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RESEARCH UPDATE

# Scaling-Up the Fit for School Program

Sisattanak District Experience





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## Overview

### Scalability Issues of School Health Programs

“The question now is not whether school health programs are necessary... but how they can be implemented at meaning scale. This is the challenge that we now face,” (Bundy, 2011, p. xiv). This quote reflects a key issue in the field of school health and WASH in Schools (WinS), especially in countries where resources are limited compared to the challenges in this field. Often good practices can be established but they remain limited in terms of impact if they cannot be sustained and implemented on scale by existing government structures. Therefore, scale-up is recently high on the agenda of development partners that support Ministries of Education (MoEs) to strengthen capacities for the implementation of simple, scalable and sustainable WinS and school health programs that are integrated in existing government systems. It has now become a precondition to consider scale-up at the very beginning of a program.

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The design of the intervention has to be simple enough and templates have to be provided so that it can easily be integrated in existing structures of the MoE and replicated by stakeholders. Appropriate and affordable solutions have to be offered for programs to be implemented successfully even in low-resource settings. Existing government structures and processes need to be maximized and systematically strengthened in rolling out the program to ensure its sustainability.

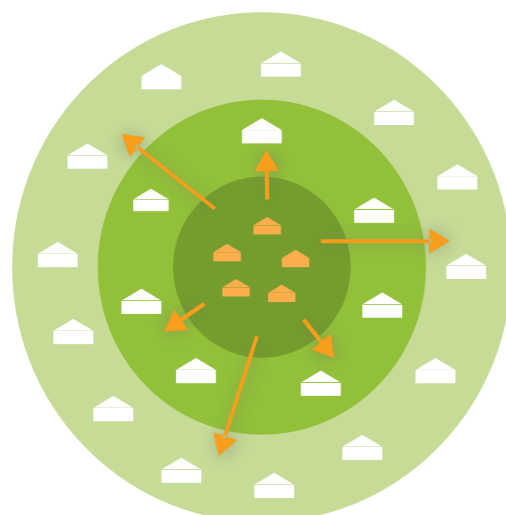
### The Fit for School Principles and the Regional Fit for School Program

The Fit for School program (FIT program) addresses these issues. Scalability is one of its key principles. Recognizing that there is a need to address hygiene-deficiency related diseases like intestinal worm infections, diarrhea and tooth decay among school-age children in Southeast Asia, this approach was developed in the Philippines by the Department of Education with the support of the German Development Cooperation. The approach follows the key principles of simple, scalable, sustainable and system thinking. It aims to transform public primary schools into supportive learning environments where children can practice healthy habits, learn and thrive. The program promotes a stepwise approach for schools to improve according to their resources, circumstances and capabilities. Beside the improvement of the school environment, daily health hygiene practices such as toothbrushing with fluoride toothpaste and handwashing with soap and biannual deworming are institutionalized in schools. These interventions are simple, cost-effective and evidence-based and can be scaled-up even in settings with limited resources. For further information, please visit the program’s website: [www.fitforschool.international](http://www.fitforschool.international).

In 2011, the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, in partnership with the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization Regional Center for Educational Innovation and Technology (SEAMEO INNOTECH), was commissioned by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) to support Ministries of Education in Lao PDR, Cambodia, Indonesia and the Philippines to implement the Fit for School program.

Lao PDR started to implement the FIT program in 2011. Twenty-two model schools in four districts in Vientiane capital were selected to carry

## Sisattanak District Scale-up Timeline



- 5 **model schools** (Year 2011-12)
- from **model schools** to some schools (Year 2012-13)
- from **model schools** to all schools (Year 2013-14)

out improvements in WASH facilities and apply the daily hygiene activities. Five of these model schools are in Sisattanak District. In 2014, the District Education Bureau of Sisattanak was able to expand the program to almost all primary schools in the district, covering 22 public primary schools and 17 private primary schools, on their own initiative.

From April to June 2015, joint missions between the Department of Pre-school and Primary School Education of Lao PDR Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES), SEAMEO INNO-TECH and GIZ were conducted to look into the scale-up experience of Sisattanak District and to document learnings gained. This case study aims to inform and guide the MoES and other WinS partners in supporting the scale-up process in other districts and provinces of Lao PDR.

### Documenting the Scalability of FIT Program

The study aimed to describe how Sisattanak District was able to scale-up the Fit for School program to all of the primary schools in its area. The study focuses on analyzing the structures, processes and mechanisms that were applied to successfully scale-up the program with limited

resources and without much external support. Specifically, the research addressed the following questions:

- **How did Sisattanak District scale-up the FIT program?**  
Focusing on roles and competencies of stakeholders and processes at the district and school level as well as coordinating mechanisms between these two levels
- **What were the main factors influencing the scale-up process?**  
Focusing on facilitating and enabling factors as well as hindering factors
- **How can the learning be used for further scale-up in Lao PDR?**  
Focusing on appropriate and most effective ways to consolidate and share learnings

Key informant and group interviews with stakeholders from four levels of the MoES were conducted (national, provincial, district and school levels) within the months of April to May 2015. School visits and review of background documents were also conducted to gather data for the case study. Findings were shared and validated with key program stakeholders.

