Developing a plan for community water security

What is this Action Sheet about?

When people have raised community awareness about the problems they face in meeting their water security needs (see Action Sheet 10 and 11), they are ready to take the next step. Communities can work together to plan for water security. Planning needs to start with an assessment of current water security. This could take the form of a Water Watch activity.

What is a Water Watch?

A Water Watch activity can help a group choose the best sources of safe drinking water. It can also help find sources of contamination now, or possible problems in the future.

A Water Watch activity can be a long process that involves the whole community and includes many of the steps in planning a water project, or it can be a shorter process done by a small group responsible for community water safety and supply. The most important thing is to listen closely to the whole community, especially those who collect and treat water every day.

How to do a Water Watch activity

1. Talk to people who use and care for the water

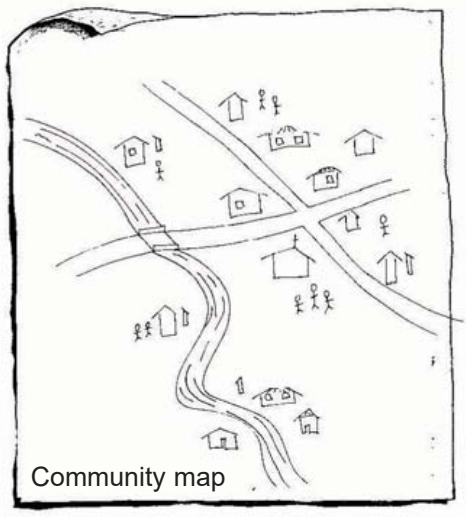
Is there a person or group in the community responsible for wells, pipes, or other water supply systems? Is there a person or group responsible for sanitation? Which people or groups most often collect, carry, treat, and store the water? These people or groups should be involved in the Water Watch and in any improvements to water sources.

Together with the people responsible for the water, list all the water sources in the area. Note what people say about drinking water quality and quantity. Note the work it takes to collect water and ensure that it is safe, and how much time people spend doing this work.

You can ask questions like:
- How much water is used every day?
- Are different sources used for drinking, cooking, bathing, watering livestock, farming, and other needs?
- Is there enough water for all these needs?
- Is there a water source or storage for emergencies?

2. Make a map of local water sorces and sources of contamination

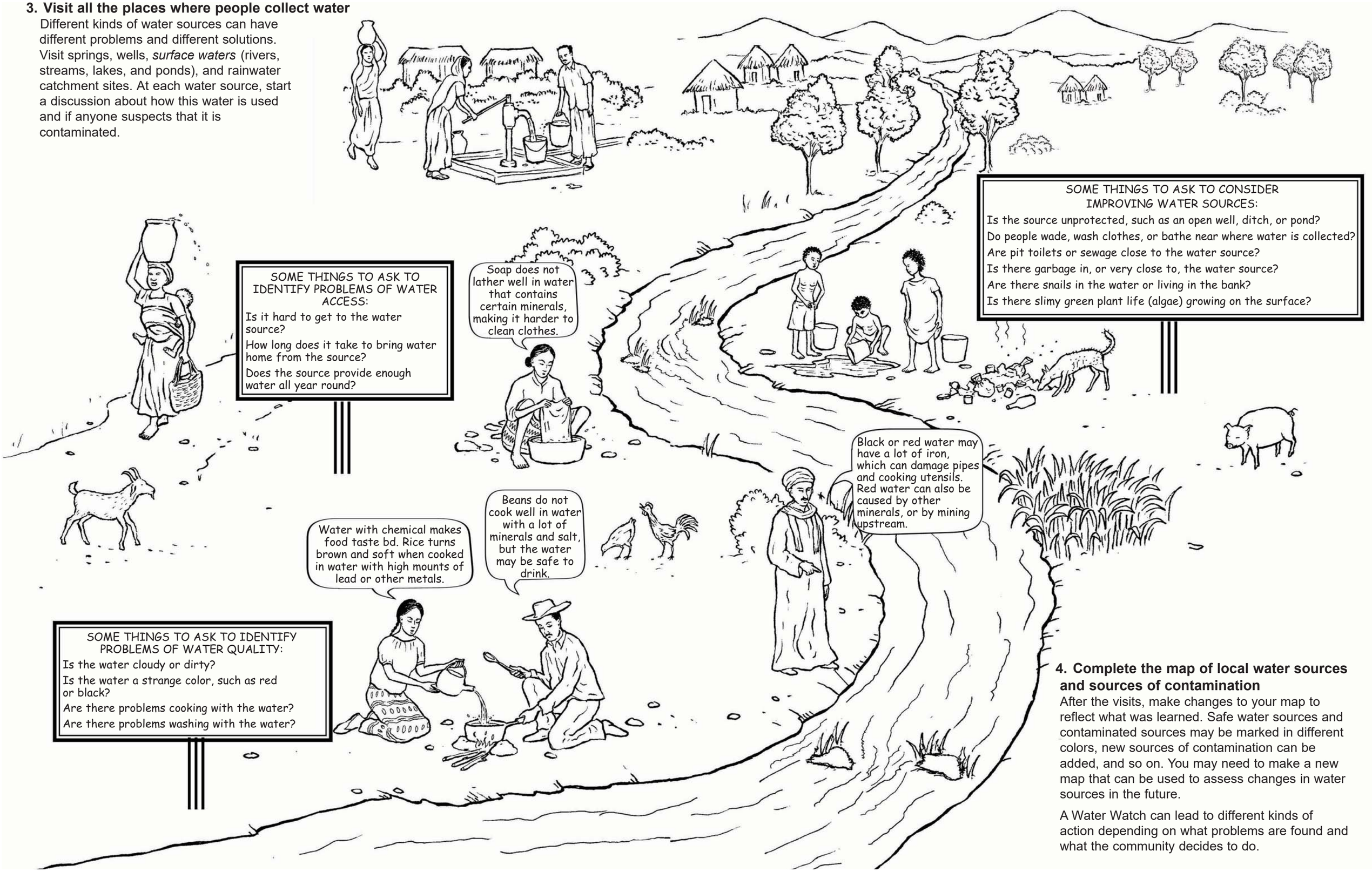
A map of the community can show where the water sources are in relation to people's homes and to sources of contamination. A map should also show important landmarks such as roads, paths, houses and other buildings, farms, fields, toilets and sewer lines, and dumping sites.



