



Photo Credit: Priyanka Amerasinghe



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# Mobilizing Lady Health Workers for safer food in Faisalabad, Pakistan

## Awareness raising campaigns run by Lady Health Workers have helped to improve sanitation and health for both farmers and consumers

Launched in 1994 by Pakistan's Ministry of Health, the Lady Health Workers (LHW) program was designed as a cost-effective approach to preventing and treating common ailments at the community level. Over 100,000 LHWs throughout the country provide basic health care and advice on reproductive health, immunization, nutrition, family planning and more. Researchers from the International Water Management Institute (IWMI) introduced intervention strategies towards safe food production through the government's primary health care program that employs thousands of community level LHWs. After three years, the results are visible throughout the district.





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Urban wastewater offers a steady and reliable supply of irrigation water which is high in nutrient content. By introducing simple preventive measures for farmers and consumers, the health risks associated with agricultural wastewater use can be drastically reduced.

## Raising awareness

The ever-increasing volumes of urban wastewater from cities in developing countries are both a boon and bane to farmers and consumers alike. The boon: a reliable supply of nutrient-rich irrigation water; the bane: health risks. In Pakistan, approximately 25% of all domestic vegetable production depends on urban wastewater. Today, the system of LHW introduced by the government is helping to make wastewater irrigation of food and fodder crops safe and sustainable. The program developed for the LHWs was based on IWMI's field-based research findings on health risks linked to wastewater farming and options for safe food production in the region.

IWMI's program engaged the LHWs to help identify contamination pathways that affect the health of farmers and consumers, and test simple, low-cost interventions such as mass deworming with anti-helminthic medicines, adoption of a package of good hygiene practices among farmers, and raising awareness of the production of safe food crops for consumers. While deworming campaigns are well-known through local school programs, focus on urban agriculturalists using wastewater for irrigation are now included as part of the target population for such programs.

## Factors leading to success

A key factor in the success of IWMI's interventions was the inclusion of spatial and temporal multiplier and follow-up activities in the existing LHW program. Initial studies were pilot-tested in two villages in Faisalabad's peri-urban perimeter with the support of the District Coordinator of the National Program for Family Planning and Primary Health Care (NPFP & PHC). Today, those experiences are being shared with other health workers throughout the district and a group of master trainers has been established. Also, regular sessions on health education have been launched for special 'Mother and Child' days. Deworming campaigns have been expanded to the whole district by the health department, which is also providing treatment twice a year in March/April and October/November. The package of practice also recommended preventive measures on best ways to ensure clean water for bathing, drinking and crop washing in the homes, fields and markets. The health department has followed-up with complementary projects to provide clean water to communities, including low-cost solar disinfection technology to treat small volumes of water at household level. There has been a marked reduction in cases of diarrhea as a result of these interventions. The Water and Sanitation Agency is also expanding its range of services to improve local hygienic conditions.

The original research project was funded by the German Government and implemented by researchers from IWMI. The research included health assessment surveys, raising awareness about health risks associated with wastewater-based livelihoods, and educational outreach programs on sanitation and hygiene behavior.

## Donors and collaborators

Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung (Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development) (BMZ), Germany.

## For more information

For more information on this and related projects, you can contact Priyanie Amerasinghe at [p.amerasinghe@cgiar.org](mailto:p.amerasinghe@cgiar.org) or visit the IWMI website ([www.iwmi.org](http://www.iwmi.org)).