## The Sisattanak District Scale-up Experience

The different levels of the MoES from the national, provincial, district, school and community levels all contributed in scaling-up the Fit for School program in Sisattanak District. On all those levels, an intersectoral collaboration with the Ministry of Health exists that supports the implementation of School Health Programs in Lao PDR. The next section describes the existing structures, processes, and facilitating and hindering factors that supported scale-up in Sisattanak district.

Sisattanak is a district in Vientiane Capital with an advanced socio-economic profile compared to many other areas and districts in Lao PDR. Its location to the national level was an advantage during the research and development phase (2011-2015) of the program in order to consolidate learnings from model schools and to develop implementation templates and materials for the Lao context. With these sound templates and materials, the program can be rolled out to more challenging areas in the country. The learnings from Sisattanak are considered useful for new districts that want to start program implementation since a lot can be learned about district management and school-based management in general using the example of the FIT implementation and scale-up.

### Sisattanak District

#### Facts

Population: 78,088  
 Number of villages: 37  
 Number of primary schools: 41  
 Number of clusters: 3  
 Number of primary school students: 5,657  
 Number of primary school teachers: 275  
 Gross Enrollment rate: 105.85 %  
 Drop out rate (Grade 1): 1.9 %  
 Primary Education completion rate: 92.9 %  
 Land area: ca. 31,000 km<sup>2</sup>



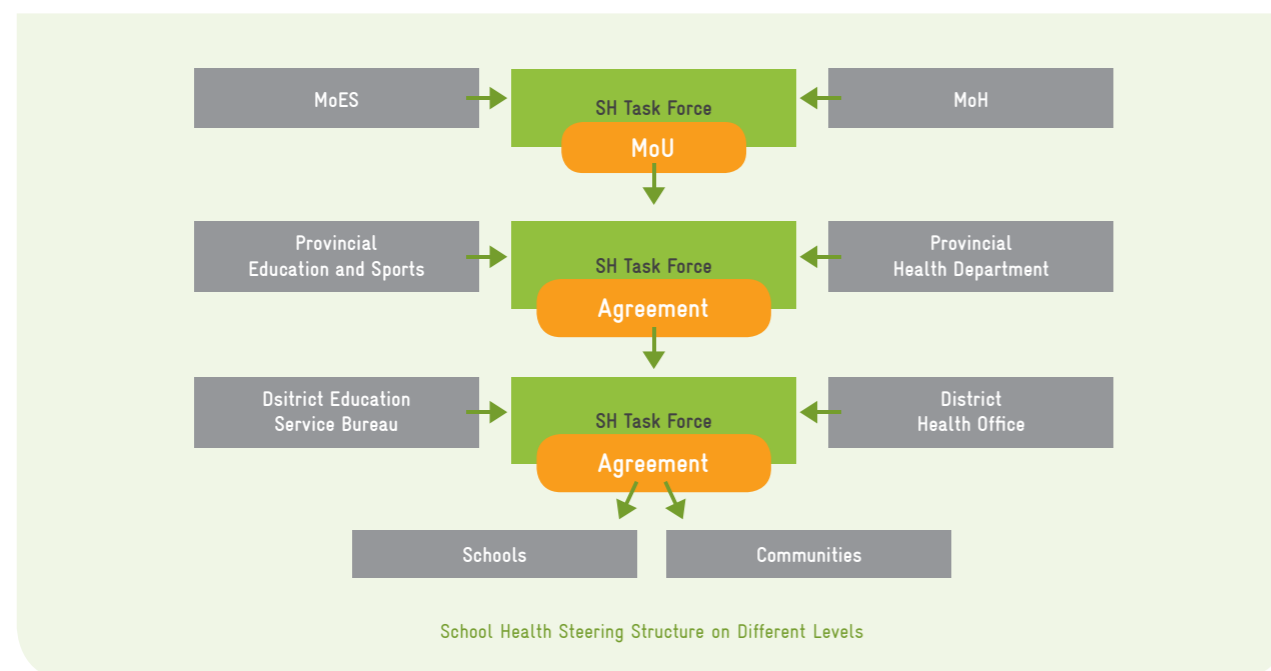
# 1. Enabling a Supportive Policy Environment



## The Key Player: DDPE National Level

School health in Lao PDR is under the responsibility of the Department of Pre-school and Primary Education (DPPE) at the national level. The DPPE provided an overall structure in implementing school health programs such as the FIT program through the establishment of a School Health Task Force (SHTF). The task force is the main body responsible

