



LMI: Bringing Water & Sanitation to the Urban Poor

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Photo: Jay Tecson

Through its unique WaterLinks partnerships, USAID's ECO-Asia program brings water and wastewater operators and experts from around the world together with their counterparts in Thailand and Vietnam to expand service and bring safer, cleaner water to the urban poor.



Photo: ECO-Asia

A Malaysian engineer works with a fellow water engineer in Vietnam to evaluate water distribution as part of their partnership through WaterLinks.

BACKGROUND

Widespread migration from the countryside is placing tremendous stress on urban water supplies and sanitation services delivery throughout Asia. This has placed a heavy burden on the nations of the Lower Mekong region as well as on the millions of urban poor who lack direct access to clean water. Further, many water services providers in Asian cities lack the proper management skills and suffer from weak governance, inefficient operations, aging infrastructure, and limited investment. Each of these contributes to poor service delivery and reduces access to safe water supply and basic sanitation. This in turn leads to higher rates of disease and child mortality from preventable waterborne illnesses and a corresponding loss of economic productivity.

Improving access to clean water and adequate sanitation, therefore, is a high priority for the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the countries that make up the Lower Mekong Initiative (LMI). The fact that the UN Millennium Development Goal calls for halving the number of people without sustainable access to safe water supply and basic sanitation by 2015 only adds to the importance of innovative and effective programming in this critical sector.

PROGRAM ACTIVITIES IN THE LOWER MEKONG BASIN

Participating Countries: Thailand and Vietnam

One component of the LMI is USAID's Environmental Cooperation-Asia (ECO-Asia). This \$29 million, seven-year regional program began in 2005. Among its primary goals is increasing the number of urban households that receive clean water directly in their homes. To do this, ECO-Asia joined forces with the Asian Development Bank and the International Water Association to create WaterLinks. This is a unique network of water operators and managers from all over Asia and the United States who provide technical solutions and mentor water managers and operators in Thailand and Vietnam. To date, this has proven a very effective means of improving the quality of water delivery in the LMI region.

For example, the waterworks in Khon Kaen in northeastern Thailand was having trouble with its treated water and the residual chlorine in its pipe network. WaterLinks helped respond to the problems by



Photo: ECO-Asia

WaterLinks facilitates behavior change and increasing demand for water and sanitation services through the 10-step Water & Sanitation Promotion Handbook.



Photo: ECO-Asia

Through WaterLinks, ECO-Asia partners with water and wastewater operators in Asia's cities to effectively transfer innovations and improve service delivery.

bringing in experts from the Korean Water Resources Company, South Korea, who helped resolve the issues, and now 80,000 residents of Khon Kaen have cleaner, safer water.

WaterLinks partnerships also provide on-the-job training, peer review, and technology demonstrations. To date, over 500 staff of the water utilities in Thailand and Vietnam have received training in subjects like water loss reduction, water and sanitation promotion, water treatment and water quality monitoring. At the same time, the program has leveraged \$84,000 from Vietnam and more than \$1 million from Thailand, a clear sign of the value the partners put on these activities.

The partnership program also develops technical handbooks and manuals for practitioners. A recent example of this is the support the Wastewater Treatment Division of King County in Washington State gave to Thailand's Wastewater Management Authority to improve its operations. After work at a pilot site in Thailand, the King County managers helped develop a technical handbook and operational and maintenance manual which Thai authorities have now adopted for use throughout the country.

WaterLinks is an international system of partnerships, bringing water and wastewater service providers in Thailand and Vietnam together with technical experts from South Korea, Macao, Malaysia, the Philippines, and the United States. Participating organizations in Vietnam include Bac Ninh Water Supply and Sewerage, Danang Water Supply Company, and Khanh Hoa Water Supply Company. In Thailand, the program's principal partners are the Thailand Provincial Waterworks Authority, and the Wastewater Management Authority.

PARTNERS

Implementing Partner: AECOM International Development

Cooperating Partners: Asian Development Bank, International Water Association, ASEAN Environmentally Sustainable Cities Initiative, World Health Organization, Southeast Asian Water Utilities Network (SEAWUN), South Asia Water Utilities Network (SAWUN) water services providers