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Fit for School

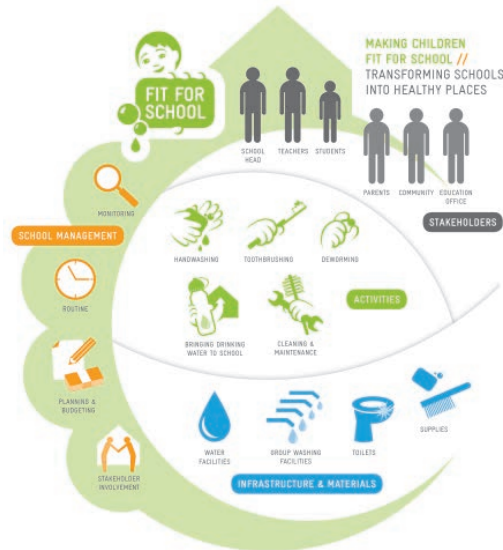
Improving water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) in schools

Background

Students suffering from diseases are frequently absent from school, sleep less, and show an overall lower learning outcome compared to healthy pupils. In Laos, Cambodia, Indonesia and the Philippines, diseases related to lack of hygiene, such as diarrhoea and respiratory infections, are still the leading causes of illness and death among children. One in seven children entering school has intestinal worms and more than 90 percent of students have untreated severe dental caries.

In Laos, 850 000 boys and girls attend one of the 8 900 primary schools. Of these schools, little more than half have sanitation facilities and a regular water supply. Where facilities exist, they are often not usable because they are locked, broken or dirty. There are several barriers for WASH in Schools: lack of a national overarching WASH in Schools monitoring framework, inadequate annual budget allocations to schools, and limited human resource capacities related to maintenance of sanitation and water facilities.

The Fit for School (FIT) program addresses these barriers through simple evidence based low-cost interventions.



What we aim for

The Fit for School approach strengthens school-based management to support the implementation of daily group handwashing with soap, daily group toothbrushing with fluoride toothpaste and regular deworming according to WHO standards to address high-impact diseases. Combined with improved access to clean water, washing facilities and appropriate sanitation, key determinants of health are addressed in a single intervention package. Fit for School focuses on measures that are simple, scalable, sustainable and integrated into the education system. The program goes beyond traditional curriculum-based health education, supporting children in acquiring healthy habits and promoting sustainable behaviour change through the implementation of daily routines that foster skills and form lifelong habits. Promoting healthy habits in supportive learning environments allows children to lead healthier lives and get the most out of their education.

In 2011, the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, in partnership with the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization Regional Center for Educational Innovation and Technology (SEAMEO INNOTECH), was commissioned by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) to support Ministries of Education in Lao PDR, Cambodia, Indonesia and the Philippines to implement the Fit for School program. Lao PDR started the FIT program in the same year. Twenty-two model schools in four districts in Vientiane capital were selected to carry out improvements in WASH facilities and apply the daily hygiene activities. The Lao MoES started to scale up the program and intends to expand the reach of the program even further throughout the 17 provinces.



Children have fun with the daily routine activities.
Photo: © GIZ/Fit for School



A community health worker informs parents about the effects of deworming drugs.
Photo: © GIZ/Fit for School

Inclusive WASH for all students

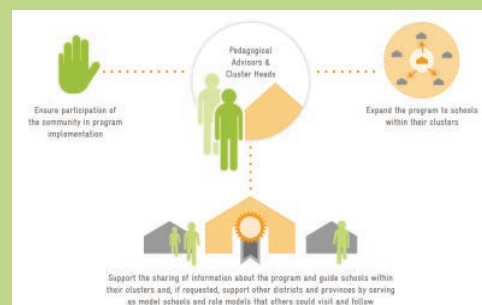
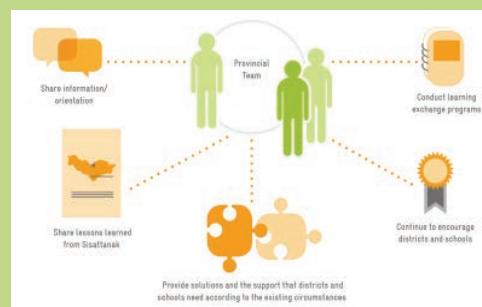
Equity in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals is important, not only because the poorest households are least able to invest in their own facilities, but also because they have the most to gain due to their heightened vulnerability to adverse health outcomes. Therefore, children benefit from nationwide school health interventions regardless of their socio-economic background or gender. Existing disadvantages and inequalities are reduced and all have better chances for a healthy and productive life.