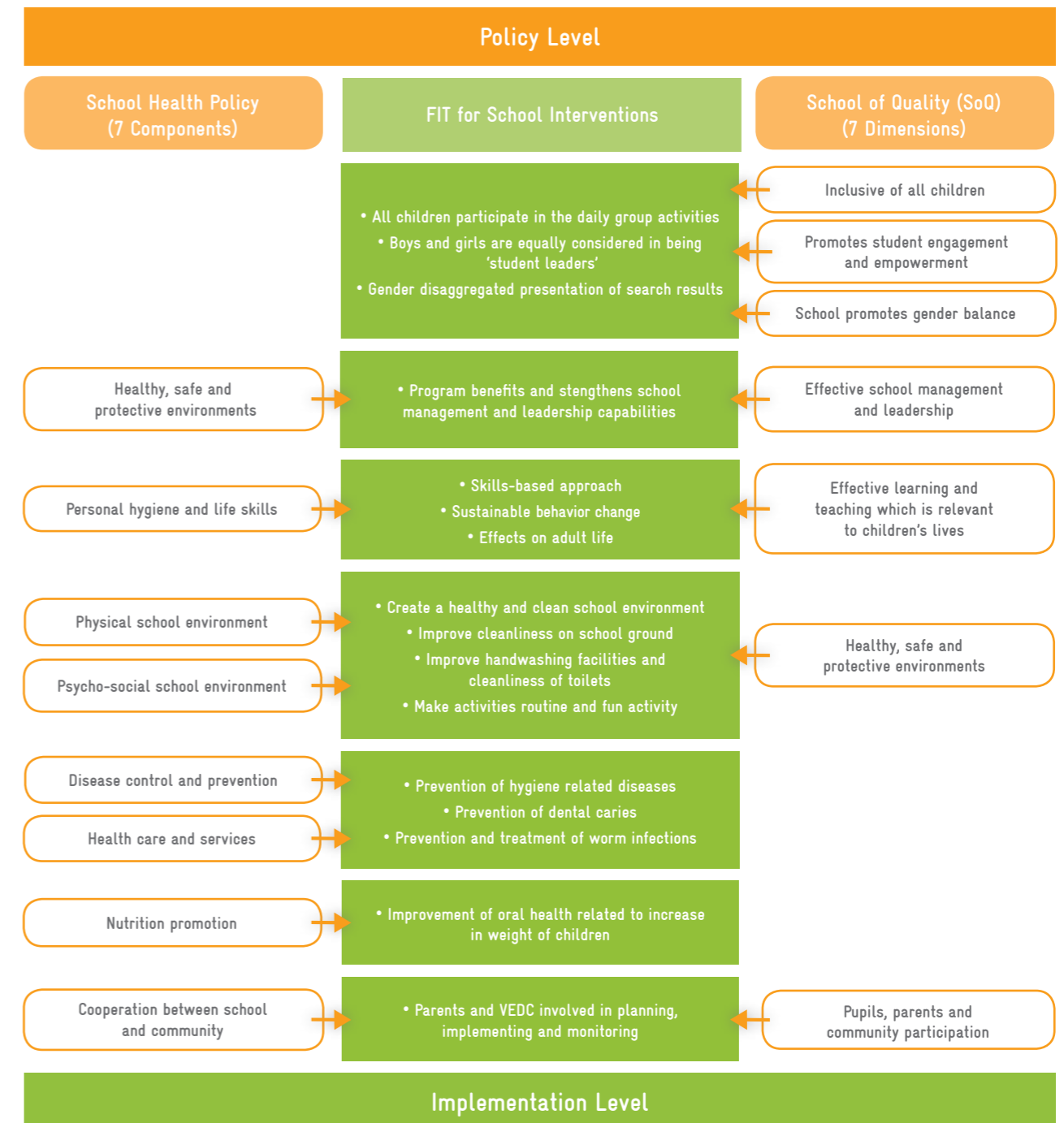
for school health programs within the MoES. The task force also exists at the different levels of the MoES and Ministry of Health (MoH) and is usually composed of their directors, and other technical staff members. The figure below shows the school health steering structure in Lao PDR.



## The Scale-Up Strategy: Alignment with National Frameworks

Lao PDR has a well-developed policy framework: 1) National School Health Policy and 2) 'Schools of Quality' (SoQ) provide a supportive policy environment and overall direction for the implementation of the FIT program in the country. One supportive factor for the scale-up in Sisattanak District, identified by the DPPE was that the Fit for School program is aligned with these existing government policies and

guarantees that the program operationalizes these prevailing policies with the help of structures already in place such as the SHTF. Despite having no reiterative directives at the subnational levels, the MoES officials at the subnational and school levels were familiar with these national policies and the direction from the national level was sufficient to administer the FIT program.



The implementation of the FIT approach has been promoted by the national level DPPE officials. DPPE officials contributed in advocating for the program to other stakeholders within the MoES. The DPPE decided to conduct the research and development phase of FIT program (2011-2015) in Vientiane Capital due to the accessibility during this phase, where more support and closer monitoring is required to come up with sound templates that can then be tested in more challenging areas as a next step. The DPPE team encourage stakeholders on provincial and district level to “start small” and improve from there “step by step.” The DPPE knew that the ministry only had a small budget and can only provide each district or school with very limited support, hence, piloting the approach in selected areas seemed to be the best option at that time. The DPPE emphasized that each district can begin with one school. Once one district has set up a model school, other schools can visit the model school thus allowing the opportunity for learning exchange.

International learning exchanges also helped in motivating the stakeholders in implementing the FIT approach as they saw that they were part of the global movement. They acquired ideas during these exchanges and realized that the FIT approach is doable even with little resources and could be started with small steps, following a stepwise approach that aims for gradual improvement depending on the public health issues and available resources in the school community. On the other hand, the MoES also determined that the lack of a focal person on school health and having unclear roles and responsibilities can hinder the scale-up process.

