



Hygiene education in Cambodian primary schools

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IT IS NOW recognized that hygiene education is an important channel to link newly installed hardware facilities to improved health (Burgers, Boot and Van Wijk-Sijbesma 1988). Hygiene education programmes in schools can contribute greatly to improving water supply and sanitation related behaviour (IRC 1988).

The situation in Cambodia

In Cambodia where only 36 per cent of the population are estimated to have access to safe drinking water and 12 per cent to latrines, the majority of primary schools are without working latrines and a safe drinking water source (UNICEF 1995). Hygiene education is on the school syllabus but very little attention is paid to it because priority is given to examination subjects. There is no standardized curriculum for this subject and teachers lack materials with which to teach it.

Approach taken in SAWA's school hygiene and sanitation programmes

Since 1992 SAWA has been involved in the implementation of projects to rehabilitate the urban water supply in some of the provincial towns in Cambodia. Firstly with the EC Emergency Rehabilitation projects in Battambang and Pursat and secondly with the ongoing World Bank/Dutch Government Five Towns project. One element of these projects (except in Battambang) has been to provide a safe drinking water source (rainwater jars, ferrous cement tanks or piped water) and pour-flush latrines to primary schools in those towns lacking such facilities. The Pursat project also included the introduction of a solid waste collection for the town, so the schools were provided with garbage bins. In order to provide the essential link between improved facilities and practices, this intervention was accompanied by a hygiene education component.

The one year Pursat project which was extended by a five month consolidation phase included the provision of 2,000 litre rainwater jars and pour-flush latrines for the eight town primary schools. Prior to the introduction of rainwater jars and latrines, project staff worked with the teachers to help them to set up school hygiene committees (a new idea in Cambodia) in order to ensure that the schools take responsibility for the operation and maintenance of the new facilities. Training was also given to the teachers on operation and maintenance of the jars and latrines.

Training courses were conducted between November 1993 and March 1994 to upgrade the knowledge of the teachers with regard to the relationship between water, sanitation and health. They were also made aware of the different teaching methods which can be used to transmit health and hygiene education messages to the students. Following that training course the teachers and the local Education Department made a request to SAWA for a structured hygiene education curriculum with visual aids and this was introduced into the primary schools in December 1994.

The curriculum produced by SAWA is based to a certain extent on the "child to child" approach and encourages active participation by the children. It is comprised of eleven lessons focusing not only on latrines, protecting clean water and schools hygiene but also on community hygiene. Accompanying the curriculum are twenty seven large posters, a hygiene story and hand washing flip charts. All the posters and pictures being produced by local artists. The hygiene flip chart consists of a series of pictures and it is up to the teacher to make up his or her own story to accompany the pictures. Following pretesting and prior to the introduction of the curriculum the teachers received training on how to use it. They were enthusiastic about the approach of the curriculum and readily participated in the games and activities. Training was also given in participatory teaching methods, which is a new concept in Cambodia, where children usually learn rote fashion. The curriculum was not ready to be handed over until the end of the project which meant there was no opportunity to monitor how it was being used.

Metal posters on how to use the latrines were placed on the door of each latrine, to reinforce messages on correct use of the latrines which was being promoted in the curriculum.

School monitoring was introduced by project staff at the time of the hand-over of the new facilities. In order to check on the operation/maintenance of the new facilities and to provide support and encouragement to the school hygiene committees. This took place fortnightly during the first year and monthly during the consolidation phase, using a specially designed monitoring form related to all aspects of school hygiene.

In May 1995 a evaluation of the hygiene education curriculum was conducted (Peabody 1995). It was found that the curriculum, posters and flip charts were being used by the teachers and they remained enthusiastic

about it, all of the teachers however had not completely understood the participatory approach being promoted. It appeared that the children at the SAWA schools had a more in depth knowledge of hygiene education than those at the control school. The metal poster on how to use the latrine proved to be a good way to reinforce hygiene messages being promoted in the curriculum. Some of the children however could not remember all the hand-washing messages being promoted. They were however beginning to pass on hygiene messages learnt in school to their families and neighbours. Many of whom had recently acquired family latrines under the latrine subsidy system which was another component of the Pursat project. The local Education Department remained enthusiastic about the curriculum and requested that SAWA try to find funding to extend the project to more schools in the province.

No evaluation was conducted on the use and maintenance of the rainwater jars and latrines. Observation at the time of the curriculum evaluation however revealed that the jars were being correctly used/maintained. The latrines were not locked (a common problem in Cambodia schools is locked latrines), were being used and were well maintained. It is thought that the continuous school monitoring and support given to the schools throughout the project had attributed to this. This monitoring is often missing from school hygiene projects in Cambodia. SAWA however has found it to be an essential component when considering sustainability.

Following the evaluation, the curriculum was adjusted to put more emphasis on the hand-washing messages and a hand-washing flip chart was produced at the request of

the teachers. Additional training was provided for the teachers on participatory teaching methods and the approach of the curriculum. A lesson learned being that when introducing new teaching techniques more time is required for training and follow up. Extra copies of the curriculum, posters and flip charts were provided to the schools at their request. Extremely limited school budgets mean that there is often no money available for even chalk and parents are required to contribute to the cost of school furniture. It is therefore necessary to provide the schools with an adequate supply of hygiene education materials made of durable materials in order to increase their life-span.

The approach used in the Pursat school project has been reiterated in the ongoing five towns water supply project where the schools are provided with a piped water supply rather than rainwater jars.

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