A new approach to improve WASH in the schools of Lao PDR

Topics related to “Water, Sanitation and Hygiene” are not yet integrated in the curriculum of Lao schools. A SNV pilot project in six schools tested how to train teachers to integrate “WASH in schools” in their daily lessons.

Many in rural schools in Lao PDR do not pay much attention to sanitation and hygiene. The teachers and education officials often have little experience of participatory, child-centred teaching methods – particularly in relation to basic knowledge of safe drinking water, sanitation and hygiene. They lack the capacity to use available “WASH in Schools” guidelines and toolkits and integrate them in the curriculum.

SNV realised that schoolteachers need to be trained in the implementation of the “WASH in Schools” programme. In mid-2012, we designed a pilot examine how to improve the teachers skills on how to integrate safe water, sanitation and hygiene promotion in primary schools.

This paper documents results and lessons learned from this pilot. It illustrates an effective approach to promote “WASH” topics in schools by focusing on improving the capacity of provincial and district education staff and teachers.

Background: “WASH in schools”

“WASH in schools”¹ is a UNICEF programme that aims to bring safe drinking water, improved access to clean sanitation facilities and lifelong health to schools. It strives to “enhance

¹ Find out more: www.unicef.org/wash/schools
the well-being of children and their families, and pave the way for new generations of healthy children”.

Schools, after the family, are the most important places of learning for both boys and girls, and should be stimulating learning environments. If all boys and girls have access to basic facilities such as toilets, safe drinking water, clean surroundings and basic information on hygiene, they learn better and can in turn introduce sanitation and hygiene concepts and practices to their families. Similarly, teachers and students can function as role models and outreach to the wider community.

Combining CLTS, SLTS and “WASH in schools”

Early in 2010, the World Bank Water and Sanitation Program-East Asia and the Pacific and SNV agreed to develop and test approaches and tools and to develop in-country training capacity inspired by CLTS. The method that was developed by Kamil Kar in Bangladesh a dozen years ago. It mobilises the communities to completely eliminate open defecation. Its concepts have been adapted for the use in schools, called “School-led Total Sanitation” (SLTS).

The original idea is to let community members “analyse their own sanitation profile including the extent of open defecation and the spread of faecal-oral contamination that detrimentally affects every one of them”. The approach ignites a sense of disgust and shame among the community and mobilises them into initiating collective action to improve the sanitation situation in the community. SLTS preaches not to use this in schools but to work with appreciative inquiry and fun games. Both is called “triggering”. As seen in this pilot, “triggered” schools and their students also reach out to the wider community and spread the ideas learned in class in their villages.

To date, SNV and its partners have primarily focused on CLTS, “Community-led Total Sanitation” (CLTS) to encourage communities to become “Open Defecation Free”. At the same time, the Ministry of Education and Sports has already set up national policies and guidelines about WASH. UNICEF with its “Wash in schools” program provides help with infrastructure and materials. However, our experience with the SSH4A program showed that these good intentions were stuck at district level. Cardboard boxes with “WASH in schools” materials were not used and gathering dust in classroom corners. While the UNICEF program does superb work in building infrastructure, providing materials and helping devising policies, it lacks teacher training.

While working with the SSH4A program, we found teachers have been trained about WASH topics, but very briefly and formal. At the same time, we found many skilled and creative teachers. This pilot tried to fill this gap and find a way to empower primary school teachers to include topics related to WASH successfully in their school curricula.

2 Find out more: www.communityledtotalsanitation.org
Pilot program in Savannakhet

Situation in the participating schools
The pilot focuses on six of the total 64 schools of the SSH4A programme of SNV in Savannakhet. One of the six pilot schools is a composite school with multiple classes where three grades study with only one teacher. The other five are primary schools with five grades each. On site, the team is confronted with the following facts:

- One school has no toilet or water supply at all. Pupils return home to use a toilet or defecate in the forest. **Twelve toilets are not in use** as there was no water for flushing. Teachers also do not trust pupils to use them properly.
- There are **no other crucial sanitation and hygiene facilities present**, such as sinks for hand-washing, waste garbage pits, soak pits or drainage.
- The **teachers lacked the skill to deal with girls’ health and menstrual hygiene**, which are not part of the curriculum on sanitation, hygiene and health.
- Primary school **teachers had not received sufficient instruction** or orientation from education staff at provincial and district level on national policy, standards and guidelines for sanitation and hygiene promotion at schools.
- Primary school teachers have **difficulties translating national policy into practical guidelines** for implementation and are not equipped to deliver an interactive teaching and learning approach concerning health and hygiene education.

