



# Wells for India

Bringing water and dignity  
to the poorest people of rural Rajasthan

*“We will not achieve the Millennium Development Goals without India”*

Focussing on provision of safe water is the key to poverty alleviation. This is particularly true for the people living in rural Rajasthan, where in the most populated desert in the world, water resources are severely stressed, resulting in poverty, malnutrition, poor health, poor education and environmental degradation. All factors which force people to migrate to the city slums in the hope of finding a better life.

One of India's major challenges to reaching the Millennium Development Goals is the mass migration of people from rural areas to the city slums in search of improved livelihoods. But if more resources are concentrated on rural populations and villages, migration to city slums will lessen. Indeed, schemes and models for reversing this trend are needed in areas where we are working.

Having access to a safe and reliable water supply and improved sanitation are two of the most important criteria for eliminating poverty. By addressing the root cause of the problem – poor water resource management in *rural* areas – we increase the sustainability and long-term effectiveness of our interventions.

Wells for India works with local partners in the Indian State of Rajasthan on community managed projects. Our work has proven impacts on every aspect of poverty elimination. We place emphasis on working on the poorest people such as tribal minority groups and people from lower castes. Rajasthan has the highest proportion in India of people from scheduled castes, and a high proportion of tribal people, (Rajasthan Human Development Report, 2002). By improving water resources in *rural* India we enhance the lives of thousands of these marginalised and vulnerable minority groups who are most unlikely to benefit from trickle down of any newly created wealth.

Access to water and improved sanitation contributes to each one of the Millennium Development Goals.

1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger

By harvesting rainwater and storing it for use throughout the year, Wells for India helps rural communities obtain sufficient water to harvest their crops and increase their livelihoods.

2. Achieve universal primary education

By adopting rainwater harvesting techniques, rural schools would have sufficient water for children and staff. Improved sanitation in schools is especially important for keeping girls in education. By improving access to water for the community, children no longer have to spend hours fetching water, they have time to attend school. Improving water supply and sanitation in schools encourages teachers to work in rural areas. These principles both theory and practice need to be built into the curriculum to foster environmental awareness.

3. Promote gender equality and empower women

Women are the main stakeholders in water management. They are the water carriers and the family hygiene educators. By having a sustainable and safe source of water near to their homes, Wells for India helps women find more time for family, rest and income generating activities. And by including rural women in community water projects Wells for India helps women raise their profile and standing in their communities.

#### 4. Reduce Child mortality

Without access to a source of safe water the health of the poorest people in rural Rajasthan suffers. One in nine children die before they are 5 years old and 50% suffer from malnutrition. Wells for India's projects focus on bringing water to the poorest and most vulnerable, including children.

#### 5. Improve maternal health

The death rate of women in childbirth in Rajasthan is one of the highest in the world. Pregnant women in rural Rajasthan have to walk great distances to fetch water. This has negative impacts on both the women and their babies. By having access to water close to their homes, women no longer need to risk their health and that of their unborn child.

#### 6. Combat HIV and AIDS, Malaria and other diseases

A sustainable safe source of water is crucial to good health. Each year water-related disease claims over 2 million lives, mostly in developing countries. Diarrhoea claims some 450,000 lives annually in India — more than in any other country, (Human Development report 2006). In rural Rajasthan, Wells for India is working with communities to improve their access to safe water sources and improved sanitation and so improving health.

#### 7. Ensure environmental sustainability

By managing water resources holistically, and using natural watershed management India's rural poor can have sufficient water for agriculture and livestock without degrading their environment. The Thar Desert in Rajasthan has suffered from severe deforestation which results in soil erosion and poor penetration of water into the ground. A key part of the work of Wells for India is water harvesting — slowing down and capturing the flow of water. This improves the long term availability of groundwater over the inter-monsoon season, providing more water for animals and safe, fresh water for drinking and household use.

#### 8. Develop a global partnership for development

By focusing aid on water and sanitation in rural areas, India's rural population will become healthier and wealthier. Migration to city slums will decrease and rural livelihoods will improve. Local community based organisations, international non-governmental organisations as well as the Government of India should work together to tackle the shameful lack of access to safe water and improved sanitation in rural India.

We are urging other organisations and the Indian and UK Governments to consider the above considerations regarding rural India at least as a minor stream of its policy towards India. As outlined above, it is a priority to stabilise the rural communities, based on holistic management and to reverse the decline in migration towards the cities. A broader policy in this respect will, of course, have an indirect impact on urban India.