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Improving Safe Drinking Water Access in Emergencies

The Alliance & Its Partners

In August 2008, 4th Sector Health announced an alliance with Procter & Gamble's (P&G) Children's Safe Drinking Water Program to improve access to safe drinking water for populations living in disaster-prone areas. More than three-quarters of the population in Latin America lives in high-risk areas. Central America is especially plagued by frequent natural disasters, ranging from hurricanes and floods to earthquakes and droughts. As a result, access to clean and safe drinking water in the affected communities is interrupted. Unsafe water, sanitation, and hygiene practices are responsible for the vast majority of diarrheal diseases, a leading cause of nearly 2 million deaths of children under age five annually.

P&G had long been a USAID partner to ensure safe drinking water for child survival in Africa and Asia with P&G Purifier of Water, a point-of-use water-purifying solution. In Latin America, P&G provides P&G Purifier of Water as part of disaster-relief programs. Because access to affected communities is difficult immediately



Mother and child enjoy clean drinking water.

after a disaster, the key to success in this strategy is prepositioning the product in high-risk areas before disaster strikes. According to Dr. Greg Allgood, Director of the Children's Safe Drinking Water Program, "In order to ensure that safe water is available, disaster management authorities need to have plans to

provide access to clean water before disasters strike." The P&G Purifier of Water is a household water-treatment product that kills bacteria and viruses and removes parasites, dirt, and pollutants from water, making it safe to drink.

To improve access to safe water, the alliance targeted vulnerable communities in Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua. P&G provided product donation and educational materials while 4th Sector Health provided USAID grant funds to preposition, train, and educate organizations and communities to distribute it and respond during a crisis.

Alliance Activities

Catholic Relief Services (CRS) was selected as the implementing partner given their prior experience in disaster relief efforts and their presence in the three countries. CRS worked with local governments and organizations in each country to distribute and preposition the P&G Purifier of Water in at-risk communities. CRS developed educational materials and trained local partners and organizations in the three countries. Spanish-language leaflets developed by CRS included key messages on hygiene, proper use of the water purification product, and appropriate disposal of the product residue and packaging. CRS also designed a support kit to ensure that communities facing disasters had the appropriate supplies.

"Safe and clean drinking water is one of the most important needs after disasters such as flooding, hurricanes, and earthquakes. Access to safe and clean water saves lives."

Dr. Greg Allgood, Director,
P&G's Children's Safe Drinking Water Program.

To increase awareness about the importance of safe and clean drinking water among local authorities and organizations, CRS worked closely with—and in some cases through—municipal and national-level government agencies and local NGOs. In every step of the process, from product distribution and prepositioning, to community education and establishing appropriate coordination mechanisms for disaster response and delivering safe water, CRS engaged local stakeholders.

Key Achievements

The alliance improved disaster preparedness in 95 communities in Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua. Ultimately, 7,118 families living in disaster-prone areas in these communities received supplies of P&G Purifier of Water and information on how to use the product. As a result of CRS's approach of working through local organizations, the initiative established local capacity to continue the safe water distribution efforts. As a testament to the importance of these activities, the communities that participated in them were prepared when heavy rains and flash floods hit Central America causing widespread damage in October 2011. In Guatemala alone, more than 47,000 people were affected by the rain, and 11,000 evacuated from their homes. As one CRS staff member described immediately after the floods, "These families are using the product now, and one community even shared part of their supply with a community that was severely affected by this recent storm."

CRS reported that the communities that received the product and training immediately recognized the value of

having effective point-of-use water treatment at hand when disasters hit. They especially noted the advantages of P&G Purifier of Water over bottled water: it is considerably cheaper and easier to transport and store. Beyond the communities, local disaster management authorities and governments were impressed with the quantity and quality of safe water provided by the product.

Conclusion and Lessons Learned

4th Sector Health's alliance with P&G demonstrates how development alliances can build on global corporate initiatives to make targeted investments that save lives. P&G was interested in expanding safe water access for disasters in Latin America, but lacked staff and resources to support expansion. Product donation alone would not have achieved the same results. Collaboration with 4th Sector Health brought an essential partner, CRS, to the table. CRS was able to operationalize the product prepositioning effort and helped P&G expand regional relationships and visibility within local disaster management agencies. The alliance achieved its goal to demonstrate the importance of safe water and the value of including P&G Purifier of Water as part of a disaster-response plan. As a result of this alliance, CRS recommends the use of P&G Purifier of Water to humanitarian organizations and government agencies. CRS also plans to procure additional supplies of P&G Purifier of Water directly from P&G to continue to preposition it in high-risk areas for future emergencies.



Keith Zook of P&G demonstrates using the company's Purifier of Water.

- 7,118 families received supplies to treat 12.5 gallons of water per day for four months
- More than 10 million gallons of clean water provided at roughly US\$0.02 per gallon
- 9 government agencies engaged in the prepositioning and distribution of P&G Purifier of Water to high-risk communities
- 5 government agencies strengthened the safe drinking water components of their disaster preparedness plans