## Experiences



Dr. Mithong Souvanvixay // General Director, DPPE, MoES

“In Lao, people believe in the saying ‘seeing it once is better than hearing it ten times from ten people’. Ministry officials who joined these regional learning exchanges and/or school visits become better trainers because they do not just read the documents but also experience and see how it is done in schools.”

### Essential Factors: Summary of Key Learnings

- Having a conducive policy environment
- Clearly defined roles and responsibilities on all levels
- Having supportive ministry officials at all levels
- ‘Starting small’ and using a ‘step-wise-approach’
- Accessibility of model schools during the ‘research and development’ phase
- Showcasing of good examples and sharing of knowledge through school visits and learning exchanges – ‘to see is to believe’

## 2. Fostering Knowledge Sharing and Advocacy



### The Key Players: Provincial Education Service

Sisattanak District is under the Provincial Education Service (PES) of Vientiane Capital. The Vientiane Capital Education Office is supervising nine districts with a total of 512 primary schools with 72,362 pupils (SY 2014-2015) (Vientiane Capital Department of Education and Sport, 2015).

Similar to the structure at the national level, school health is under the Pre-primary and Primary School Department. The provincial office assigned a staff member as a focal person for the Fit for School program. The focal person is responsible for conducting meetings, orienting, mentoring and monitoring of districts and schools.

### The Scale-Up Strategy: Orientation and Dissemination

In the beginning, in order to brief the districts about the FIT approach, the provincial office conducted program orientations. The focal person attested that she herself became more familiar with the FIT program by studying its materials, especially the Fit for School 'School and Community Manual' and the Basic Orientation Video. The team also distributed assignments for the program orientations. For example, the District Director of Education and

Sports gave the opening remarks while the technical staff or Fit for School program focal person served as the resource person.

In conducting program orientations, the provincial team had shown the FIT approach orientation video and distributed the manuals. The videos were well-received by the participants as they can see and understand better how to implement the program. Most of the time, after watching the video, the participants would want to explore further how they could actually implement the FIT approach at the school level.

Knowing the successful scale-up in Sisattanak District, the provincial office had decided to also introduce the program to the remaining five districts in Vientiane Capital (nine districts in total) in addition to the four initial districts where the program was introduced in model schools. The Provincial team supported district personnel in program launching. According to the DPPE, "for the new five districts, the provincial office called for a meeting with representatives from each district. We oriented them about the program and shared Sisattanak's experiences with them as an example."

The provincial team actively used existing structures in sharing best practices in implementing the FIT program and giving presentations and providing status reports on school health in regular monthly

meetings. For example, last year, the Chomphet Primary School, a model school in Sisattanak District, was invited to showcase its best practices, including the FIT program, in the "Three Built' (decentralization) Strategy within Education Sector Meeting", a national gathering of all district and provincial teams in Lao PDR. This demonstrated the commitment of local authorities to scale-up the FIT program as the Three Built strategy calls for resources to be channelled to subnational level, particularly to: (1) build the province as a strategic unit; (2) build the district to be the overall strengthening unit; and (3) build the village to be the development unit.

Ms. Khamvanh Razakhanthy, Head of the Pre-school and Primary Education Section in the Vientiane Capital Education Service recognized that districts have different conditions. She noted that even villages in the same district have different levels of socio-economic development. In order to address these differences, the provincial team had to do the following: a) share information/orientation, b) conduct learning exchange programs, c) share lessons learned from Sisattanak, d) continue to encourage districts and schools, and e) provide solutions and the support that districts and schools need according to the existing circumstances.

### Three Built Strategy

#### Build the province as a strategic unit

Provincial Education Service and the School Health Task Force decided where to start the program. They chose two urban and two suburban districts representing different economic conditions. Schools installed different kinds of facilities based on their local contexts. With this contextualized strategy, MoES was able to scale up to nine districts in Vientiane Capital easily.



#### Build the district to be the overall strengthening unit

District education management and the School Health Task Force worked hard to gather support from all stakeholders. They coordinated with the district governor for fund mobilization and community participation. They provided orientation to school principals on how to implement the program. These experiences also strengthened their capacities as managers and trainers.

