

THE TRAGEDY IN SCHOOL LATRINE CONDITIONS AND USE: A WAKE UP CALL FOR CLEAR RESPONSIBILITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

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CHALLENGE

In 2005, the Government of Ethiopia (GoE) adopted the MDG concept and developed the Universal Access Program (UAP) to provide access to safe water for 98% of the rural population and for 100% of the urban population of the country by 2012 (UAP 2005). To accelerate access to sanitation and hygiene in schools, the Ministry of Education initiated implementation of a School Improvement Program (SIP) in all regions. Despite these efforts, a survey in 2008 in 6 districts in the Southern Region of Ethiopia revealed that only 3% of the schools had access to safe water and 49% of the schools had safe latrines (Wandera et al. 2008). A detailed follow up assessment showed that latrines in almost all schools, including those with safe latrines, are dirty and most children are unable to use the latrines and resort to open defecation in the fields around the schools.

CLIENTS

Based on the survey results and the poor conditions of school latrines, SNV agreed to support six districts (Kedida Gamela, Misrak Badewacho, Boloso Sore, Shashego, Alaba and Dembya) in Southern Ethiopia to strengthen their capacity and improve school latrine management and use. The districts (Woredas) and SNV agreed to introduce Community Led Total Sanitation (CLTS) in villages that have schools.

METHOD / SNV INTERVENTION

SNV facilitated a training of 50 trainers (facilitators) who triggered CLTS in 24 villages and their schools. After 2 months, follow up missions revealed that whereas CLTS had triggered households to build and use latrines, the same did not happen in most schools. The school latrines remained dirty, unused and open defecation around the schools remained rampant.

Discussions were held amongst the government and NGO staff working in the 6 districts and they resolved that a thorough investigation be undertaken to determine why improved school latrine use remained illusive. SNV proposed the use of the inquiry led multi-stakeholder approach (whole system facilitation) to enable stakeholders investigate and promote improved school latrine access and use. The stakeholders discussed and agreed to try the approach.

Whole system facilitation (WSF) is a capacity development approach in which stakeholders are facilitated to generate and broker knowledge, identify opportunities for leverage interventions and foster joint action and learning. The approach focuses on facilitating whole systems change processes through systemic action inquiry to address complex issues and solve them through multiple stakeholder processes. The approach is one of the 5 products that SNV East and Southern Africa (ESA) has adopted to enable clients address complex issues.

Implementation of WSF began in February 2009. SNV Ethiopia Southern Portfolio engaged 4 local capacity builders and initiated implementation of the whole system facilitation (WSF) in 4 districts. The WSF was designed to proceed in 6 steps:

- (1) define and clarify the school latrine management issue and the key stakeholders to participate and collaborate
- (2) undertake a multi-stakeholder inquiry on school latrine management and use,
- (3) hold multi-stakeholder meetings to share the inquiry findings and develop leverage actions for implementation
- (4) multi-stakeholders implementation of the leverage actions
- (5) multi-stakeholder assessment of results and designing of further actions if need be and
- (6) disseminating of the results.

To date, steps 1 to 3 have been undertaken and the results presented in this case are limited to what has been achieved from the 3 steps. An overview of how the 3 steps (Clarifying the issue, multi-stakeholder inquiry and multi-stakeholder meetings to refine the issues maps and agree on leverage actions) were done is explained in annex 1. The 27 schools in which the inquiry was done are listed in annex 2.

New insights on school latrine management and use in the 27 schools.

Only 2 out of the 27 schools (7%) visited have clean and used latrines. The remaining 93% of the schools have very dirty latrines (Fig. 1.) The dirty latrines were observed for both old and new latrines. All high schools that were assessed had very dirty and poorly used latrines.



Fig 1. Status of latrines in schools

Many of the latrines have poor and unsafe floor designs (Fig 2.) complicating management and use of latrines. As a consequent children fear to use the latrines and prefer the fields. Standard design guidelines for model latrines floors do exist but are not enforced because the local schools cannot afford them. Most of the pupils from grade 4 onwards know how to use latrines. The main reason for improper use of latrines is that latrines are not enough (200 pupils /toilet seat). To be able to use the latrines in the 15 minutes break time, the pupils have designed a practical strategy whereby they visit a latrine in groups of 5 or more at the same time. In the process they mess up the latrine floor.



Fig. 2. Poor and unsafe latrine floors in schools

Most of the latrines (even for girls) have no privacy (no doors, no latches, and no separate toilets). This makes it difficult for girls to use the toilets (Fig. 3). The issue is complicated by the fact that most of the schools are mixed schools for both boys and girls and in many schools there is no separation of latrines for girls and boys.

Government education staff at the Bureau, Zones and district levels agree that school latrine conditions and use is poor. However, they believe that class rooms, books and teaching is the priority in schools. As a consequent, government staff do not regard improved management and use of school latrines as a priority school performance indicator. During school monitoring visits school latrine management and use is not assessed and enforced.

School Directors and school committees too do not consider proper latrine management and use as a priority. They are in agreement with the government office officials that the priority in schools is buildings, books and teaching. They therefore do not allocate budget to



Fig 3. School latrines with no privacy

employ cleaners for latrines. The school directors also explained that they are overloaded with many other priority assignments making it difficult for them to routinely enforce school latrine management. As a consequence schools latrines are not cleaned except when a pupil is assigned to clean a latrine as a form of punishment.

