

Factsheet on Blue Schools

The Blue School concept proved to be a very promising approach not only to improve WASH in schools but also to raise awareness among children about the entire water cycle and the importance of water resources protection. The concept raised interest not only among the Consortium organisations but also among local stakeholders such as school directions and local authorities. The more than 80 blue schools implemented in Benin enabled the Consortium to draw first lessons learnt and formulate recommendations.

1 A STEP-WISE APPROACH

The attractiveness of the blue school concept is its comprehensiveness. It enables to raise awareness of school children about the entire water cycle, water resources protection, different uses of water (drinking, hygiene, food production, etc.), and the importance of treating and reusing wastewater. More generally, it can be used as a starting point to introduce health, environment and nutrition related topics at school.

However, implementing all components at once may be challenging. Based on that, a step-wise approach is recommended with an **initial focus on hygiene and sanitation**. While the awareness raising activities should comprise the entire water cycle, the 'infrastructure' component should first ensure that children have safe water for drinking, enough water for hand washing with soap, and adequate sanitation facilities. In case of limited resources, the gardening / irrigation component should be introduced in a second step only.

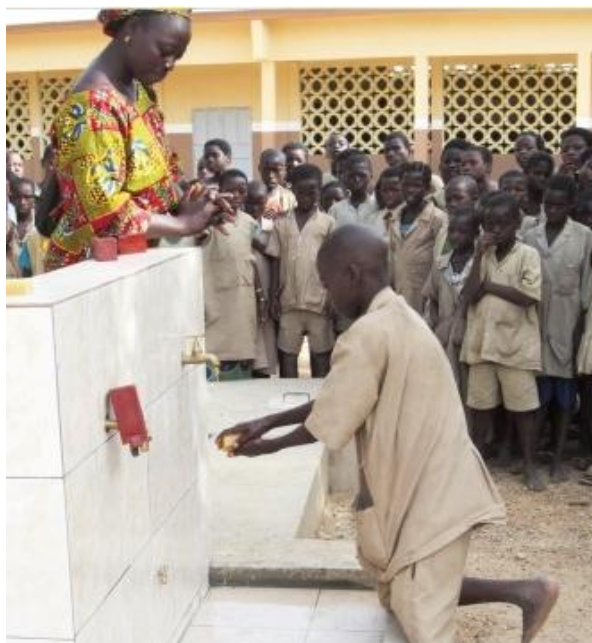


Figure 1: Students practicing hand washing



Figure 2: Students working in the school garden

2 SELECTION OF SCHOOLS

The selection of school is an important step for the success of the approach. In a first step the local authority has to be supported to identify the school based on the communal plans and priorities. In a second steps transparent defined criteria like size of school, equal repartition, organisational level, land resources and existing infrastructure etc. should help to make the final choice.

3 TACKLE POTENTIAL CONFLICTS

One of the idea behind the blue school concept is to provide an understanding for Integrated Water Resources Management. One of the key issues is the difference in quantities required for different uses. While a rainwater harvesting cistern may be appropriate for drinking water, it is likely to be inadequate in most cases as a technology for irrigation given the much larger quantities of water required for food production.

Careful estimation of required water quantities, in particular for the gardening component, are thus required. In case water is scarce, first priority should be given to drinking water. This estimation will also help avoid potential conflicts with neighbouring communities. The question whether the consumption of additional water for gardening may threaten availability of water for drinking for the neighbouring communities should be carefully assessed.

4 IMPORTANCE OF MAINTENANCE COMMITTEES

In particular the gardening component represents an additional challenge in terms of management. A garden may require protection or maintenance works during school holidays. Experience from the Consortium programme highlights the importance of a functioning maintenance committee (e.g. a parent, teacher, pupil association) to ensure maintenance of the WASH infrastructure and garden both during school terms and holidays. The required maintenance activities as well as contacts of support service providers such as mechanics should be clearly described in a maintenance booklet. Moreover, the experience in Benin also stresses the importance of clarifying roles and responsibilities within the maintenance committee.

5 CLARIFYING ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

More generally, roles and responsibilities of all actors in implementing and managing blue schools should be clearly defined (local authorities, teachers, district school authorities, Ministry of education, communities). In particular, responsibilities for the post-implementation phase (monitoring, supply of materials such as soap, repair of infrastructure, etc.) should be clarified. A crucial role of the implementing organisation is to advocate (towards the school direction or district school authorities for example) for a budget line enabling maintenance, replacement and upgrading of the blue school.

6 INTEGRATION IN SCHOOL CURRICULA

Interest has been great to integrate the various elements of the blue school concept in the school curricula. As far as possible, dialogue should be established with national education authorities to contribute to curricula development. Moreover sufficient time should be allocated to the training and coaching of teachers.

7 SCHOOL CONTESTS

In Benin, the experience of creating competition among schools mainly around the application of good hygiene practices has been very successful and can therefore be recommended for replication. It is a relevant motivation instrument for both teachers and pupils.

8 LINKING SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY

Using children as agent of change is a promising approach but needs parallel interventions at community level. As far as feasible, the blue schools should thus be integrated in a broader approach enabling to promote good hygiene practices and improve access to adequate water and sanitation facilities at home too. Promising experiences have been made for example with the introduction of household water treatment options at school and their subsequent adoption in families.

9 WASH AND NUTRITION

In the case of Benin, the focus of the gardening component was put on vegetable production and tree nursery garden. Besides improving diet in the school canteen, the remaining vegetables were sold enabling thus income generation. A particular focus was put on introducing simple tools to transparently manage these funds such as a booklet for income and expenditures. The income is mainly invested in buying seeds, equipment and for the repair of the water supply system. Some of the schools generated up to around 100 CHF within one school year.

The school garden proved to be a very effective practical learning site for children offering the opportunity to practice diverse topics such as life and earth science, environmental science and mathematics.

In Phase II, the link between WASH and nutrition will be assessed in more details in collaboration with the SDC project 'Vegetables go to School: Improving Nutrition through Agricultural Diversification'.