Better school lessons
SNV teamed up with the Participatory Development and Training Centre (PADETC) and provincial and district education staff in Savannakhet to develop and adapt practical guidelines for teachers to integrate WASH in school curriculums. During five days, sixteen provincial and district education staff and six primary school teachers were coached. The coaching focused on:

- Teaching pedagogic knowledge about how children learn and the **importance of participatory and activity-based learning** in contrast to lecture-style teaching
• Showing ways how “WASH in schools” can be integrated in the school curriculum

• Developing action plans regarding “Wash in schools”

Six trained teachers from pilot schools are now able to develop action plans about activity-based hygiene education. The teachers used the new approaches in their daily lessons.

41 school volunteers (21 of them girls) were assembled in the six pilot schools to implement the school action plans developed with support from teachers. All were from grade 5, so they were able to supervise younger children. They were happy and felt they are “part of school activity.” Their teachers trusted them to develop and lead the activities with some support.

This is the daily monitoring schedule that was created by school kids from grade 4 and 5.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Monitoring schedule at schools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Cleaning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Hygiene</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toilet Use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handwashing with Soap</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“Results

In a follow-up visit three months later, 514 pupils had learned about basic drinking water treatment through new elements of the school curriculum. They also have been taught about the different plants and herbs that smell good and that can be used to boil water for healing when they are suffering from minor diarrhea.

“We now understand we must boil water before drinking. We also told our parents to do so at home.”
– Pupils studying in Koutsung school
All toilets were being used and maintained well. There was soap available in or near the toilets for hand washing. In the end, 436 (85%) of the students were using a clean pour-flush toilet. Three of the five schools with toilets had marked separate toilets for boys and girls. In Phalou school, a composite primary school with only 39 pupils, a shared toilet was used. In remaining four schools, there was one toilet for each grade. The respective students cleaned and maintained them as part of their daily schedule.

SNV also facilitated a meeting between the respective Village Education Development Committees and School Management Committees to discuss the results of this pilot project. They decided to contribute to a successful implementation of the “WASH in School” action plans with the following actions:

- **Two new hand-pump boreholes** constructed to replace broken ones at schools in Koutsung and Nakhoamin village, Atsaphon district.
- **A piped water supply system** has been connected to schools in Dongboun village, Xonabouri district.
- A Borehole with **electric pump and water storage tank** with a tap has been installed at the school in Palou village, Phin district.
- A lid was provided for a dug well and electric pump at Tom-Yea school to **keep bird excrements out** and to **keep small children safe** when they are collecting water.

Five of the six schools now have safe access to a water supply. Pupils are able to collect water for flushing toilets.

---

**Example from the field:**
**Pro-active students invent red flag toilet monitoring scheme**

During a visit in September, the team was impressed to see that school children from one school had developed a quite intriguing activity themselves. It is a fine example about how “triggered” schools can outreach to the wider community. Their system worked like this:

- **Teams of children were monitoring** if the toilets of households in their villages met standards; they checked the toilets; they checked around the house for animal feces.
- With an elaborated system they “scored” the **households** two times a week.
- Depending on score they placed a **yellow or red flag** above the door.
- Three red flags in a row resulted in a **fine of 5000 Kip** for the houseowner that had to pay to the school.
Conclusion

This pilot showed that training teachers and education officials is an effective way to integrate WASH topics and activity-based hygiene education in rural primary schools. Some lessons learned include:

- **Support from district and village officials is crucial**
- **Follow-up is very important**; in one case a teacher did not have the confidence to organize meetings between the school and the community; SNV facilitated this
- **Just putting up a curriculum does not suffice**; it has to be translated down to the schools and teacher have to be trained how to work with “WASH in schools”
- **CLTS/SLTS methods can be used** to reach out to the community; during the project children forced their parents to boil water every morning to bring it to school
- **There is a severe lack of knowledge about menstrual hygiene management**; it is not included in primary school curricula. This is a problem as a) rural children tend to start school late and b) young girls reach puberty earlier these days. Also, young girls tend to favor consulting their female teachers over their mothers.
- **Strong leadership from schools, community and district** helps enormously
- **Village accessibility is vital** to consistent monitoring

Many challenges remain, particularly with regard to understand better how children learn and how to shift from a textbook-centred to a child-centred learning environment.

About SNV

SNV Netherlands Development Organisation is a non-profit international development organisation with headquarters in the Netherlands and programs in 36 countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America. SNV is dedicated to a society where all people enjoy the freedom to pursue their own sustainable development. SNV contributes to this by strengthening the capacity of local organisations within three main sectors: Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH), Agriculture, and Renewable Energy. SNV builds strong networks across Asia by maintaining both national and project offices in Cambodia, Vietnam, Lao PDR, Nepal, Bhutan and Indonesia.

Acknowledgements

This practice paper was written by Phetmany Cheuasonkham, SNV Laos WASH advisor. Peer reviewing and editing by Thea Bongerlman, Frazer Henderson, Lukas Messmer. Photo credits: Phetmany Cheuasonkham

SNV Laos
PO Box 9781
Vientiane, Lao PDR
Tel. +856 (0) 21 413 290-1
Email: laos@snvworld.org