

4. Eliminating schistosomiasis via MDAs and improved water, sanitation and hygiene

Schistosomiasis, a parasitic disease caused by blood flukes, is one of the neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) continuing to affect the Region. It is endemic in parts of Cambodia, China, the Lao People's Democratic Republic and the Philippines. Transmission occurs through contact with freshwater that has been contaminated by excreta from people already infected. The disease can cause bloody diarrhoea and vomiting, anaemia, stunting, developmental retardation, spleen enlargement and even death in severe cases. The economic and social effects of the disease are significant.

In Cambodia and the Lao People's Democratic Republic, in some villages bordering the Mekong River, the disease was highly endemic with high mortality a few decades ago. Annual mass drug administrations (MDAs) over 20 years have significantly reduced the prevalence of infection in these endemic villages. Continuing contamination of the river with excreta due to poor sanitation in affected villages means MDAs are not enough to achieve elimination. Also key are efforts to prevent contamination of river water by improving access to sanitation and eliminating open defecation.

A community-led initiative called CL-SWASH, building on national efforts to expand participatory water safety planning, is being implemented jointly by Government authorities responsible for



CL-SWASH, a community-led initiative to eliminate schistosomiasis with water, sanitation and hygiene interventions, uses team members chosen by their communities in Cambodia to discuss open defecation and households without latrines.

NTDs and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) in Cambodia and the Lao People's Democratic Republic, and by the affected communities themselves, facilitated by WHO. This initiative aims

to eliminate schistosomiasis through strengthening WASH in affected villages, in addition to annual rounds of MDA. Reflecting the cross-cutting nature of the initiative, it has been supported by WHO teams in the Regional Office and in the country offices responsible for malaria, vector-borne and parasitic diseases including NTDs, and health and the environment.

Local facilitators conducted community training in endemic villages with a focus on the empowerment of villagers to identify and address key local issues. During the training, villagers selected a village CL-SWASH team that then went house to house with checklists, water test kits and malnutrition screening kits to assess the situation. They mapped the results of the survey including areas used for open defecation and households without latrines, and discussed the findings and possible solutions they could enact without outside assistance. Villagers developed their own CL-SWASH plan and pledged to follow it, including building and using latrines at their own expense.

Encouraged by the enthusiasm of villagers, the countries have developed a roll-out plan for expanding the initiative to all endemic villages, with the goal of eliminating schistosomiasis by 2020. ■