

agency news

In another new feature, we bring you news of what the agencies have been 'up to'. Our definition of agency could be seen as rather loose — we will certainly include news of how the World Bank is choosing to spend the monies destined for the W&S sector, but we'll also cover developments on a much smaller scale, with items on Southern agencies.

BRAC

The discovery of arsenic in groundwater in Bangladesh is arousing widespread concern. BRAC (Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee) workers who are determining the level of arsenic contamination in tubewell water have found that village-based healthworkers are ideal for carrying out large-scale testing campaigns.

In collaboration with the Government of Bangladesh, BRAC conducted a testing programme to determine the level of arsenic concentration in the tubewells of Hajiganj *thana*, thereby developing a simple, inexpensive and rapid arsenic-testing methodology, while at the same time assessing the testing capabilities of BRAC-trained village healthworkers.

Out of a total of 11 954 tubewells, arsenic concentration in 859 was found to be within 0.01 mg/litre. The remaining 11 095 (93 per cent) were found to be contaminated with arsenic concentration greater than the acceptable limit. The validity of the field-kit results was confirmed by the analysis (by spectrophotometer) of 193 randomly selected water samples.

For more information, contact: Md. Jakariya, Environmental Researcher, Research and Evaluation Division, 75 Mohakhali, Dhaka 1212, Bangladesh. E-mail: bracamr@bdmail.net. For more information on the arsenic-poisoning situation in Bangladesh, consult the West Bengal and Bangladesh Arsenic Crisis Information Centre's website at: <http://was.net/wei/dch/acic/index.html>

Tearfund

While the Brazilians display their footballing skills at the World Cup in France this summer, their countrymen in the north-east are facing serious drought and food shortages.

The situation has got so bad that people are rioting and breaking into foodstores. A Tearfund partner, Centro Evangélico Missionário (CEM), which runs vocational training courses in the heart of the affected area, reported recently that its students were collapsing because of hunger. According to Martinez da Cruz: 'The local government used to provide CEM students with free meals in the day but this was discontinued about two years ago. CEM suspects it is because of political interests and the fact that CEM is an evangelical Christian organization.'

Da Cruz believes there is much more the Brazilian government and the churches could do to help: 'The government recognizes that the situation is serious but is too slow to respond. People are starving now.'

WHO

The Water, Sanitation and Health programme of the World Health Organization is facing an extensive restructuring process. Meanwhile, several crucial activities are taking place, including: in partnership with Unicef and the Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council, the establishment of a process leading to a major report on the status of the W&S sector; the approval of a new WHO strategy on environmental sanitation for high-risk communities; a planning meeting on the AFRICA 2000 Initiative on water supply and sanitation, which will count on the participation of all sub-Saharan African countries, to take place in Harare from 28 September to 2 October 1998. WHO is also sponsoring several national workshops on the sustainability and optimization of W&S systems and training courses on Participatory Hygiene and Sanitation Transformation (PHAST) in partnership with selected collaborating agencies.

WaterAid

Last March, WaterAid held its first international hygiene education workshop in Bangladesh. The participants — staff and partners from 11 country programmes — looked at:

- problems implementing hygiene messages;
- baseline surveys: purpose and content;
- ensuring stakeholder participation;
- using participatory tools;
- gender in hygiene education;
- working with children;
- measuring hygiene-behaviour change.

WaterAid is now prioritizing — and revising its Hygiene Education Policy to reflect this — the monitoring and evaluation of hygiene-education interventions; the gender implications of integrated projects; and children as a target group. Get a copy of the report from Vicky Blagbrough, WaterAid, 27-9 Albert Embankment, London SE1 7UB, UK. E-mail: wateraid@compuserve.com

UNICEF

The United Nations Foundation, formed to distribute a \$1 billion gift to the UN from Ted Turner, founder of Cable News Network (CNN), has awarded \$4 million to Unicef in the first set of grants awarded to UN agencies.

The largest grant (£1.75 million) is for a three-year guinea-worm eradication project in Africa. The disease, which is targeted for global eradication by 2000, is caused by a parasite found in drinking-water, and causes deformities, ulcers, fever and debilitating pain.