

School Sanitation in Primary Schools in Vietnam

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Since 1991, school sanitation has been promoted in Vietnam as part of the Environmental Sanitation Project of the WATSAN programme.

Vietnam has about 13,000 primary schools in 10,000 communes of 53 provinces. In addition, there are hamlet schools in big villages. Student popula-

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tion varies from approximately 500 to 1800 students per school, 20 to 60% of whom are girls. For a variety of social, cultural and economic reasons, primary schools generally lack the basic provision of a safe water supply, and sanitation and hygiene facilities.

In 1988, a decision was made to introduce a "Health Education" curriculum that included hygiene and environment for primary school grades I to V. The Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) of Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRV), with support from UNICEF, developed the curriculum, printed and distributed the text books, guidebooks, workbooks, readers, posters, teaching aids, magazines, and newsletters. MOET also provided in-service and pre-service training to teachers in a number of selected schools each year.

While introducing the above curriculum, the schools felt the need to construct the physical facilities for safe water, water storage, latrines, urinals,

handwashing, and garbage disposal. This would help develop the practical side of the curriculum and foster good habits among students and teachers concerning water use, sanitation and personal hygiene. The Environmental Sanitation Project began providing these facilities in selected schools in 1991; as of June 1995, approximately 2,000 primary schools had received them.

Based on annual available funds, each year a number of primary schools are selected to receive support from UNICEF (US\$300) and MOET (US\$200). This is a participatory programme in which the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA) provides the safe water supply facilities; the Ministry of Health (MOH) provides the technical support and training; and MOET plans the construction of the sanitary and hygiene facilities, campaigns and exhibitions on hygiene. Additional required funds are contributed by the province/district/commune peoples' committees (CPC) or the parents. Teachers are trained on maintenance and the headmaster is made responsible for the proper upkeep of the water and sanitary facilities in the school. Commune Peoples' Committees and MOET make periodic supervisory visits to ensure proper use and maintenance of the system.

A study was conducted in 1992 to assess:

- (1) the optimum number of latrines, urinals, hand washing taps, water storage units, etc., required to meet the peak demand in schools with student populations of 500, 1000 and above 1000;
- (2) the optimum size of the units and the overall size of the complete block of facilities;
- (3) use of available local materials, total quantities of materials required and the total costs for the facilities in the three blocks.

Based on the above study, MOET and UNICEF are promoting three systems standardized with the appropriate number of units, sizes and costs. A booklet has been produced in Vietnamese that provides full information about the project. It includes the responsibility

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Students children of Dong Tho primary schools in Yen Phong district, Ha Bac province enjoying their new safe water source for hand washing

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ties and contributions of each party, the three standard systems with drawings, estimates, and instructions for use, and maintenance information. Improvements of these systems would be needed in areas where there is a scarcity of water. After standardization, the costs for the system for above 1000 students have come down to US\$1000, about 66% of the original US\$1,500. The cost of water supply varies between US\$200 and US \$400. UNICEF provides the materials worth about US\$140.

The following activities are carried out:

- Selection of required number of schools each year (based on need, voluntary participation, contribution, etc.);
- Workshop for province/district officials and school headmasters;
- Supply of basic construction materials by UNICEF (within the agreed spending level);
- Fund support from MOET/province/district/commune;
- Construction of the standard system;
- Training of two teachers (one female teacher) for each school on hygiene education and maintenance of the system;
- Inspection of the construction system, its maintenance and reporting;
- Organization in each school of a parent's meeting, an exhibition on health and hygiene and a campaign for deworming, handwashing with soap, and cleanliness.

MPO 1991–1995 was to cover 5000 primary schools. However, due to funding constraints, only about 2,000 schools were covered. A proposal to cover all the primary schools in the country with water supply, sanitary and hygiene facilities has been included in the MPO 1996–2000. UNICEF will provide assistance for 5,000 schools and the rest will be covered by the government.

Lessons Learnt:

- The activities of this project and the facilities provided in the primary schools have been accepted and appreciated by the government, the province/district/commune, the schools and the communities. The project has shown not only the appropriate, cost effective and sustainable/maintainable minimum facilities required in the schools, but has brought about a change in the perception of the teachers, students and parents towards adoption of good sanitary and hygienic practices.

To be successful, this programme needs detail planning and standardization of facilities, designs, costs and contributions.

- The demand for these facilities in schools not yet covered is growing, and it has become difficult for UNICEF and MOET to provide the contribution to cover more schools in each year. There are instances where the province has provided the contribution to cover additional schools. Enthusiastic and motivated Head Masters of some primary schools have collected donations by writing to ex-students who are now holding good positions in the government/business.
- The maintenance of WES facilities was not good in some schools during 1991 and 1992. After adoption of the proper design of the facilities and training the teachers, maintenance has improved. In some schools, as reported during field visits, the trained teachers stand in front of the newly constructed sanitary block for the first seven days to observe the behaviour of the young students and to train them in its proper use and maintenance.
- It is encouraging that MOET is moti-

vated to cover more schools than those for which UNICEF can provide contributions. In the beginning of the year, MOET makes adequate budget allocations for this programme.

- The teaching of the curriculum on "Health Education" in the primary schools has been strengthened by the provision of water and sanitary facilities. It caused a change in the attitude and behaviour of students and teachers towards hygiene.
- To be successful, this programme needs detail planning and standardization of facilities, designs, costs and contributions. Before providing any support, the school and commune authorities must be motivated to voluntarily accept the programme, to continue to contribute and to maintain it at their own cost. Above all, a willingness to improve the present situation must be created at all levels of the government. SRV is well aware of this fact.

At the end of 1991, an evaluation carried out in three provinces where the new facilities were initially provided, gave the following results:

- 99.5% of the students, teachers and parents accepted the facilities in the schools as convenient and good;
- 81% of the teachers opined that the facilities can change the sanitation habits of students and teachers;
- 97% of the parents agreed that sanitary facilities should be built in the schools and 95% were willing to contribute towards the cost of construction;
- facilities were kept clean in 65% of the schools (in 1991 when the project started);
- 93% of the students informed and 75.6% urged their parents to construct sanitary latrines in their houses;
- 100% of the teachers and 86.2% of the parents were willing to construct pour-flush latrines in their houses. ●