

See Our World

An essential part of Plan's work is to help create spaces for children and young people to discuss together the issues which affect their lives, then ensure adults respect their views so that children may be involved in community decision-making. This communication has been prepared with and by children directly and is intended to give a general sense of the kinds of issues children discuss and how they work together.

Our Health in Our Hands

Dear Sponsor,

Warm greetings from Timor-Leste! We are children of Aileu, one of the districts where Plan Timor-Leste works. A meeting was arranged through our playgroup with other school children to discuss our concerns. We agreed that one of our major concerns is hand washing. With the support of Plan's Community Development Facilitator Romaldo and Programme Unit Manager Alvaro, we would like to share a story about our involvement in improving hand washing practises.

Why do we think hand washing is important? Before the programme started in our communities, we always became sick with diarrhoea and other diseases. Some of our friends even lost their lives because we did not always wash our hands after carrying out our daily chores or defecating and before we eat.

"We always had to smell human waste around our houses. We were not aware that the frequent diarrhoea which our friends, brothers and sisters suffered from was caused by that. We hope that adults can help us to end this situation in our community." - Carmelita, 16



At first, our local government and Plan had a programme to teach and encourage community members to build water systems and toilets and change attitudes and their way of thinking. But due to the poor economic situation of our families, Plan introduced an additional support which provides some of the materials needed for building water systems and toilets to help our communities.



Showing friends how to wash their hands

“In my village, many of us have no toilet at home. Children, adults and parents used to defecate in open spaces without washing their hands afterwards because there was no water and sometime we just defecate at the pig fence,” says Bona, 15.

Now we have been oriented on a child-to-child approach with the support of our local government, Plan and their partners. A child-to-child approach brings us, the children, together to share our experiences on washing hands and using toilets. In our discussions, we and our communities get to think about the way we live and the impact that it has on everybody’s health and on the environment.

“In my house we have built a small toilet in the backyard but there is no water. We need to walk to the river to fetch water but it’s only for cooking and washing clothes.” - Luis, 12



We gave a lot of input during community meetings to build hand washing facilities in our backyards. Through the child-to-child approach, we tell our friends about hand washing and even show them pictures of diseases that people can get if they do not wash their hands. Some families have used local materials in the village to voluntarily build toilets. The community

members are also constructing water systems with pipes, cement and other materials donated by Plan and with help from Plan partners. All these activities helped many children and community members become aware of the need for a good water system and sanitation practices to keep them healthy.



One of the new dry pit latrines built with our community’s own efforts

Our next tasks are going to be:

- Continue to tell our parents to build hand washing facilities and toilets
- Help our parents to fetch water to use for hand washing
- Remind our family members to wash their hands before eating and after using toilets
- Ask our community leaders to build a toilet at the playgroup site
- Facilitate awareness sessions at school and in the community on the hand washing issue with the help of Plan staff



*27 children participated in the discussion and the following were directly involved in the production of this document: **Zoela, Berta, Joel, Antonito, Zenilda, Jonia, Alcino, Jeferino, Luis, Bona and Carmelita***