

PVI and AllKids ‘Water for Toilets’ Delivers Results

PVI’s Cambodia work over 2014-2016 has focused on providing water at schools in the poor rural Ream/Battrang area, South West Cambodia. Toilets were provided when the schools were built but are derelict and unusable due to lack of water supply. The idea that toilets would be used with students carrying buckets of water from nearby dam or hand pump on a bore was always an unlikely option. Water needs to be provided and the toilets and the septic systems renovated for the toilets to become usable again.

The ‘water for toilets’ initiative was undertaken by PVI in conjunction with the local education aid NGO, AllKids and supplements their comprehensive program of providing education and personal development for local children. Most of the children in the AllKids’ program weren’t previously attending school. As a result of AllKids’ various activities including improving the facilities and supporting teaching programs in government as well as teaching at AllKids learning centre, attendance has increased at AllKids and local government schools and retention rates are up with approximately 90% of children now completing primary school with most continuing to secondary school. There are now less than 5% of children not attending school. These are just some of the very positive outcomes.

Prior to ‘water for toilets’ 45% of students had access to toilets assuming the overall average for Cambodia applies in Ream/Battrang area. The toilets they used would have mostly been in their homes or shared village toilets.

‘Water for toilets’ projects over the last 3 years has provided access to toilets for a total of 2,800 students (2014 – 1,000 students at Smach Deng Primary School, 2015 – 1,200 students at Smach Deng Secondary School, 2016 – 600 students at Battrang Primary & Secondary Schools). The numbers of students at these schools represent a little more than 80% of the total students currently attending local schools. Given that some of the students attending other schools have access to toilets outside the schools they attend, the proportion of students that now have access to toilets has increased to 90%.

PVI is hoping to provide water supply and renovate toilets at another local school of 500 students in 2017. This would increase the total number of students with toilet access at school to 3,300 which would represent 96% of students currently attending schools in Ream/Battrang area.

The proportion of school students in the Ream/Battrang area that now have access to toilets has increased to 90% as a result of PVI’s ‘water for toilets’ program over the last 3 years. A further project in 2017 is expected to increase the proportion to 96%.

The unfortunate truth is that, in contrast to their urban sisters and brothers, the majority of Cambodians living in rural areas don’t use toilets. Whilst the government has adopted the UN goal of providing toilets to all Cambodians, the progress is slow. Currently more than 50% of rural Cambodians don’t use toilets¹. It’s estimated that 1,500 students of the 2,800 attending the 3 schools we have worked at over the last 3 years now have access to toilets for the first time.

¹ There are varying estimates of % not using toilets. Cambodian government estimates 54% of the rural population don’t use toilets and the UN estimates the number at 61%. 55% is assumed as a conservative estimate that is used for calculations in this report.

It is a given that the first step is to provide access to functioning toilets. However, this isn't job done! There is further work to ensure children use the toilets properly and the schools institute hygiene programs to consolidate the benefits. There is also a challenge of ensuring the water supply is secure and maintained.

PVI's partnership with AllKids is a great advantage in this regard. AllKids runs a successful education program at its own learning centre. The students also attend government schools in the area as part of the AllKids program. The success of the AllKids program and delivery of school improvements through PVI and other volunteer aid groups provides AllKids with a high level of credibility and influence. AllKids use this to incentivise government schools to introduce hygiene and other programs including proper use and maintenance of functioning toilets. AllKids' work in this area is foresighted and will complement the government's policy to introduce programs on sanitation and hygiene into schools starting this year.

The results to date of 'water for toilets' program in the Ream area are impressive but there is still more to do.