

Participatory Development of National School Health Policies: Some Lessons Learned from Kenya

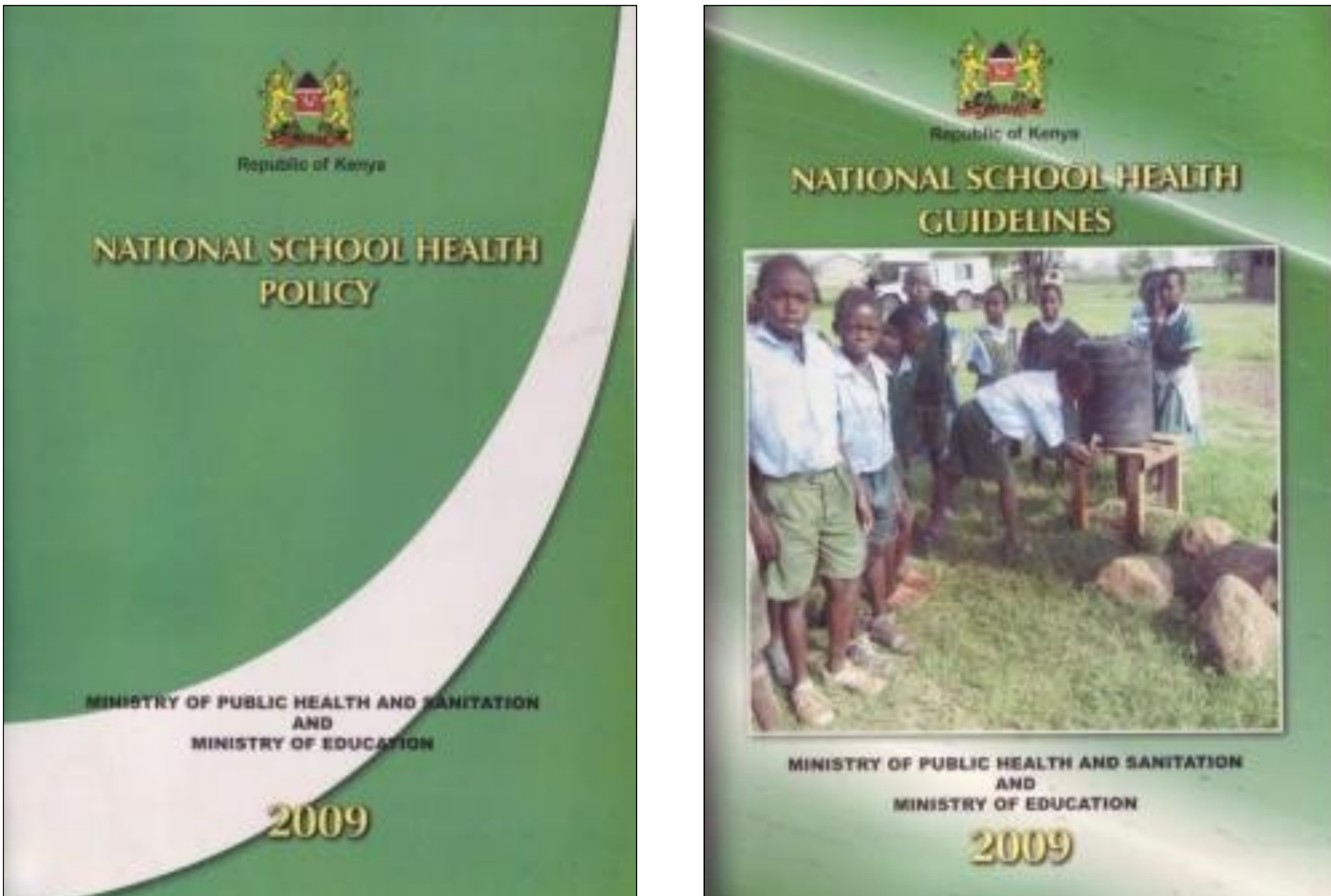
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BACKGROUND

- Kenya has recently made significant progress towards improving the health and education standards of schoolchildren by launching the **National School Health Policy and Guidelines**, a participatory endeavor between the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Public Health and Sanitation and their partners.
- The Policy and Guidelines were officially launched in August 2009 and now provide an **enabling environment** for adequate school health and nutrition.



