

A photograph of a man in a dark tank top and shorts walking through a lush green field. He is carrying two buckets, one green and one black, on a shoulder pole. In the background, there is a wooden structure with a white container on it.

SNV

Functionality of Rural Water Supply Services

Water Supply Types

WATER SUPPLIES IN SAVANNAKHET AND THEIR ROLE IN DEVELOPMENT

Rural households in Southern Laos rely on a variety of water supplies: boreholes, dug wells, rainwater, rivers and ponds. Coverage levels for improved water supplies in rural Laos are currently at 65%. The 7th National Socio-Economic Development Plan aims for 75% by the end of 2015. Instead of building more water supplies, SNV's "Functionality of Rural Water Supply Services" (FRWS) programme in Lao PDR focuses on ensuring that the existing ones work. To do that, we need to know which supplies serve the most people and which need greater support.

A safe, reliable water supply is necessary for health, hygiene, and regular use of sanitation in Laos, where most people are anal washers and flush toilets are preferred even in rural areas.

Surveying water supply types

This paper highlights some of the results from SNV's 2013 FRWS baseline survey, which conducted 734 household interviews in Atsaphone and Phine Districts of Savannakhet, assessing the water supply service levels they receive. The baseline captured the types of water supply used by households for consumption and basic personal hygiene purposes.

**BOREHOLES
ARE THE MOST
COMMONLY
USED SUPPLY**

Wealthier families use a borehole

The baseline report shows that most households use a borehole for water supply in both Atsaphone (73%) and Phine (64%) Districts. The second most used supply in Atsaphone is dug wells whilst in Phine it is natural surface water sources. A surprisingly low number of households use rainwater as a water supply.

In both districts, wealthier households are twice as likely to rely only on boreholes as their main supply, inferring that most are private supplies. In both districts, wealthier households are twice as likely to rely only on boreholes (under the WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme classification ground water is assumed to be safer than surface water) as their main supply, inferring that most are private supplies. Therefore, programmes which only aim to improve the functionality of boreholes would benefit many rural households, but would serve a higher proportion of wealthier than poorer households.

Targeting poor households

The baseline found that Atsaphone households were more likely to use dug wells as a secondary supply. Poorer Atsaphone households are seven times more



Boreholes are the most commonly used water supplies in both districts.



Handpumps are very common in Savannakhet.



Rainwater quality and accessibility is good, but few use it.

likely to use a dug well as their main supply. In Phine, two thirds of poor households use surface water as their main supply. In Phine, secondary supplies were also more likely to be streams or ponds.

To improve the water supply service levels of poorer families programmes need to address the quality problems associated with ponds, streams and dug wells, by providing protection and improving maintenance.

Addressing preferences for drinking unsafe water

Although over 60% of Phine households and over 70% of Atsaphone use at least one improved water supply, many families reported using an unimproved water source as their main supply. This preference was much stronger among wealthier families. In both districts, seven out of ten of the poorest 20% of households named an improved supply as their main supply, compared to only two or three out of ten wealthier households.

This suggests that households who can choose their supply prefer to drink water from unimproved supplies which needs to be addressed through targeted behaviour change communication.

Rainwater is a good supply, but seldom used

Rainwater is a potentially safe and highly accessible supply yet surprisingly, it is very rarely used in both districts. Only 14 households (2%) out of 734 sampled use rainwater as one of their water supplies, even though 595 (80%) of houses have a suitable roof. Investigating the main barriers to wider use of rain water harvesting may be useful to raising household service levels.

Public water supplies are heavily relied upon

Although self-supply is common in Laos and many people aspire to own a private supply, our baseline found that more than half the households in both districts relied entirely on public water supplies. A third of households used only a private supply. Remaining families used a combination of private and public supplies.



The poorest households often rely on surface water.

Dug wells are much more common in Atsaphone than in Phine.



Therefore, although the number of private supplies is rising, keeping communal supplies functional is still an essential part of providing basic services to rural households.

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