Results achieved so far

GIZ supports the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) to implement and scale-up the Fit for School approach nation-wide. By April 2017, more than 400 schools across Lao PDR are implementing Fit for School as part of their daily routines, reaching 35,000 students in primary education. Every province in Lao PDR has established model schools for other schools to learn from. Two districts – Sisattanak in Vientiane Capital and Taphabhat in Bolikhamxay – have scaled up Fit for School to all primary schools in their district.

A two year program assessment study on health indicators was concluded in 2014, involving 22 model and 22 control schools in Vientiane implementing the FIT program. The research was carried-out by MoES, SEAMEO INNOTECH, and GIZ in collaboration with University College London and University of Health Sciences in Lao PDR. The study revealed that the Fit for School intervention of daily group toothbrushing prevented 37 percent of new caries lesions. The set-up of daily routines in model schools resulted in an overall improvement in cleanliness and functionality of school toilets. The effectiveness of the national deworming program was illustrated by the low prevalence of worm infections in both model and control schools.

The MoES decided to start the Fit for School program in Vientiane Capital due to the accessibility of model schools. Five of the initial model schools established in 2012 are located in Sisattanak district. In 2014, the District Education Bureau of Sisattanak was able to expand the program to all primary schools in the district, covering 22 public primary schools and 17 private primary schools, on their own initiative. MoES encouraged stakeholders on provincial and district level to start small and improve from there step by step. The District Education and Sports Bureau has now started to introduce the interventions to all pre-schools and secondary schools in the district as well. The successful strategy of making effective use of education sector structures, such as the school cluster system and the collaboration with Ministry of Health in the School Health Task Force, have been documented in a publication and video, which are now being used by MoES to train other districts on how to successfully improve WASH in schools.



Handwashing facilities can be built with only minimal investment and limited water resources.

Photo: © GIZ/Fit for School



Students take on responsibility in administering the group hygiene activities.

Photo: © GIZ/Fit for School

Strategic partnerships of MoES, GIZ and organizations like UNICEF and the World Food Program have resulted in aligned efforts to set up a WASH in schools monitoring system based on a 3 star approach which provides guidance to school principals and district based pedagogical advisors on how to achieve stepwise improvements. Combined with the WFP School Lunch Program, Fit for School improves nutrition outcomes through group handwashing before eating and toothbrushing after lunch. World Vision, ChildFund, and Plan International help the program to expand by integrating it as their WASH component as part of their support to schools across the country.

GIZ Laos' engagement in regional cooperation

We engage in a variety of regional projects, because regional integration and cooperation are beneficial to advancing the Lao development agenda. Other regional programs engaged in Lao PDR include the program for Improved Land Management in the Mekong Region, the German Contribution to the Swiss Mekong Region Land Governance Project, and support to the Mekong River Commission (MRC). GIZ provides advice to the MRC in carrying out its organizational reform process and supports the MRC's sectoral work on sustainable hydropower development and climate change adaptation.

Several of our programs support ASEAN integration, such as the Initiative for ASEAN Integration or the establishment of regional standards for the training of vocational education personnel. Other projects tackle the implementation of national competition policies and support supreme audit institutions.

These are the current GIZ programs in various areas of regional cooperation:

- Fit for School
- Improved Land Management in the Mekong Region (ILM-MR)
- Trans boundary Water Cooperation with the Mekong River Commission
- Support to the Initiative for ASEAN Integration (IAI)
- ASEAN Sustainable Agrifood Systems (SAS)
- Competition Policy and Law in ASEAN (CPL)
- Regional Cooperation Programme to Improve the Training of TVET Personnel (RECOTVET)
- Support to Supreme Audit Institutions

About GIZ

The services delivered by GIZ draw on a wealth of regional and technical expertise and tried and tested management know-how. As a federal enterprise, we support the German Government in achieving its objectives in the field of international cooperation for sustainable development.

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