National School Health Policy (left) and National School Health Guidelines (right)

Vision, Mission and Goal of the Kenya National School Health Policy and Guidelines

Vision

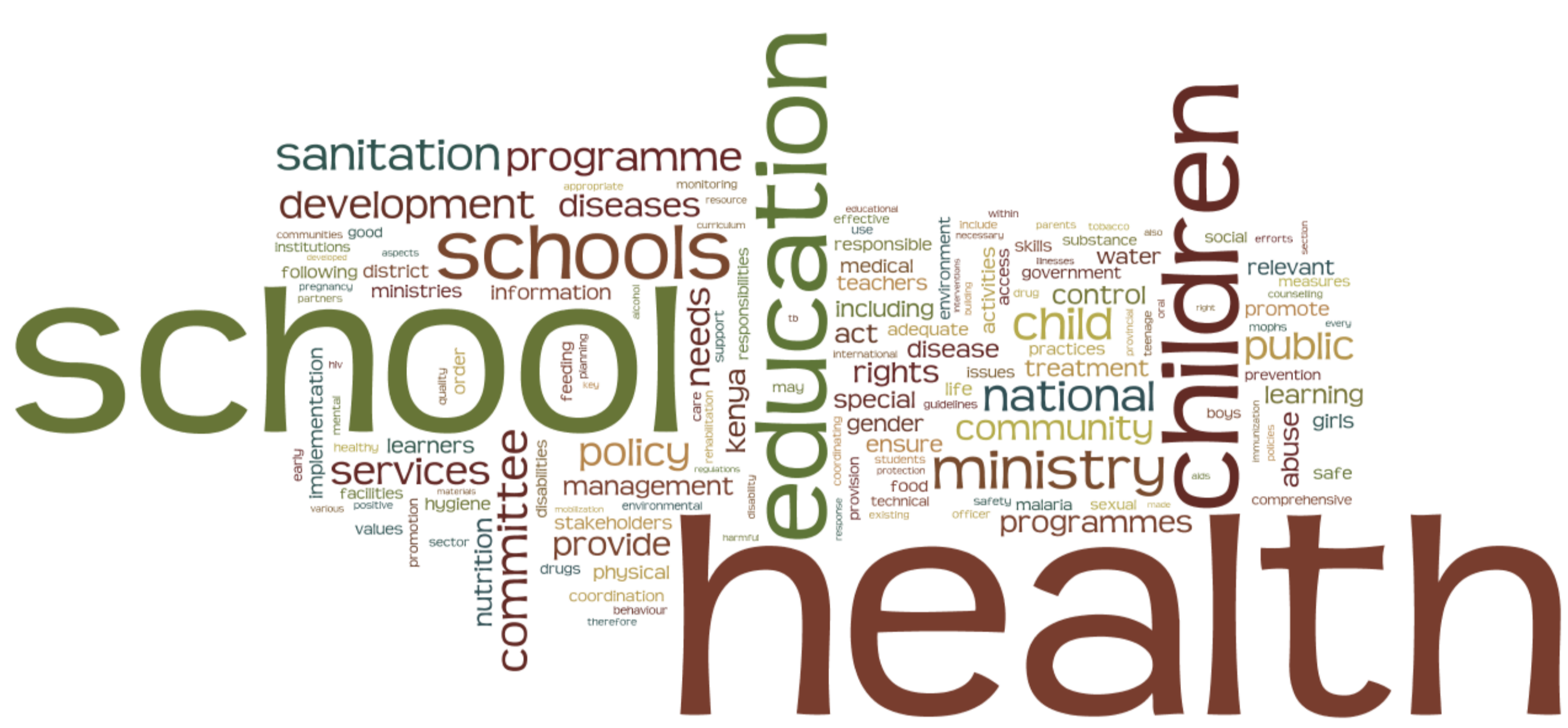
A healthy, enlightened and developed nation.

