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IMPROVING MENSTRUAL HEALTH THROUGH WASH IN SCHOOLS

THE PHILIPPINES – AND BEYOND: REGIONAL FIT FOR SCHOOL PROGRAM

CONTEXT AND INITIATIVE

Stigma, embarrassment and insufficient access to water, sanitation, hygiene facilities and supplies at school are challenges menstruating girls are confronted with. Increased absenteeism and lower participation of girls are some of the consequences. To counter these negative impacts on girls' education, the Regional Fit for School Program made Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) integral to their work on Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) in school.

In close collaboration with UNICEF and Save the Children, the Fit for School program has been supporting the Philippine Department of Education to recognize the importance of the topic and to integrate MHM into the national WASH in Schools (WinS) Program. In 2016, the Government issued the National WinS Policy which mandates schools to implement MHM interventions. Similarly, MHM was included in the Three Star Approach for WinS (UNICEF/GIZ 2013), which guides schools in incrementally improving their WinS status and serves as the framework for monitoring progress. MHM-related indicators include gender-segregated and female-friendly toilets, availability of sanitary pads, and access to information.

From 2017 to 2021, the number of schools participating in the monitoring increased from 30,000 to 45,000, covering 93% of public schools in the country. Annual



monitoring reports prove that efforts have been fruitful as continuous improvement can be seen for all indicators relating to MHM.

GENDER – A QUALITY FEATURE OF OUR WORK

The Fit for School program has contributed to raise awareness on menstruation and address gaps in schools through a range of initiatives. Most importantly, knowledge products were developed to provide adequate information to all learners. The materials ensure that boys are included in the narrative that MHM is not just for girls. Boys and men have a role to play and need to better understand menstruation to be able to support girls and help to fight discrimination and bullying.

In collaboration with the Water Policy sector program the Fit for School program developed a MHM concept for schools, which is modular, culturally adaptable and consists of primary and secondary intervention packages.

IMPACT

German Development Cooperation supports the Philippine Government in implementing a massive open online course (MOOC) on WinS including MHM. 22,500 educators have enrolled in the course between 2019 and 2021. During the school closure caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, an educational video on Menstrual Health featuring a celebrity was broadcasted via TV and social media reaching a broad audience nationwide. On May 28th, the international Menstrual Hygiene Day 2021 was celebrated via an online event and several social media posts reached more than one million people.

Combined, efforts led by the Fit for School program and the Philippine Department of Education helped to mainstream MHM as an integral part of the education sector and thereby kept girls in school and increased awareness of 27 million Filipino learners.



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