Community map

3. Visit all the places where people collect water

Different kinds of water sources can have different problems and different solutions. Visit springs, wells, *surface waters* (rivers, streams, lakes, and ponds), and rainwater catchment sites. At each water source, start a discussion about how this water is used and if anyone suspects that it is contaminated.



4. Complete the map of local water sources and sources of contamination

After the visits, make changes to your map to reflect what was learned. Safe water sources and contaminated sources may be marked in different colors, new sources of contamination can be added, and so on. You may need to make a new map that can be used to assess changes in water sources in the future.

A Water Watch can lead to different kinds of action depending on what problems are found and what the community decides to do.

Who should be involved in planning for water?

Everybody. Men, women and children. Women may have different needs for water than men. It is usually women who collect and treat water for family use, but it is often men who are in charge of building and maintaining water systems. Because of these differences in men's and women's work and needs, it can be useful to create planning activities that ensure women's participation.

This activity helps women think about their water needs and the barriers they face in meeting these needs.

Time: 45 minutes to 1 hour

Materials: Large drawing paper, drawing pens

Step 1: Divide into groups of no more than 10 people each. Give each group drawing pens or pencils and paper.

Step 2: Each group draws 2 circles on their paper, a large circle with a smaller circle inside.

Step 3: Each person draws inside the larger circle the water, sanitation, and health-related problems that affect the whole community. Inside the smaller circle they draw the problems that affect women in particular. If a person cannot draw, she can write down her thoughts or have some else do it for them.

Step 4: Now bring all the groups together into one large group and begin a discussion.

- How do the problems in the 2 circles differ?

- How are the problems similar?

- What solutions can be found for both, making sure that the women's problems receive sufficient attention?

This activity can also be done with men.

- Have one of the groups consist only of men, and have each group draw 2 small circles rather than only one. One of the smaller circles represents problems that affect women in particular and one represents problems that affect men.

- When the groups come back together, ask the men to consider how they can help improve conditions in the community by addressing some of the issues that affect women. This may include building toilets closer to homes, carrying water, spending more time with children, ...

- It may be more comfortable to have the women discuss their issues in private before the men discuss theirs, especially in communities where men and women may have strong differences of opinion.

How can we use the Water Watch results to plan improvements to our water supply?
After doing a Water Watch or using other methods to understand your community water security problems, you can begin to plan improvements.

When making a plan to improve the water supply, start with local resources including: local water sources, people with the skills to build improved wells or water storage tanks or install pipes, or older people who remember how water was collected many years ago. It is best to improve existing water sources before trying to develop new ones.

Identify possible solutions
The actions your community takes to improve water security depend on which problems are most urgent, or easiest to solve first. What is important is to make a plan that addresses the root causes of the problems and satisfies the needs of everyone in the community.