Mission

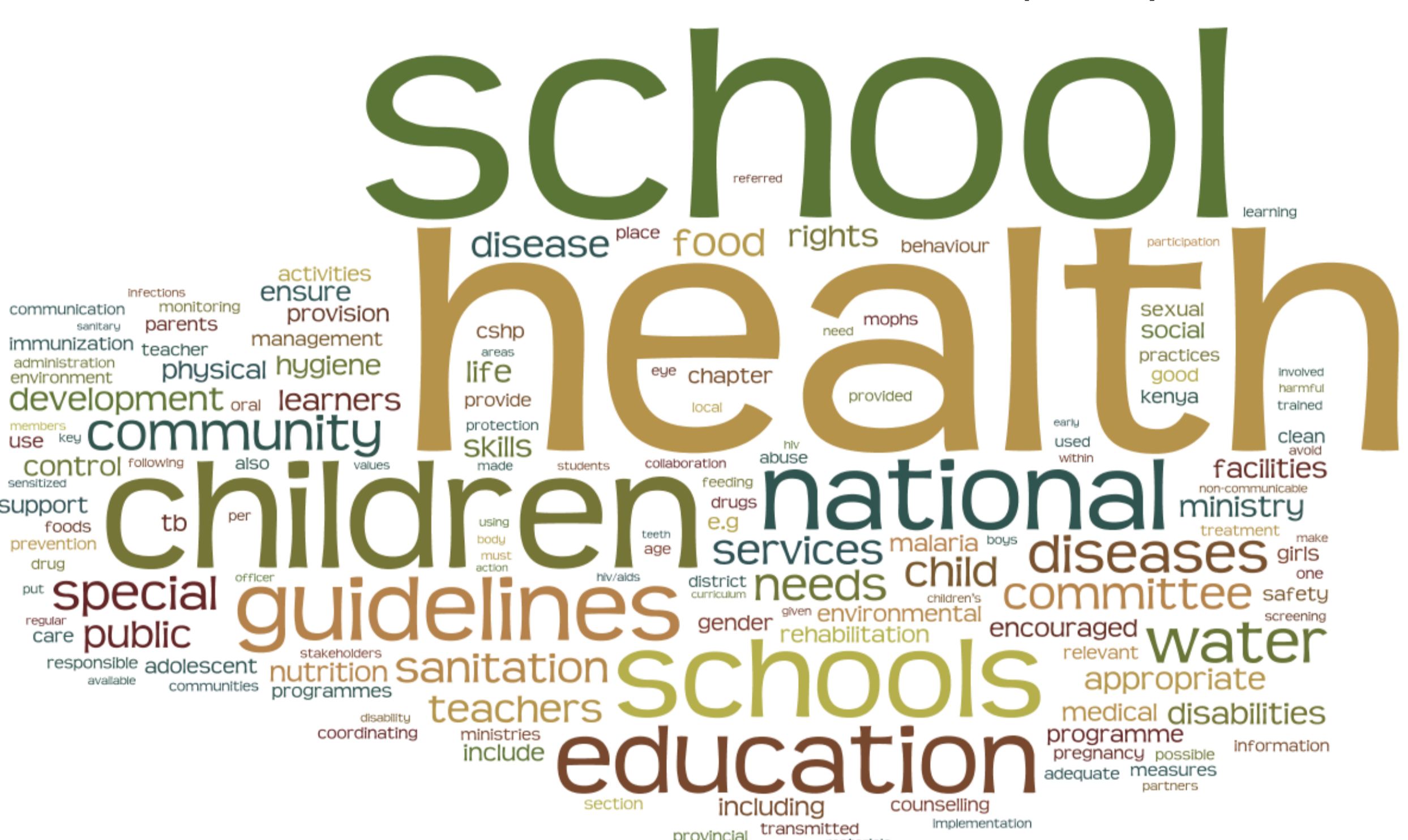
To work together in planning, designing and implementing sustainable quality health interventions across the education sector.

Goal

To enhance the quality of health in school communities by creating a healthy and child friendly environment for teaching and learning.



Wordles of the National School Health Policy (above) and the National School Health Guidelines (below)



RESULTS

- The Kenya National School Health Policy was found to **complement** existing education and health policies.
- The Kenya National School Health Guidelines include some **highly relevant thematic areas**, including values and life skills, gender issues, child rights and protection, water, sanitation and hygiene, nutrition, disease prevention and control, and special needs.
- Research, linkages and collaboration and capacity strengthening** are identified as critical components of continued improvements in child health and nutrition.

