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Scaling up the Essential Health Care Program in the Philippines to Marginalized Child Populations in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao

Fit for School ARMM

Situation

The provinces of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) are among the poorest in the Philippines. The region in the south of the country has to deal with weak infrastructure as well as reoccurring conflicts. These conditions make it challenging for the Regional Office of the Department of Education (DepEd – ARMM) to monitor the WASH in Schools (WinS) services within the 2000 public elementary schools under their responsibility. At the same time, the region suffers from a higher prevalence of health related issues among young children. Considering these tremendous challenges DepEd ARMM with the assistance of the Fit for School program decided to support the monitoring with a digital tool. Although many schools in ARMM have very limited access to computers and internet, cell phones are widely available.

Objective

The Fit for School program supports the education sector to improve water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) in Schools (WinS). In particular, the Fit for School ARMM program started to work in 2015 with DepEd ARMM to establish a monitoring system for WinS linked to a corresponding recognition system for step-wise progress. The program aimed to establish this system and expand it to two divisions in ARMM, covering nearly 500 schools. Through this system the Regional Office would have the needed information for planning and decision making to improve WinS, and each school would receive appropriate feedback to make gradual progress to improve WinS implementation.

Approach

The monitoring system is based on the GIZ-UNICEF “Three Star Approach to WASH in Schools”, which provides a step-wise recognition system to guide schools to gradually improve their WinS status using existing resources available to them. In order to categorize schools based on this approach, a self-assessment via an Android application was chosen as the most efficient option to collect data from all schools.

Applied digital Technologies

Open Data Kit (ODK), an open source Android based application, was selected as the means to collect monitoring data. The application can be downloaded from the Google-Play Store to any Android device. Once the application is downloaded, the user can download and access the blank questionnaires. For the aforementioned steps an active internet access (WiFi/Data) is required. The survey, however, can be conducted on school grounds without internet access. After completing the survey, the schools receive immediate feedback indicating their current level of performance, as well as suggestions for improvement. Therefore, schools can take immediate action in order to improve their WASH infrastructure and practices and realize the next level of recognition. The final step is to upload the completed questionnaire, so that the Regional Office can access and aggregate the data. In case of lacking Internet connection, the completed survey can be saved on the phone and later uploaded when internet access is available, for example when school heads visit division offices. Geotagged photos can also be included in the responses, which enables district and division staff to more easily validate the data.

Achievements through Digitalization

The WinS monitoring through the ODK was initially piloted in 28 schools and the following school year, scaled up to two school divisions, (Maguindanao 1 and 2) with 477 schools submitting data. The information available was used to categorize schools based on their WinS status. Those with a higher WinS status received official recognition from the Regional Office. Furthermore, ODK allows the Regional Office to store the encoded data online and to have a first analysis of the output. The paperless system is more efficient and helps DepEd ARMM in order to use it for further planning, e.g. the Regional Office was able to create maps based on the information from the monitoring to identify geographic areas with schools which lacked access to water or sufficient toilets. DepEd ARMM now has initial experience with digitalizing one aspect of their monitoring. They are now able to expand the monitoring system to the remaining divisions in the region and to cover a wider range of topics in the department.

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Project Name

Fit for School ARMM

Commissioned by	German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), co-funded by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT)
Lead Implementing Agency	GIZ
Lead Executing Agency	Department of Education, ARMM
Duration	05/11 – 12/17
Budget	€ 6.4 million
Website	www.fitforschool.international