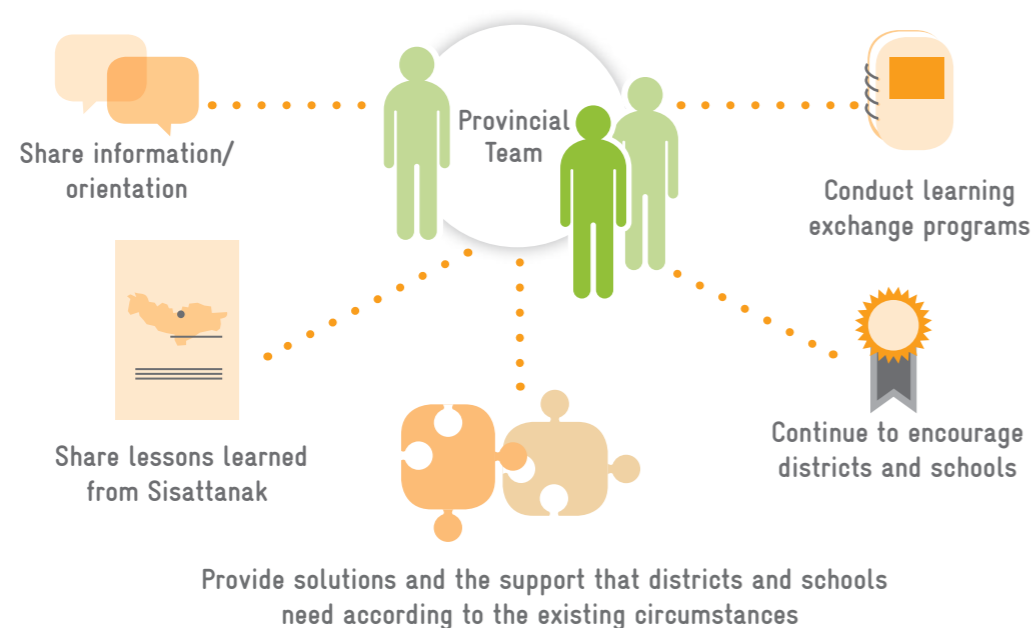


#### Build the village to be the developmental unit

Village authorities took ownership to develop their villages with special focus on education and health issues of the children. Communities participated in the planning process and supported schools in constructing washing facilities.



## Role of Provincial Team



### Community Involvement // Orientation

In its orientations, the provincial team emphasized the need to involve different school and community members to foster ownership of the program.

### Essential Factors: Summary of Key Learnings

- Use existing meeting and structures for advocacy and dissemination of learnings
- Facilitate knowledge sharing and learning exchange between districts in the province
- Having assigned teams working on the program from the district to the school levels
- District and school management capacities: teams had facilitated ownership of the program among the different members of the school and community

## Experiences



Ms. Khamvanh Razakhanthy // Head of the Pre-school and Primary Education Section, Vientiane Capital Education Service

"We are confident that the program will be sustained. We are confident because community involvement is very high. They contributed the biggest share for the construction of group washing facilities. The community also monitors the program and use of the facilities. If they see that there is something that needs to be fixed or repaired, they fix it. The program can also be monitored by the teachers and students of the school. If any problems are seen, they report it to the district or provincial office so it can be solved immediately."

### 3. Creating the Demand for Scale-up and Providing Appropriate Support



#### The Key Players: District Education Service and Cluster Head

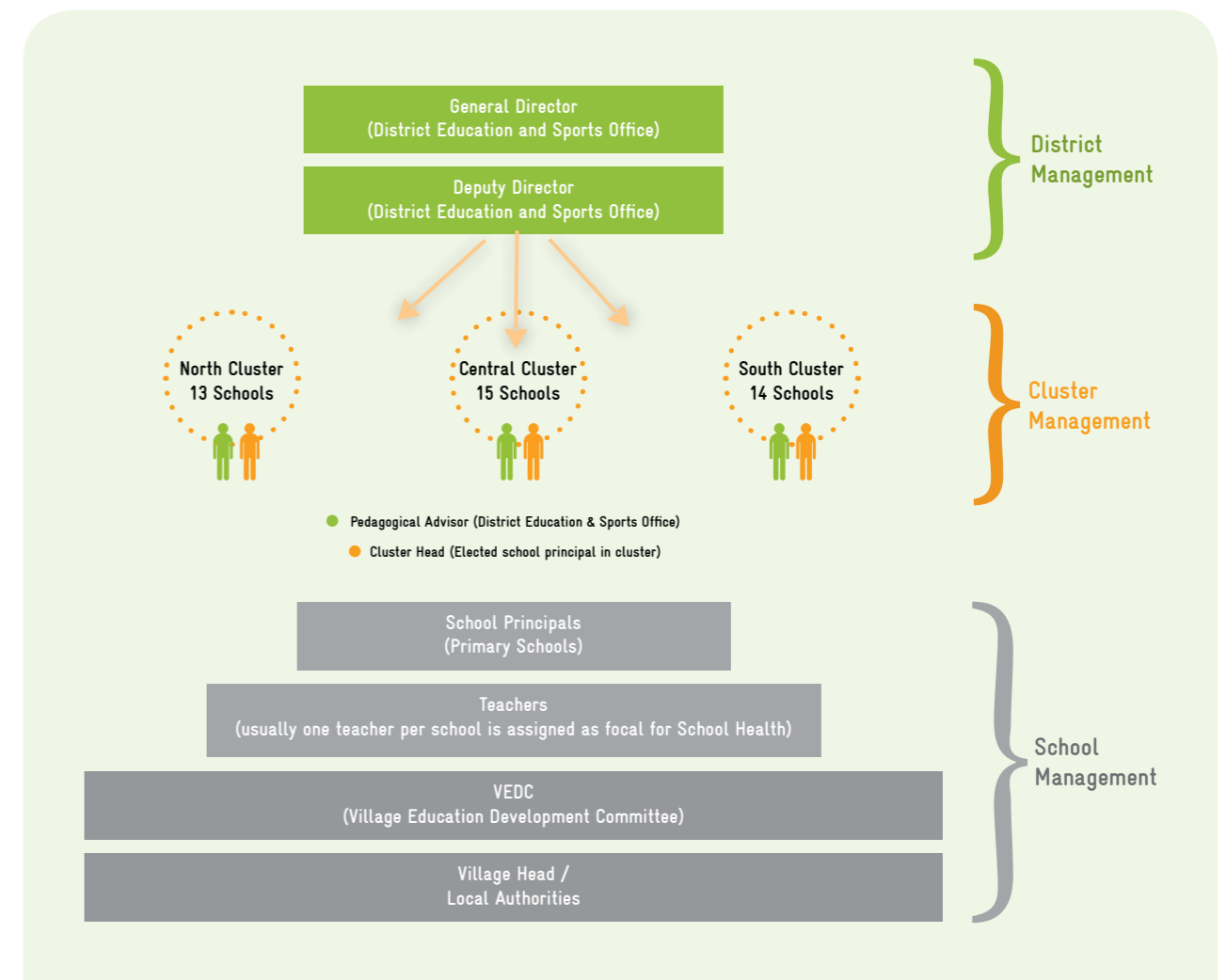
The District Management used the existing school cluster system to implement and scale-up the Fit for School program. In 1994/95, school clusters were formed in all districts. The Sisattanak District is composed of three clusters based on the district's geographical features: North (13 schools), Central (15 schools) and South (14 schools). Technical oversight for the clusters on academics, school activities, learning environment including school health is done by three pedagogical advisors. Each pedagogical advisor is being supported by a cluster head, who is also school principal. Each cluster head is supported by two vice cluster heads: a) vice for academic affairs, and b) vice for activity, arts and sports. The figure on the next page gives an overview of the district and cluster structure.