Kenya National School Health Policy and Guidelines: gender principles (Source: GTZ)

Particular attention is put on the principle of non-discrimination and the need to **promote equity** among students. The Policy requires the support given to students to be responsive to their particular needs, with special attention given to vulnerable children such as girls, orphans or students with disability. It also calls for awareness to be created among learners as well as teachers, parents and the community at large on differences and existing inequalities related to gender and other characteristics. Some of the recommended measures for promoting equity/eliminating discrimination are:

- adapting facilities to the needs of different age groups, boys and girls and children with special needs;
- promoting equal opportunities for girls to education and health, for example, by providing cheap sanitary towels;
- informing on negative cultural practices related to gender, their consequences as well as possible control mechanisms;
- ensuring HIV positive learners, teachers and staff are not discriminated against and have access to treatment and check ups;
- providing mental health education and promotion;
- introducing measures to prevent discrimination of mentally ill children and staff;
- providing sport and recreational activities for children with disabilities;
- monitoring children's nutritional status and introducing meals programmes.

The Policy and Guidelines also touch on sexual and reproductive health (SRH) of adolescents. They recognize the need to educate students on SRH and provide them with the necessary skills to prevent unwanted pregnancies, disease or sexual violence. Teenage pregnancy is approached from a human rights point of view. The Policy requires the school to provide counseling to the pregnant girl and her parents to ensure her and the child's well being (e.g. by visiting ante natal care). The girl has a right to continue her classes as long as possible and seek re-admission to the same or another school after pregnancy. Any discrimination against the teenage mother is prohibited.

OBJECTIVES

- This research is intended **to facilitate sharing** of school health improvement strategies and policy statements across African countries by documenting lessons learned from Kenya.
- The research also provides **recommendations** for future action.



The Kenya National School Health Policy and Guidelines were launched jointly by the Minister of Public Health and Sanitation (Beth Mugo) and the Minister of Education (Prof. Sam Onger) in Nairobi on 5th August 2009

METHODS

- The research is based on a **comparison** of the Kenya National School Health Policy and Guidelines with globally accepted key school health policy issues, such as the ones provided in the Global School Health Policy Checklist.
- The comparison is done through **document review** and semi-structured **interviews** with key informants.

Global School Health Policy Checklist

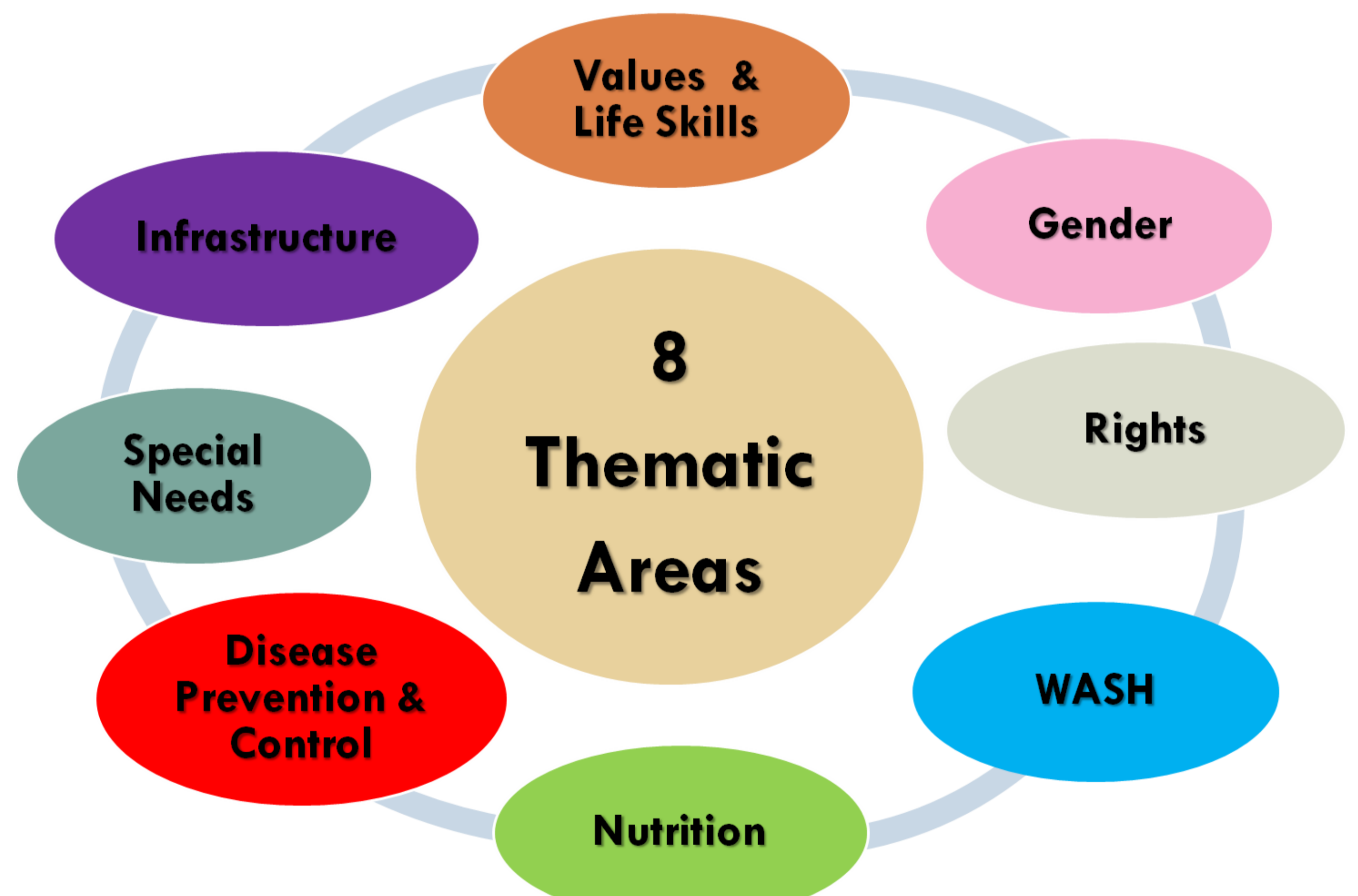
developed by the Partnership for Child Development (PCD)

