



Children as agents of sanitation and hygiene behaviour change

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In Nigeria, it is widely acknowledged that sanitation and in particular safe excreta disposal has the lowest priority in the water and environmental sanitation (WES) sector through a lack of interest at community level (ranked the lowest in the KAP study) as shown in figure 1. Since primary schools are part of communities, they also lack sanitary and water facilities. Where facilities exist, they are inadequate and badly used and poorly maintained. The direct consequence of this condition is the very poor hygiene and health status.

This paper focuses on promotion of sanitation and hygiene education among school children with a goal of enhancing positive knowledge, attitudes and skills that help encourage them to become agents of hygiene behaviour change in their schools, homes and communities. It addresses why schools; and children and how children are becoming agents of change.

Why schools?

There is this widely held belief in most areas that toilet is not necessary in a learning environment and that children seen around the toilet during classes are afraid of lessons are doing things that are wrong. Such as fighting, bullying, or any unwholesome behaviour.

The WES Project made an assessment of 40 selected primary schools, 10 in each of the 4 region (Unicef's Zonal/Regional Offices) of the country. The results of assessment indicated that most schools have very poor environments. Sanitation and water facilities are absent, badly maintained or not used. Also children adopt poor hygiene habits such as indiscriminate excreta disposal and lack of hand wash-

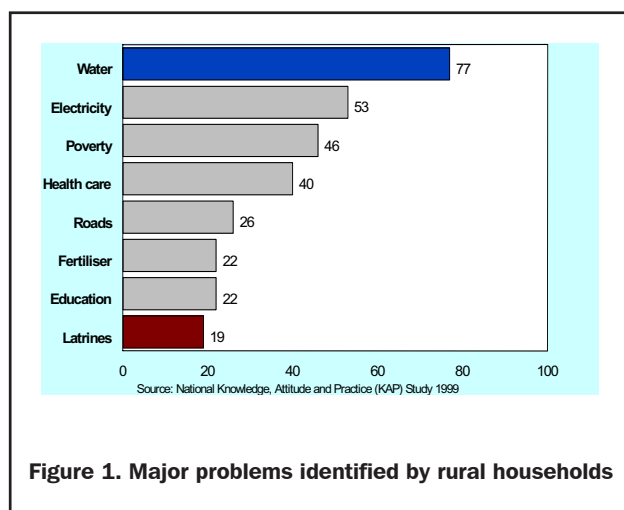


Figure 1. Major problems identified by rural households

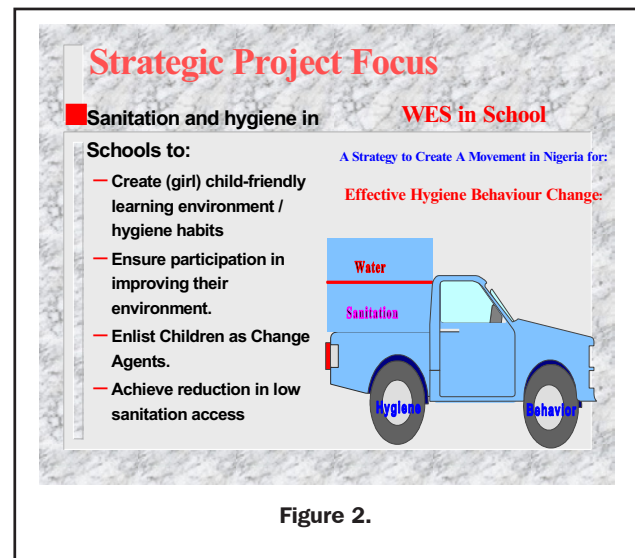


Figure 2.

ing practices. Under such conditions, children become most vulnerable to health hazards and subsequently to school absenteeism as children fall ill. Where schools lack separate facilities for girls and boys, many girls do not attend school, especially during their menstruation. It is therefore important for schools to open hygiene education, have access to safe as well adequate sanitation facilities and water supply. Schools provide opportunities to i) prevent diseases and promote health ii) effect an effective way of reaching large group of people, including children, school personnel, families and community members iv) reaching children at influential stages in their lives when lifelong behaviours are formed.

Why children?