Teachers do not participate or play any role in promoting cleaning of school latrines and use. They are therefore not role models. Most teachers are not even convinced that they have any role to play. One teacher remarked "I was employed to teach physics and that is it. I have been in this school for 4 years and have never visited the pupils latrines."

The school committees on their part also feel that schools have more other serious constraints than poor latrine conditions and use. To them the priority concerns that they are responsible for are: class rooms, getting teachers and books. They are also not sure of their role in latrine management and use.

Schools latrines in almost all the schools are not conducive for adolescent girls and particularly during menstruation periods (no doors, no water, no separation) resulting in girls coming very early to school or leaving school late to avoid embarrassments. Most of the girls are forced to miss school 2-3 days/month during menstruation (Fig 4.). Most adolescent girls feel that nobody cares about their menstruation difficulties in schools.



Fig 4. Adolescent girls expressing their frustrations

From the issue maps, stakeholders identified: (1) Unclear roles and responsibilities for school directors, teachers and school committees, (2) limited knowledge and (3) poor accountability to be the underlying causes for the poor school latrine conditions and use. They came up with 4 leverage actions that they plan to implement and achieve greater impact. These actions are: (1) Develop and implement guidelines and regulations for stakeholders government staff, School committees, school directors and teachers) participation in school latrines management and use, (2) Develop and enforce clear accountability measures for those assigned responsibilities, (3) Develop and enforce minimum standards for design & construction of school latrines from locally available materials, (4) increase financial allocation to latrine management, (5) Enable Adolescent girls to improve menstrual hygiene management and support them to access cheap pads.

The findings of the inquiry clearly show that school latrine management and use in Ethiopia is nobody's' responsibility and no one is held accountable for the crisis. These explains why critical WaSH stakeholders are not deeply concerned and disturbed with poor latrine conditions in schools and why nobody is willing to take responsibility for the tragedy. These findings underscore the need for governments to come up with very clear policies outlining who is responsible and accountable for the management of school latrines in public schools. The stakeholders on the other hand have also to be bold enough to implement such policies and reward and discipline those given responsibility.

OUTCOME

- Nine schools out of the 27 schools visited have improved school latrine cleaning through employment of cleaners. The schools have adopted a strategy where parents pay 2 birr per pupil year and the money is used to clean toilets. Through this strategy approximately 4,500 pupils have access to clean latrines.
- Sharing of the information on the pathetic status of latrines in schools has forced the SNNPR Regional Bureau of Education to take responsibility and initiate a process to improve management of school latrines. They have brought stakeholders together and are in the process of designing a strategy to increase accountability amongst the key stakeholders.

LESSONS LEARNED

- A local NGO known as Bright Image for Future Generations (BIGA) has initiated a project to support adolescent girls to improve menstrual hygiene management. They plan to increase awareness on menstrual hygiene amongst the adolescent girls, teachers and parents. They have also identified suitable local pads, samples have been made and they are being tested for acceptability before mass production.

From the reaction of the stakeholders, it appears that stakeholders who are closer and are frequently confronted with the unacceptable conditions of latrines in schools are more willing to take action than those at the higher levels. In the study, the district and lower level stakeholders were relatively more concerned and enthusiastic to implement the 4 leverage actions to bring change.

Unfortunately, the same enthusiasm was not exhibited by the Regional level offices where policy and institutional support is expected to come from. The Regional Education Bureau staff appeared to be quite content with what the government is doing despite its shortcomings. It has taken the district level stakeholders in the 4 districts and NGOs over 1 month to lobby and convince the Regional Bureau of Education to agree to avail the human resources required to support the district initiatives.

Fig. 5. A district officer explaining an issue map showing the complexity and inter-linkages between issues



In an inquiry process, physical observations, taking photos and appreciating what is working well are very important. The observations enabled the inquiry team to discuss issues from a practical and reality perspective including observing the bushes for open defecation. The appreciations during the inquiry resulted in stakeholders not becoming defensive and the photos provided a baseline of the facilities at the beginning of the process for later comparison of changes.

Bringing stakeholders together to discuss the issues and their linkages was an eye opener and it enabled stakeholders to appreciate the complexity of the issue and the need to address multiple aspects of the issue (Fig. 5). It also assisted the stakeholders to identify the leverage actions (Pressure points) which if addressed can lead to greater impact.

The WSF process though not completed has enabled school WaSH stakeholders (Government staff, NGOs, School directors, School committees, Teachers and pupils) to jointly undertake the inquiry, determine and understand the underlying reasons why improving school latrine conditions and use is difficult to achieve. They have also determined the critical leverage actions to be undertaken. Implementation of the planned collaborative leverage actions will also go along way in demonstrating how school latrines should be managed and used in Ethiopia but also boosting collaboration amongst stakeholders. WSF has also led to stakeholders creating a concerted lobbying of the Regional Education Bureau to support the process. SNV Ethiopia will support implementation of the remaining 3 steps of the WSF process to and looks forward to sharing further lessons learned.

Literature cited:

1. Universal Access Program for Water Supply and Sanitation (UAP), 2005/6
2. Jackson Wandera, Selamawit Tamiru, Zinash Tsegaye, Fantahun Getachew, Adane Kitaba. 2008. Integration of governance for empowerment issues in a baseline survey increases households access to safe water in Ethiopia.