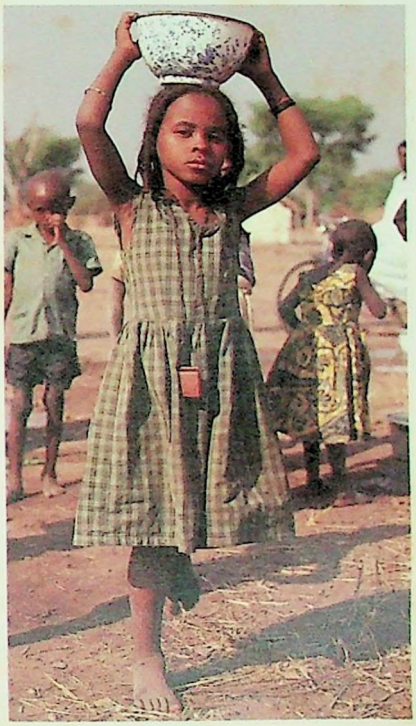
Improving village water supplies may be an essential step in the development of village and home industries (fish processing, fruit production, and beer brewing, for example) and can increase the productivity of a village's residents by decreasing the amount of time and energy that must be spent fetching water and by increasing workers' outputs because of better health. Other economic benefits may include home gardening and small-scale livestock production. Rural water supply and sanitation improvements can also help to slow migration to already over-crowded cities and serve to redistribute income to some extent from wealthier cities to poorer rural communities. These economic impacts are difficult to quantify but that does not mean they are insignificant. Indeed, entire sectors of an economy, such as livestock production or mining operations, may be dependent on water.

Social Benefits

A young girl in Sudan carries a 22-liter tin of water on her head twice each day for her family. Asked what she would do if her village got a well, she replied: "Then maybe I can go to school again."
UNICEF

To rural villagers, the most important benefit of an improved water supply or sanitation system is likely to be convenience. They may applaud the positive health and economic effects once they are aware of them, but it is the end to the daily struggle to find and fetch water that is paramount. It is not unusual for six hours per household per day to be spent in this way. The social aspects of gathering at the river to do the wash or fill water jugs notwithstanding, most of the women who are the primary drawers of water would vastly prefer a reliable supply requiring less of their time and effort. So would their children.

A second social benefit of water supply and sanitation projects is the opportunity they provide for community organization and the development of leadership within the community. This does not necessarily occur naturally. It must be fostered from the outset of the effort and treated as one of the project objectives. The results are well worth the trouble. The skills acquired by a community as it develops and maintains its own water supply or sanitation system are transferrable to other types of improvement projects and other kinds of activities. The community and the country benefit from greater self-reliance and stronger leadership.



Political Benefits

Although water supply and sanitation benefits are largely socio-economic, the decisions to pursue these benefits through facilities improvement are, in the end, political. For several reasons, giving high priority to water and sanitation is a good political choice.

First, these programs are not usually matters of deep political controversy. There may be differences on timing and financial levels of commitment, but most political leaders can agree on the general proposition that people should have reasonable access to clean water and a sanitary means for disposing of their wastes. The United Nations resolution launching the Decade for Water received universal support in a body often torn by ideological disagreement and regional conflict.

Second, water supply and sanitation projects, if handled properly, receive great popular support. While such projects can be made controversial if the community is given no chance to participate in decision-making or if community education is ignored, very few people are opposed in principle to a better, more convenient water supply and a healthier way to dispose of human excreta. People like improvements in their lives, especially those, such as a convenient water supply, that can be enjoyed immediately.

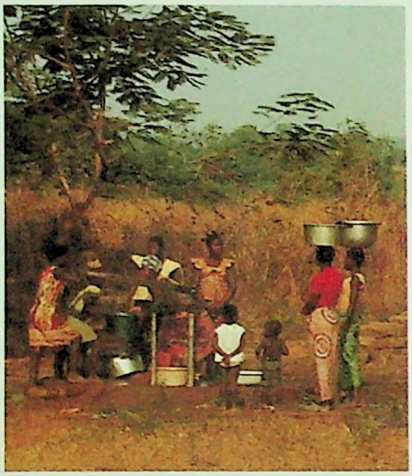
Third, the pace of many development projects is often slow, almost glacially so. Many of the benefits of water supply and sanitation projects are immediately apparent to community members which builds their support and confidence in the development process.

Fourth, and more narrowly, development of water supply and sanitation systems usually involves self-help by the community with the assistance of substantial sums of money from the national government and is thus a convenient way to disburse political rewards. Political leaders and governments can use village water supplies as a means of showing their rural constituents their concern with development and progress, of allaying political opposition, and of rewarding political supporters.

The "How" of Water Supply

Let us assume that the decision has been made to undertake a rural water supply and sanitation program that will address the country's needs. How does one proceed with such a complicated and potentially costly effort? The United States Agency for International Development has developed a set of materials called "Water for the World" that provides many of the answers.

There are two kinds of materials in the "Water for the World" series. First, there is a volume titled *Safe Water and Waste Disposal for Rural Health: A Program Guide*. This book was written for people in the developing nations who have or are interested in having the responsibility for developing a countrywide rural water supply and sanitation program. It is not primarily a technical manual, although it describes the water supply and sanitation technologies best suited for use in village settings. It is written



for the program manager and includes advice on almost every aspect of setting up a program—technology, planning, community participation, human resource development, and economics. The second part of "Water for the World" is a set of about 160 technical notes which describe in detail water and sanitation methods, their planning, design, construction, and operation and maintenance. These technical notes are intended for people working in the field on water supply and sanitation projects, and they can be used in a variety of ways.

Begin working on your water supply and sanitation program by reading these materials, especially the *Program Guide*. Study them, talk about them with other people, distribute them to anyone who is also interested in a program for the Decade. But, most of all, *use them to plan a program for your country.*

The greatest usefulness of these materials lies in their ability to help the program planner understand water supply and sanitation programs and what they involve. This understanding must then be turned into a detailed design for the program best suited to meet the needs of a country and accomplish the objectives the country considers important. This program design should be done in-country and it should reflect the health, social, economic and political benefits that a country's leaders want to achieve through the program.

Something will happen in all of the developing nations as a result of the Decade for Water, and everything that happens will to some extent be beneficial. There are enough technical assistance and financing agencies involved in the Decade to ensure that every country that is willing to accept help gets it—at some level and in some form. Without a detailed in-country program and plan, however, available external resources—not the needs and desires of the country—may dictate what is done. Programs, plans and solutions from outside the country will receive highest priority. In the end the goals achieved may be those of the donor agencies, simply because local goals have not been clarified and promoted.

Seize the initiative, plan the program, control the resources. Use outside help, of course, but use it to further the goals of your country's own program. It is especially important that people in the country prepare the program plan. A country that has a water supply and sanitation program plan prepared—knows what it wants to do and generally how it wants to do it—has the best chance of obtaining outside resources and of making maximum use of them for its own purposes.

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This document is a summary of a book entitled *Safe Water and Waste Disposal for Rural Health: A Program Guide* published as a part of "Water for the World" materials prepared under contract to the U.S. Agency for International Development. Other parts of "Water for the World" include about 160 technical notes on narrowly-defined technical topics and two documents similar in length to this one entitled *Executive Summary, Safe Water and Waste Disposal for Rural Health: A Program Guide* and *Program Implementation for the Decade for Water*.

July, 1982