#### The Scale-up Strategy: Cluster Approach

In Sisattanak District, Mr. Khamphone Sayapheth, is the deputy director supervising all schools under the formal education school system (i.e., preschool, primary and secondary schools). The deputy director has shown strong support for the FIT program and provided the direction for scale-up. He attended the

orientations organized by the provincial and district offices and endorsed the program to the schools. The District Management Team strategically chose the schools of the cluster heads (who are school principals at the same time) to become model schools, which made knowledge sharing and model school visits easier later on in the process. It was very clear to Mr. Khamphone that the district will not just stop with the model schools.

The decision from the District Education Service (DES) to have cluster heads become model schools proved to be instrumental in scaling-up the FIT approach. Schools in the clusters would often meet at the cluster heads' schools and, upon seeing how the program can easily be implemented, other school administrators were encouraged to implement the program. Aside from this, as the cluster heads gained implementation experience, they were able to provide advice and share from their own experience how to address problems encountered by schools in the district. They usually impart their knowledge and act as resource persons during regular meetings within their clusters or meetings called by the DES. Cluster heads were very much aware that they are the representatives of the district office and that they have a role in mentoring other schools. At times, they would need to visit schools that need help and guide them in finding solutions to help them improve.



Pedagogical advisors and cluster heads played crucial roles in scaling up the Fit for School program. They are very much aware of the intended outcomes of the program such as better health for students, improved hygiene practices, and increased health awareness among students. The cluster heads also knew their roles in scaling-up the FIT program: 1) ensure participation of the community in program implementation, 2) expand the program to schools within their clusters, 3) support the sharing of information about the program and guide schools within their clusters and, if requested, support other districts and provinces by serving as model schools and role models that others could visit and follow.

With regard to the FIT program, they have met with school principals who want to implement the program in their schools and explain its benefits. They would show pictures and take them to implementing schools to convince them to do it.

They encouraged the school principals to ask for the cooperation of local authorities and parents. They also shared experiences on raising funds, which is a common question among schools principals. In addition, the pedagogical advisors provided encouragement to schools as they monitor and visit them. They would often point out just one mistake even though they see nine others to gently motivate the school community in getting better in implementing the program.