If water is scarce or difficult to get to, building rainwater catchment tanks, storage tanks or a piped water system may help bring water closer to the community (see Action Sheet 13-22). If this is not possible, can the work of collecting water be shared to make it fairer and easier for everyone? If there already is a water system, can the community improve it using better collection methods, fixing broken pipes and pumps, protecting water sources and conserving water? If it is a problem that should be resolved by the government, can the community solicit government support?

If the water is contaminated by germs, the source can be improved or the water can be treated to make it safe. The community can discuss which of these options will be easiest, most effective, and most sustainable over time. To learn about improving water sources, see Action Sheets 16 and 19. To learn about different methods for water treatment, see Action Sheet 23-25.

If the water may be contaminated by chemicals the water should not be used until a water quality test can be done (see Action Sheet 11). If a test shows that the water is contaminated, more contamination should be prevented and another water source should be developed.

What are the barriers to planning a water project?
There can be many reasons why a community lacks safe water. Problems might include lack of money, lack of knowledge about building water systems, lack of support from the government, or lack of participation by people in the community. To achieve the goal of safe water, the barriers must be identified and removed one by one.

People are more likely to improve their water source and to maintain a water system when they see:

- immediate community benefits such as more water, easier access, or less disease.
- low cost.
- only small changes in daily routine.
- positive results such as less mud, fewer mosquitoes, or more water for home gardens.

Health workers and water safety promoters can help the community improve water security.

Who is responsible for water security?

All over the world people are working to ensure their rights to enough, safe water. Because water is a human right, governments are responsible to meet people's need for enough, safe water. It often takes people working together to make sure the government will honor and protect their rights to water security. Some people believe that private companies can provide better service than governments. But when private companies take control of water services (water privatization), prices are often raised, forcing many people to drastically reduce the amount of water they use. This leads to serious health risks such as diarrhea illnesses. It also forces people to find places where they can collect water for free. This takes a lot of time and hard work, and the water they find may not be safe for drinking.

When governments and communities work together, a good plan to ensure water security — especially for those most in need — can be made.

Partnerships improve water access

In the West African country of Ghana, some community groups have taken the problem of water security into their own hands. In the small town of Savelugu, the government run Ghana Water Company supplies water to the community. The community members are responsible for pricing, distribution, and repair of the water system. They call this a government community partnership.

Both the community and the government run company benefit from the partnership. Because the community is responsible for managing the water, access to water is guaranteed by popular decision making. If some people cannot afford to pay for water, the community pays for their water until they can afford to pay. People's needs are met because they are respected as members of the community — not because they have money to pay. The Ghana Water Company benefits because the community always pays for the water supply.

Savelugu's community based system is being used as a model for small towns throughout Ghana. By managing their own water system, the people of Savelugu have shown that privatization is not the only way to provide water. Since their government community partnership began, there is less illness and everyone has enough water. Their success has shown that community decision making and responsibility is one way to improve water security.

International law and the right to water

Access to enough, safe water is recognized as a human right in many international laws and agreements. One of these agreements, called *General Comment 15*, states:

The human right to water entitles everyone to sufficient, safe, acceptable, physically accessible and affordable water for personal and domestic uses. An adequate amount of safe water is necessary to prevent death from dehydration, to reduce the risk of water-related disease and to provide for consumption, cooking, personal and domestic hygienic requirements.

Other international agreements that protect the human right to water include:

- The United Nations Charter
- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights
- The Geneva Convention
- The Declaration on the Right to Development
- The Convention on the Rights of the Child
- The Stockholm Declaration
- The Mar del Plata Action Plan
- The African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights
- The Dublin Statement
- Agenda 21
- The Millennium Declaration of Johannesburg
- The European Council of Environmental Law
- Resolution on the Right to Water
- The Protocol of San Salvador

Most countries have agreed to the conditions of some or all of these conventions.

Governments have a responsibility to protect water sources for the common use of all people. Like other rights, the right to water only exists if people use it and defend it. As water grows scarce and becomes a source of ongoing conflict around the world, communities, governments, and international agencies need to work hard to defend the right to water for today and for the future.

Acknowledgements
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More information

CAWST Centre for Affordable Water and Sanitation Technology www.cawst.org

Freshwater Action Network www.freshwateraction.net
Gender and Water Alliance www.genderandwater.org
Network for Water and Sanitation International (NETWAS) www.netwas.org/
Siren Conservation Education www.siren.org.uk
UNDP Community Water Initiative www.undp.org/water/
Advocacy Manual for Gender and Water Ambassadors: Guidelines, Training Module, Case Studies, Gender and Water Alliance, 2003 www.genderandwater.org
Small Community Water Supplies: Technology, people and partnership; J. Smet, and C. van Wijk (Eds). 2002.

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