In line with Right Based approach, of UNICEF global priorities and WES sector concerns, access to water and sanitation is a right of every child. Also children's participation is a right hence they should be effectively involved in water and environmental sanitation activities in their schools. In most African cultures children are not allowed to correct adults, making it difficult for children to correct parents at home after having learnt the correct hygiene habit in school. However, have the right focus and method of child to parent approach, the positive behaviour of children is bringing about new trends. There indications that their opinions and participation in the welfare of the family is valued. In addition they have vital role to play in societal behaviour changes because:

- Children are eager to learn and adapt to new behaviour changes more easily.
- Children in Nigeria play important roles in the household chores, taking care of their younger siblings,
- Depending on dept of cultural beliefs of their communities, children may also question existing and hygienic practices in the household.
- Children as future adults and parents can apply lifelong behaviour formed in their lives and passed to their own children and society.

Strategies adopted

Community based training

School based sanitation training with parents as active participants. Here Parents come to understand that there is nothing wrong in children correcting adults, as far as it is done in a respectful manner and right choice of words. etc

Use of school prefects (role models) in school

The school sanitation teacher guides members of sanitation club in the election of school sanitation and water prefects and their assistants. There are criteria for this election, some of which are:

- Being punctual to school
- Neat dressing and other hygiene practices
- Class performance

The sanitation teacher assists them to draw up a weekly rooster, indicating name of children and their morning duties in the school each day. For example a child in primary 3, who is in charge of sanitation, comes to school early. He/She inspects the sweeping of the classroom, ensures the school compound is swept, the toilets are cleaned wash hand facility and water in proper position with water. Any defaulting child is reported to the senior

sanitation or water prefect, who will report to the teacher. During weekly club meetings children are asked to report on sanitation in school and the community.

The strategy has resulted in children eager to show good hygiene habits, as a way of being elected the next prefect. In their communities they hunt for sanitation news to be able to report during meetings. This has encouraged children to speak out.

- Short stories/ debate on water and environmental sanitation.
- Short stories on sanitation are developed by teachers, given to children to read and retell the story during morning assembly.
- Class debates are also organized on sanitation topics.

The how of behaviour change

The School WES intervention which is being implemented in selected Child Friendly Schools comprises Hygiene Promotion/ Education and Building of WES Facilities and provision of manuals to both teachers and pupils. By providing these facilities and learning materials, schools can reinforce the health and hygiene messages and encourages a general child friendly learning environment in the school and community.

Hygiene and Sanitation Awareness and Promotion. The project focuses on Child to Child methodology of hygiene promotion and education as an overriding factor. This is so as to facilitate active and adequate participation of the pupils to enhance acquisition of knowledge and skills through improving key hygiene practices such as safe disposal of faeces, hand washing, and hygienic water uses. As school children are being actively involved in promoting improved sanitation and hygiene practices in their school, they are encouraged to reach their various households in the community.

Table 1. WES in selected child friendly schools by region

Region	Selected Child Friendly Schools	Schools with Latrines	Schools with Water Sources:		Schools with H/washing facilities	Schools with Environmental Health Clubs	REMARKS * Establishment / participation is voluntary.
			BH	HDW			
AFO	46	43	25	4	20	31	Some EHCs have Sani-Centre
BFO	24	7	6	1	14	7	Other schools have , rest are new Sanplat & upgraded trad. Latrines
CFO	23	23	17	0	23	23	Unicef support 20, SPEB 3 schls; PTA, support SEHCs
DFO	38	34	14	8	6	17	
TOTAL	131	107	62	13	63	78	Selected - needy & willing state/schools.

Environmental Health Clubs. The capacity of children and youth to function as agents of change in their families and communities is being encouraged through initiatives such as establishment and operation of voluntary school environmental health clubs (SEHC). This includes training of teachers and members of parent and teachers associations to support the school environmental health club members, to develop community sanitation and hygiene brigades for integrating other children in their communities. Through the operation of these voluntaries, children help to promote improved hygiene practices among their peers, their households and communities. This in turn can lead to a demand for similar facilities and use by their households and communities, thus children serving as agents of change.

Conclusion

In line with Right Based approach, of UNICEF new country programme of cooperation and global priorities of WES sector concerns, hygiene and sanitation must have the right focus for effecting positive behaviour change of children. In-turn children impact the new knowledge acquired on their family members and communities, thereby improving the health and economic well being of society.

The environmental impact of improved hygiene and sanitation hygiene behaviour is expected to improve the physical environment of schools. The provision of WES facilities and hygienic uses of such is one important improvement with positive implications for children's health.

Equally important is the expected improved sanitary conditions within the households and within communities. Such improvements are expected to contribute to decreased transmission of diseases and increase productive activities in of households, schools and communities. In particular role of committed school children who become very active Hygiene and Sanitation Brigades through their Environmental Hygiene Clubs will no doubt also be active sanitation advocates for better cleaner homes, schools, communities and an environmentally healthy nation.

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