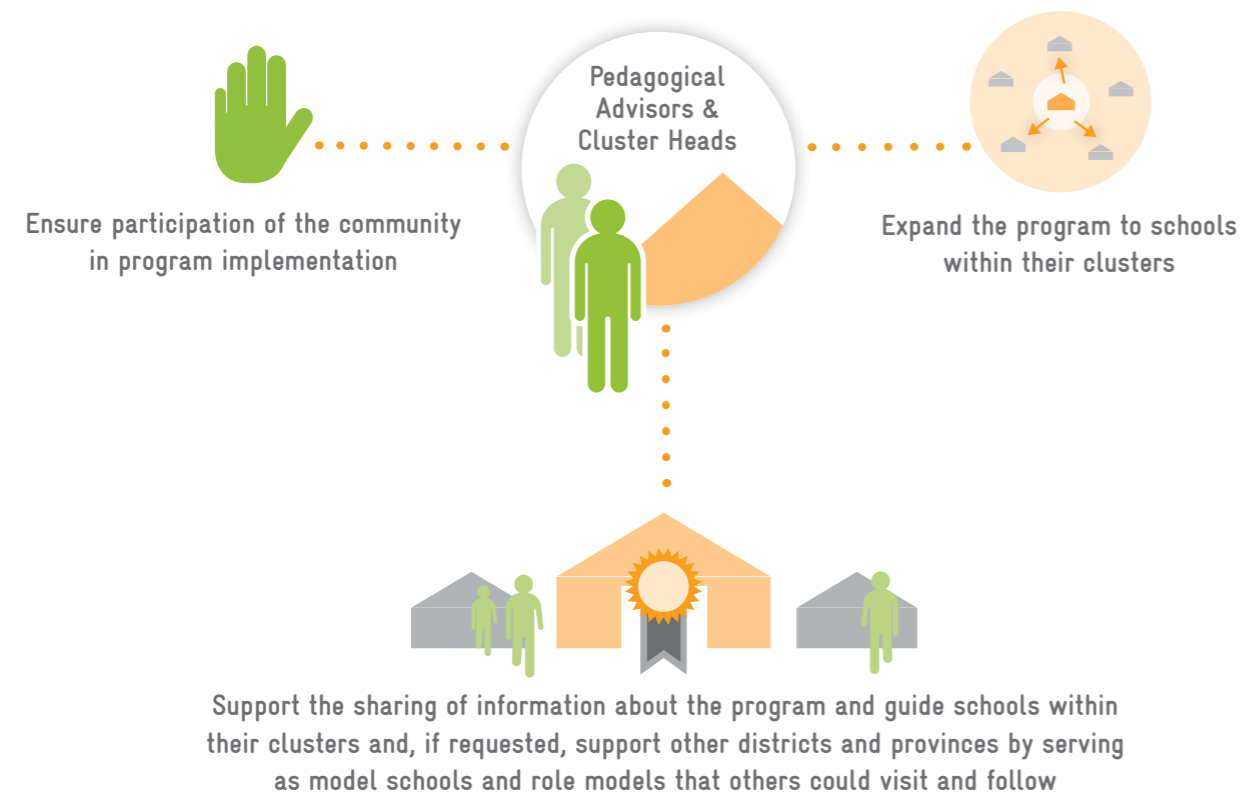
With this, the respective pedagogical advisor and the cluster head formed a team that provided support and assistance to schools in their cluster. They motivated and encouraged schools and provided the technical knowledge necessary to start the program, to improve gradually and to sustain the implementation. Through their own efforts, the district team was able to develop the demand among the schools for the FIT program. Those who have not yet implemented



the program were not 'forced' to carry it out. It was more that the successful implementation in model schools and the increasing number of schools implementing the program made other schools want

to start doing it as well, since they do not want to be left behind. This is also reflected by a statement from the provincial team, "for as long as one school starts implementing the program, other schools will follow."

## Role of Pedagogical Advisors & Cluster Heads



### Essential Factors: Summary of Key Learnings

- Effectively make use of existing structures in the district such as the school clustering, monitoring and meeting systems
- Pro-active and supportive district management team
- Pedagogical advisor and cluster head had good technical knowledge, communication and mentoring skills
- Clusters became the knowledge hub for sharing implementation experiences and encouraging all schools in the respective cluster
- Facilitate learning between schools in a cluster
- Establish an encouraging and supportive atmosphere among all stakeholders
- Create the demand by establishing model schools and exposing others to it
- Good socio-economic and geographical conditions also facilitated the expansion
- School communities were able to raise sufficient funds

## Experiences



Mr. Khamphone Sayapheth // Deputy Director, Sisattanak District

"We already had scale-up in mind when we selected and established the model schools. This is why we selected the schools of the cluster heads as our model schools in Sisattanak."

Create demand and provide support!

Facts

Good model schools and exposure of others to these model schools will help to create demand and initiative. Once schools express interest to also introduce the program to their schools, the district team provides technical support, guidance, motivation and encouragement.

## 4. Modelling the FIT Approach



### The Key Player: School Principal

School principals are key players in ensuring that the Fit for School program is well-implemented. Running the program entails application of school-based management capacities such as involving school stakeholders in the project planning, change to mobilizing resources and monitoring.

### The Scale-up Strategy: School-based Management Approach

Having well-implementing model schools greatly contributed to the scale-up of the FIT program in Sisattanak District. Principals, teachers and student leaders of the model schools served as mentors to other schools. School principals who later on implemented the project mentioned that they first heard about the program from the district office. However, what convinced them to implement it in their schools is when they saw the group washing facilities and the daily hygiene activities being done in a cluster head's school during a cluster meeting. They shared that they liked the activity and wanted to implement it in their schools or improve the conditions and programs they already had been implementing.

When they shared the information on the FIT program within their schools, some wanted to see it for themselves. For one school, the person in-charge of school health went to a model school to see how the program is being implemented and shared his/her observations and learning gained.

