

School sanitation and hygiene education in Mysore District

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Many past projects on school sanitation and hygiene education in India, have focused on the construction of sanitation and water facilities without taking hygiene education as an essential component in this development. More recent projects, such as the project in Mysore, however have focused on a more holistic integrated approach. This article discusses both the 'hard' as well as 'soft' issues in school sanitation and hygiene education.

The Mysore experience

The district of Mysore is located in the southern part of Karnataka State and is situated in Deccan Peninula, spread over an area of 6268 sq kms. It has 7 taluks with 236 Grama Panchayats. Mysore district has been one of the districts in which UNICEF, under the WatSan sector, has focused in terms of school sanitation and hygiene education.

The novel idea of a sanitation programme, under the support of UNICEF, began in Mysore District in 1992, which was followed by a comprehensive strategy on the control of diarrhoeal diseases by improving access to water and sanitation (CDD WatSan). This CDD WatSan programme focused on developing holistic project approaches towards child survival, protection and development as well as school sanitation. The school sanitation aspect of the programme provided an excellent opportunity to promote sanitation packages from teacher to child, child to child, child to parent and parent to community.

As a result of this earlier programme, a more comprehensive project developed. The school sanitation objective of this new project intervention included:

- Changing the ingrained habits of people from the practice of open defecation to the use of a latrine
- Exposing children in the use of water and sanitation (WatSan) facilities for good health and hygiene
- Building linkages between the school and community
- Making schools a focal point for dissemination of information at the village level

To focus on these objectives a

detailed survey was conducted by the health department who assessed the level of water and sanitation facilities at schools within Mysore, and the knowledge students had on sanitation.

The findings of the survey¹ revealed that:

- 90% of schools lacked latrine and urinal facilities
- 75% of schools lacked water supply
- 21% of schools had a kitchen garden
- 87% of students were aware of the fact that tap and borewell water are safer sources of drinking water
- 32% of students had knowledge of waterborne diseases
- 63% of students had knowledge of fly nuisance
- 18% bath themselves daily

Based on these survey finding, the following strategies were developed for school sanitation, namely:

- Emphasizing sanitation and hygiene to school children through their school curriculum
- Forming school cabinets which monitor sanitation activities
- Motivating school headmasters and teachers in the process of maintaining the school campus
- Providing basic facilities such as water supply and institutional toilets
- Involving the health and construction department in school sanitation

The Mysore School Project: 1995-1998

In 1995, based on the survey findings, a total of twenty schools were identified for upgrading and hygiene promotion. Water supply was provided to all of these 20 schools. Further construction of toilets and urinals were provided in the school campus in all of these schools.

1. To get access to this survey contact, Manoj Kumar at Zilla Panchayath, Project Co-Ordinator (Sanitation), Mysore 570 005.

Hygiene education covers all aspects of personal hygiene - school children learn to take care of their teeth



As a result of these developments, headmasters and school teachers were more motivated to teach hygiene education. School teachers were given training by the health and public health engineering department in the form of discussions and videos. One of the suggestions made by the school teachers was to form school committees. These consist of a number of school children who could be involved in various aspects of monitoring the facilities and advocating hygiene promotion among other students. As a result of this suggestion, school committees now exist in numerous schools. These school committees consist of the chief minister, deputy chief minister and other ministers in charge of health, sports, water supply, horticultural and cultural activities. The school headmaster guides the committee regularly by holding meetings and discussion related to all aspects of school. School committee members are also taken to other schools.

A number of other activities have also taken place based on teacher suggestions, such as pictorial wall paintings, which are made in all the schools to emphasize the significance of various aspects of personal hygiene and community sanitation. Another important activity has been the development of a weekly calendar on school sanitation and hygiene education activities. For example, on Monday the school children focus on the importance of toilets, while on Tuesday the disposal of waste is discussed. In other words, for each day of the week one health-activity is undertaken by the students.

The roles of local non-Governmental Groups (NGOs) also play a vital role in these schools. A number of activities such as painting competitions, enactment of street plays and health camps are organized with the active involvement of NGOs.

Outcomes

Based on the initial 20 schools which were identified for upgrading and hygiene promotion, the programme has now expanded to over 300 schools around Mysore, which have access to sanitary latrines in the school premises as well as water facilities. An additional survey reflects some preliminary changes which have taken place among the school children. Although these results are somewhat premature, they nevertheless indicate some clear changes at the school level such as higher school attendance, low dropout rates² and a more positive attitude from school children and teachers, towards involvement in school sanitation and hygiene education activities.

In the context of this specific case study, although much remains to be done, there are grounds for optimism as support among schools, community, citizens and school children continues to grow. At this stage, this case study remains relatively new and will need a few more years to develop. In the meantime in order for other projects such as these to develop and survive, it will be essential that:

- Political backing comes from the local municipality
 - There is social acceptance by communities with regards to school children assisting in maintaining and monitoring sanitation and water facilities
 - There is financial backing from local municipalities, citizens and outside agencies in this case UNICEF
- Inevitably many challenges remain

2. A preliminary survey indicates that school attendance has increased significantly from 78% to 89%; and school reduction in dropout has come down from 22% to 11%.



School children are taught to wash their hands after using the toilet. It is hoped that such habits will pass on to their families

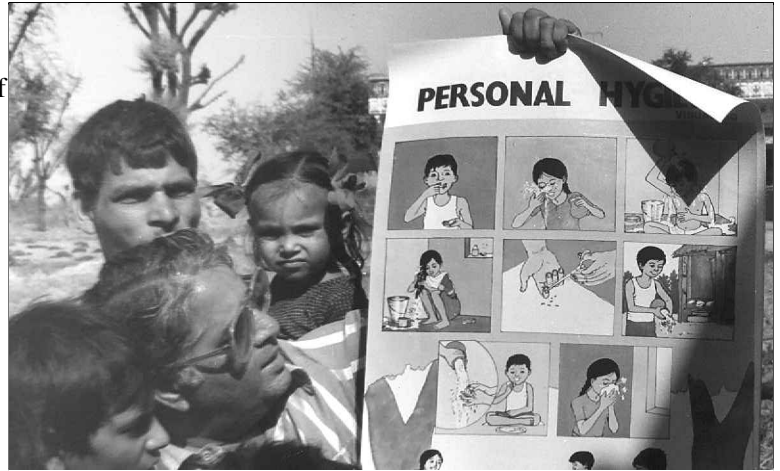
within the Mysore schools who have taken part in the project. Case studies such as that found in Mysore reflect true partnership between local government (Zilla Panchayath), schools and local NGOs. The role of all of these stakeholders are essential in order to create well functioning schools, both in terms of facilities as well as promoting hygiene education. Support from all of these stakeholders are

essential and provide an essential link in upgrading the livelihood of school children.

about the authors

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Visual aids are seen as an important tool in hygiene education.



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