

# Fit for School Programme

Improving health for better education and child development

## The challenge

Schools are key public institutions where students, staff, and community members come together, interact closely, and share common spaces. Thus, the risk of transmitting infectious diseases in school settings is high. Schools are also the institutions where lifelong hygiene behaviors are acquired and serve as models for parents and communities. Therefore, routine hygiene measures serve two purposes: as school-based activities to improve personal hygiene of children, particularly washing hands with water and soap and toothbrushing, and emphasizing the importance of better environmental hygiene through proper cleaning. Establishing this culture of cleanliness and hygiene in schools is at the core of the program so that they can serve with purpose as safe public institutions and to prevent and control the risk of infection within the community.

## Our approach

The Fit for School Approach strengthens school-based management to support the implementation of water, sanitation and hygiene programs, including daily handwashing and toothbrushing and regular deworming, 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.

Promoting healthy habits in conducive learning environments allows children to make the most of their education through better health. This is also reflected in the SDG 4 on Quality Education under 4.a.1, which is an indicator on schools with access to basic drinking water, usable single-sex basic sanitation facilities, and basic handwashing facilities with available water and soap. Children benefit from improved water, sanitation and hygiene in schools regardless of their background, so existing disadvantages and inequalities are reduced and all have better chances to live a healthy and productive life.

## The GIZ Fit for School Programme

On behalf of BMZ, GIZ has fostered the Fit for School Approach in the Philippines since 2008 by supporting the Department of Education in delivering these interventions to public elementary schools under what was then the Essential Health Care Program (EHCP). Due to the high demand from other Southeast Asian governments, GIZ was commissioned by BMZ to implement the Regional Fit for School Programme in 2011 in partnership with the Southeast Asian Ministries of Education Organization (SEAMEO) and its Regional Center for Educational Innovation and Technology (SEAMEO INNOTECH). The Programme supported the adaptation of the Fit for School Approach to three new countries - Cambodia, Lao PDR and Indonesia - through the development of replicable implementation models and guidelines. As the models have been integrated into national Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) program in Schools (WinS), GIZ now supports government-led scale-up in the respective partner countries.

Project name	Regional Fit for School Programme
Commissioned by	Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)
Project region	Southeast Asia (Philippines, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Cambodia)
Lead executing agencies	Regional Partner: SEAMEO INNOTECH, Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, Cambodia SEAMEO RECFON, Indonesia Ministry of Education and Sports, Lao PDR Department of Education, Philippines
Duration	Regional Programme: December 2011 – November 2021



L-R: Flag ceremony activity in Philippines; Handwashing group activity in Philippines; Digital monitoring in Cambodia

## Results

The program supports the Ministries of Education in the partner countries to roll-out WinS policies, implementing guidelines, and monitoring systems. Compliance with WASH standards and reaching benchmarks are driving forces in the education sector to engage school heads, district supervisors, regional directors, and even the state secretaries to trigger action on national, subnational, school and community level. This institutional behavior change has improved the learning environment for millions of children. In the 4 partner countries, 7.5 million learners are attending schools with improved WASH conditions for safe drinking water, usable sanitation facilities, and handwashing by reaching the WinS minimum standards (see Table 1).

**Table 1.** Estimated number of children attending schools reaching minimum WinS standard

Country	No. of Schools reaching the minimum WinS standards	Average no. of students per school	Estimated no. of children attending schools reaching the minimum WinS standards
Cambodia	6,773	238.1	1,600,000
Indonesia	1,291	166.6	200,000
Lao PDR	3,346	122.0	400,000
Philippines	10,549	500.0	5,300,000

A longitudinal health outcome study measured the impact of the interventions in the partner countries, revealing better access to WASH facilities, and improved practice of handwashing with soap. Furthermore, the programme strengthened the implementation of existing national deworming programs. Daily toothbrushing practices led to 17 to 37 percent less tooth decay among students in implementing schools. The interventions also showed positive health effects in terms of weight increase and reduction of absenteeism.

## Success factors

The Fit for School Approach is based on four core principles: simplicity, sustainability, scalability and system focus. A WinS program and its interventions must be based on the best possible evidence and should be cost-effective and simplified to facilitate implementation in the school context with little extra effort. To ensure sustainability, long-term allocation of government human and financial resources is crucial. Close partnership with the parents and the local community is imperative in maximizing ownership, transparency and accountability. Capitalizing on existing systems and resources is an essential strategy for scalability and sustainability. The approach works through the education sector, especially at the subnational level, to promote sustainable programme management and implementation within local structures.

Recognizing the importance of School-based Management, the Fit for School approach strengthens the capacity of the education sector to implement and monitor WinS and open the doors of schools for closer collaboration with parents and the larger school community. Every member of the community can contribute in various relevant ways to make the programme successful, including the construction of washing facilities, participation in monitoring, cleaning, repair, and maintenance. In this way, even schools with very limited resources can start to improve the school environment step-by-step by implementing simple but effective WASH interventions.

## Success story

The Ministry of Education and Sports in Lao PDR has scaled up Fit for School from 22 model schools to over 3,300 schools in the span of eight years. Ms. Sengdeuane Boudsadee, a parent from Dongsavad School, says, "I am very proud to be part of the programme. It helps children practice daily hygiene activities. My child is cleaner now and he also encourages his siblings to carry out hygiene activities at home. We support the school with materials and labor for the construction of the washing facility. I like to support the school since what they are doing is for our children, and I see that many things are improving in our school and I would like to contribute to these improvements."

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