Knowledge & behavior promotion

- HIV/AIDS** – Is HIV/AIDS taught in schools in any form (e.g. knowledge based, life skills, peer education, etc.)?
- Life skills** for health generally – Does the education sector use a life skills approach for health education?
- Specifically **tobacco** – Does the health education specifically target tobacco use?
- Specifically **substance abuse** (including alcohol) – Does the health education specifically target substance abuse (e.g. alcohol, drugs)?
- Hygiene education** / hand washing – Is hygiene education (e.g. hand washing) taught in the schools?
- Reproductive health** (including pregnancy, STIs) – Does the health education include information about reproductive health (e.g. pregnancy, STIs)?
- Nutrition education** – Does the health education specifically include nutrition education?
- Obesity** – Does the health education specifically target obesity?

Services

- Malaria** – Is malaria a specific target of the school health program (eg. promoting bednets, providing treatment, providing bednets)?
- Iron supplementation** – Do the schools have an iron supplementation program (e.g. providing iron tablets)?
- Deworming** – Do the schools have a deworming program (e.g. providing deworming tablets)?
- Screening and referrals generally by **teachers** – Are screening (for simple ailments such as refractive error, hearing impairment, skin/eye/ear infections) and referrals conducted on a regular basis in the schools by the teachers?
- Screening and referrals generally by **Ministry of Health** – Are screening and referrals conducted on a regular basis in the schools by Ministry of Health staff?



8 thematic areas in the Kenya National School Health Policy and Guidelines

Kenya National School Health Policy and Guidelines: children rights (Source: GTZ)

The Kenya National School Health Policy and Guidelines are based on **four pillars of children rights** as outlined in the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child and the Kenya Children Act 2001. These are survival rights, development rights, protection rights and participation rights. Both documents intend to strengthen children's capacity to fulfill/demand their right to health, and education by for instance:

- improving children's access to health related information;
- creating awareness among teachers, pupils, parents and the community at large on different forms of discrimination, exploitation and violence towards children;
- enhancing access to complaint mechanisms for any of the above cases as well as to rehabilitative/counseling measures;
- developing structures which protect children from abuses;
- facilitating children's active participation in decisions regarding their health and education.

Furthermore, the documents respect the inter-relatedness of human rights by linking the right to health to other human rights, such as the right to water/sanitation, information, food/nutrition, privacy and education.

CONCLUSIONS

- The Kenya National School Health Policy and Guidelines define a **comprehensive school health programme** that enables the Government and its partners to provide for quality health education and services to promote overall health, nutrition and education of children.
- Having been developed in a **participatory** manner, the Policy and Guidelines have received wide support and goodwill so far.
- These now **needs to be supplemented** by effective management, adequate resources, training and technical assistance through an action plan that outlines short- and mid-term objectives, tasks, timetables, and responsibilities.