The school principals were able to initiate and sustain good collaboration with the community, one key aspect of good school-based management. The school principal involved the parents and members of the Village Education Development Committee (VEDC) already at the initial planning stage. The starting point for this was the construction of the group handwashing facility. The school community was presented with three options for the handwashing facility: a) low cost or the tippy tap model, b) polyvinyl chloride (PVC) pipe, and c) concrete-type. They were informed how much each type of facility would cost and about their respective benefits. The VEDC and parents then helped in seeking financial and in-kind support from the broader community. But this was just the beginning of a successful collaboration between schools and communities. The VEDC and parents were involved in the construction of facilities, they participated in program monitoring and feedback mechanisms between schools and communities. Since the communities were involved in the entire process, there is a strong sense of

ownership of the program thus ensuring that it is sustainably implemented. Financial management mechanisms and accountability on the responsible use of funds were also established. The accountable use of funds and transparent processes are another crucial aspect and indicator of strong school-based management. Program activities were reflected and integrated in the School Development Plans under the component of 'Healthy and safe school environment'. School principals took on a leadership role in introducing and sustaining program implementation in their school.

Another remarkable aspect on school level was that the schools themselves help each other and willingly shared implementation experiences with interested colleagues, e.g. on fund-raising, technical aspects, etc.

Key informants also shared a number of possible hindrances for scale-up. These include having an unsupportive community, weak school-based management capacities of principals, and structural challenges such as difficulties with the water supply. Also, fund raising in small schools can be challenging.

## Three Kinds of Group Handwashing Facilities



Low Cost or the Tippy Tap Model



Polyvinyl chloride (PVC) pipe



Concrete Type



### Community Involvement // Choosing Facility Type

The School Principal ensures community involvement (e.g., choosing the facility type, raising funds, construction, and maintenance).

### Essential Factors: Summary of Key Learnings

- Stakeholder in model schools are role models for other schools in the cluster
- SBM capacities of school principal:
  - Community involvement and ability to create ownership (from the very beginning and throughout the entire process)
  - Leadership: being committed to the program and able to lead stakeholders (parents, VEDC, teachers, student leaders) to take ownership
  - Financial management / accountability
  - Integrating the FIT program in the existing school development plan under the section safe and healthy environments
  - Active knowledge sharing (e.g. on fund-raising, technical aspects) with other schools
- Proactiveness, willingness and eagerness to improve the program
- Strong ownership of parents increases accountability of principal and commitment to sustain the program
- Involvement of partners and the wider community. Through regular monitoring activities, the school community was able to identify areas that they could enhance, such as repairing or adjusting their washing facility and enriching their daily hygiene program implementation

## Experiences



Ms. Lurnthong Sayavong // Principal of Dongsavath Primary School

"As school principal, I am committed not to stop the program. The parents appreciate the program also. If the program will stop, the parents will be disappointed."

## 5. Engaging Community Support



### The Key Players: Village Education Development Council

The Village Education Development Council (VEDC) is a key stakeholder in the school community. Its members consist of the village head, deputy village head, representatives from the Women's Union, and Youth Union, parents, students, elders, and principals and teachers. VEDC members are elected every three years. The village chief is usually the chair of the VEDC while the school principal serves as the vice chair.

### The Scale-Up Strategy: Community Involvement and Ownership

Gaining and sustaining the involvement of the community is a crucial aspect in the scale-up process. Schools in the Sisattanak District were able to convince their communities to generate support for the program. The school community was involved early on, especially in planning and decision-making on what kind of group handwashing facility they want to build in the school. Later, the community raised funds for the construction of the selected handwashing facility. They prepared solicitation letters for small and medium enterprises and for well-off individuals in the community. The VEDC also

practiced accountability in the use of resources. They accounted for every solicited donation (funds and in-kind) and how these were used.

When the schools had constructed the facility and started to administer the program, parents and VEDC were also involved in monitoring. They tried to see how the program implementation can be further improved. They also checked if facilities need repair and provided some support or funds for this. On the other hand, lack of funding sources can also be a hindering factor in scaling up the FIT program. Some schools might not be able to garner the much needed community involvement and would need more support to develop these capacities. Fund raising from partners is also quite difficult for small schools with limited student population. In these cases, low-cost facility options and/or extended fund raising in the wider community and local private sector may be done.

## Experiences



Ms. Sengdeuane Boudsadee // Parent from Dongsavad School

"I am very proud to be part of the program. This program helps children practice daily hygiene activities such as washing hands before eating and toothbrushing. My child is cleaner now and he also encourages his other siblings to carry out hygiene activities at home. We support the school with material and labor to construct the washing facility. I like to support the school since what they are doing is for our children and I see many things are improving in our school and I would like to contribute to these improvements."



### Community Involvement // Transparent Use of Funds

The school community practices accountability by reporting back to parents and other contributors on funds raised and details on spending.

### Essential Factors: Summary of Key Learnings

- Community ownership is at the center of the successful implementation and scale-up
- VEDC and parents have been involved from the very beginning
- Principal and community's capacity to raise funds is crucial for successful implementation

## The Catalysts for a Successful Scale-up

The experience of Sisattanak District reveals aspects that contributed to the successful scale-up of the Fit for School program in the Sisattanak district. All levels of the Ministry of Education and Sports contributed to this. However, certain key factors were determined to be the catalysts for their accomplishment. These include the following:



The abovementioned factors can be harnessed to further scale up the FIT program in Lao PDR. Beside this Research Update, the learning from this Sisattanak District case study will be consolidated in a video for the district teams, which will provide practical guidance on how to introduce and scale up the program in districts. It will support the capacity development for sustainable program implementation at the district and school management levels as part of the scale-up process within the MoES in Lao PDR.

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