

GIZ Gender Competition 2022: Fit for School Program

Promoting Gender Equality

Girls in many countries continue to face barriers in education. Among the several factors that affect education of girls is access to proper water, sanitation, and hygiene facilities and supplies while in schools. Several studies have shown that the ability to manage menstruation in schools has a positive impact on the education of girls in terms of reducing school absenteeism, increasing participation, and preventing falling behind from lectures. Achieving gender equality entails paying attention to the needs of girls and women. As such, addressing menstrual hygiene management (MHM) is an important step towards achieving gender equality. Improving access to WASH facilities will enable girls to appropriately manage menstruation while in schools and help ensure that it will not be a barrier to their education.

Various factors, however, serve as challenges in improving WASH in Schools (WinS) and achieving SDG target 4A which aims to “build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability, and gender-sensitive, and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all”. Improving WinS requires more than just building infrastructure in the school setting, but also ensuring that WASH services meet relevant standards and that resources for operation and maintenance are adequate. Education systems require robust monitoring to ensure schools make progress towards sustaining at least the basic level of service. The Regional Fit for School (FIT) Programme works closely with the Philippine Department of Education (DepEd) in the implementation of its WASH in Schools (WinS) Program and in establishing the Three Star Approach (TSA) for WinS. The TSA serves as the framework for monitoring WinS, guiding schools in incrementally improving their WinS status, including aspects of MHM. It provides schools with specific guidance to introduce practical aspects of MHM that can be implemented with existing resources. The FIT program likewise works extensively on usability of toilets, particularly supporting systems for schools to conduct daily cleaning of facilities and regular maintenance to ensure toilets are “female friendly”.

The guidance provided within the TSA enables the education sector to consider and account for MHM-related indicators and address the needs of girls in schools at nationwide scale. In addition to the technical support provided to enhance DepEd’s delivery of MHM in Philippine schools, several initiatives to raise awareness on menstruation and address myths and stigma have been led by the program. These include developing knowledge products for integrating production of reusable pads into lesson plans, organizing webinars, and developing advocacy materials on MHM. The materials developed by the program likewise ensures that boys are included in the narrative to convey the message that the topic of MHM is not just for girls. It allows men and boys better understand menstruation to be able to support girls and to help address discrimination and bullying.

Gender as a quality feature of our work

The program has been supporting the DepEd Philippines in improving WASH in schools since 2011. In 2016, DepEd issued the National WinS Policy through DepEd Order 10, Series 2016 entitled “Policy and Guidelines for the Comprehensive Water, Sanitation and

Hygiene (WASH) in Schools Program”. Through this policy, all schools are mandated to implement important aspects of MHM, amongst other WinS aspects. DepEd has likewise adopted the Three Star Approach to monitor and recognize progress of schools on WinS. Since 2017, the Department of Education releases an annual report on the status of MHM using the TSA monitoring results.

The program also supports DepEd in the implementation of a massive open online course (MOOC) on WinS which includes the topic of MHM. The MOOC has two modules: Leading WinS for school heads and coordinators and Accelerating WinS for division-level coordinators. Since the launch of Leading WinS in September 2019 and Accelerating WinS in January 2020, there have been a total of 5,879 and 221 course completers from the different regions in the country, respectively.

In 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, DepEd Philippines has shifted from a face-to-face learning modality to distance learning through several modalities such as the conduct of online classes and video broadcasting through DepEd TV. The closure of the schools in the Philippines due to the COVID-19 pandemic posed a challenge in terms of sustaining the gains made in MHM throughout the years. Ensuring appropriate menstrual hygiene measures will reach the target population despite the current school closure in the Philippines is necessary. To further support DepEd Philippines amidst the school closure, the program produced a video on MHM, which includes general information on menstruation, some of the common misconceptions surrounding menstruation, how to make a reusable pad, and how the education department makes schools a more inclusive place for girls. The video features Miss Universe 2015 Pia Wurtzbach as the champion carrying the messages on MHM to learners and the general public. Having a famous personality to champion the topic is key in reaching a wide set of audience and build awareness and knowledge on MHM. The video was launched by DepEd on the DepEd Philippines Facebook Page as part of the School Health Division’s One Health Week celebration and was broadcasted nationally via the different DepEd TV channels in October 2021.

The most recent celebration of the MH Day on May 28, 2021 wherein a webinar entitled “Action and Investments on Menstrual Hygiene Management in the Philippines” was held and several posts on MHM were released reached an audience of 1,012,319. The huge audience reached shows a marked improvement in terms of engagement of the public in the topic of MHM compared to the 235,408 reached in MH Day 2020.

The efforts led by the program, in support of DepEd, helped mainstream the topic within the education sector. Through the TSA monitoring, MOOC, and the many activities and advocacy materials developed for MHM, school heads and teachers now have an increased awareness on the topic, which is key in instilling proper knowledge and improving attitudes and practices of approximately 27 million learners in the country towards MHM.

Gender and results-based monitoring

The WinS TSA monitoring includes four key steps: preparation, self-assessment, validation, and recognition. As part of preparation activities, orientation of DepEd staff, particularly the school heads and WinS Coordinators, is being conducted to understand the system. Next is self-assessment where schools check crucial indicators on WinS and submits online the WinS monitoring form. As part

of monitoring, the Schools Division Offices validate the data through documents review and/or school visits. Lastly, a recognition system is implemented to encourage schools to continuously improve their respective services.

MHM-related indicators, specifically water availability, gender-segregated toilets, availability of sanitary pads, and access to information, are monitored annually. The first batch of monitoring was conducted in School Year 2017/18, with two thirds of public schools or about 30,000 schools participating. This increased to 35,000 and 39,814 participating schools in School Years 2018/2019 and 2019/2020, respectively. The latest round of monitoring was conducted in School Year 2020/2021, with a total of 44,815 participating schools or approximately 93% of public schools in the country. Since the baseline monitoring in 2017/18, continuous improvements are seen in all indicators relating to MHM. The improvements seen in the monitoring results highlight the use of monitoring to guide the schools and transparently provide information on aspects that need to be improved. The program also developed a dashboard to support the Regional and Division Offices with the aggregated data for planning and technical assistance to schools. The WinS monitoring and the transparent results on indicators generated according to regions and divisions allow for specific support within the DepEd System. The transparency that the TSA provides, specifically in showing which schools are improving, how is it done, and which indicators to work on, is key for the continuous improvements. The table below shows the MHM-related data within the WinS TSA monitoring from the baseline in 2017/18 up to the latest monitoring in 2020/21 showing impressive improvements of schools all over the country.

| MHM Indicator | 2017-2018 | | 2018-2019 | | 2019-2020 | | 2020-2021 | |
|--|---------------------------|------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| | Elementary (N= 25,640) | Secondary (N=4,946) | Elementary (N= 28,914) | Secondary (N= 6,091) | Elementary (N= 32,619) | Secondary (N=7,195) | Elementary (N=36,420) | Secondary (N=8,395) |
| Availability of water in schools | 63.6 | 60.0 | 72.4 | 71.4 | 81.8 | 81.6 | 89.9 | 88.4 |
| Average number of students per functional toilet for female | 101.6 | 121.4 | 123.2 | 125.8 | 96.3 | 117.4 | 89.0 | 109.5 |
| Proportion of schools where all functional toilets are secure, private and have door with lock | 79.8 | 84.2 | 85.2 | 87.7 | 87.2 | 88.3 | 88.5 | 90.6 |
| Rest space for girls with menstrual discomfort | 32.3 | 50.0 | 47.2 | 63.9 | 52.2 | 69.5 | 58.4 | 74.0 |
| Availability of sanitary pads | 37.7 | 46.2 | 72.5 | 85.1 | 78.3 | 88.6 | 81.0 | 89.0 |
| IEC materials for teachers | 34.5 | 33.5 | 46.0 | 45.2 | 52.9 | 52.8 | 60.5 | 62.0 |
| IEC materials for students | 37.0 | 36.4 | 48.6 | 49.4 | 55.8 | 56.9 | 62.9 | 65.9 |
| Information on proper disposal of sanitary napkins in girls' toilets | 56.9 | 60.7 | 70.1 | 74.4 | 74.6 | 78.6 | 79.0 | 84.3 |

Cooperation

The GIZ FIT Program works with UNICEF Philippines and Save the Children Philippines as part of a technical working group (TWG) to support the Department of Education Philippines in the implementation of the WinS Program. The TWG conducts regular updating and planning through monthly meetings convened by the DepEd Bureau of Learner Support Services - School Health Division. These regular monthly meetings serve as one of the success factors which allowed collaboration among different development partners and strict alignment among DepEd partners, avoiding duplication of activities, and sustaining commitment. Having clear roles and responsibilities as well as a clear direction of the partnership with DepEd also serve as success factors in the cooperation. Lastly, formalizing the partnership under the Department of Education was a key step in steering action from the different partners. Since its establishment in 2011, the TWG has conducted several activities on MHM, including monitoring, implementation of the MOOC, joint development of knowledge products and IEC materials, and co-organization of events promoting MHM to help close gender gap in schools.