

Sustaining WASH facilities and services in Schools of Chhattisgarh in the period of school closure and pandemic

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Chhattisgarh has around 48,671 schools across 28 Districts¹ with approximately 5.7 million students.² The impact of COVID-19 on the education of children has been significant with schools closed in the state since March 2020. Long lockdowns during the first wave of the pandemic in India and the continued current second wave has further restricted the movement of schoolteachers and staff to schools. The closure of schools inevitably impacts the school WASH infrastructure as well. Rusting of the handpump's riser pipe, issues relating to water quality and dilapidating handwashing and toilet units are apparent due to their non-usage for months at a time. The lingering of the COVID-19 pandemic is still uncertain as is the re-opening of schools. However, UNICEF Chhattisgarh acknowledged from the beginning that there was a need to maintain the WASH infrastructure in schools considering the importance of continued WASH facilities and services in general and more specific to reopening of schools with this continuing COVID-19 pandemic. Functional WASH services for a clean and safe environment and maintaining respiratory and hand hygiene are the first line of defense against the pandemic and will require to be in place whenever the schools reopen. In such a situation, constant monitoring of the existing WASH facilities of schools is crucial.

Partnership for WASH in Schools: UNICEF Chhattisgarh provides technical support to the School Education Department for the improvement of WASH facilities and services with special focus to the schools which have poor WASH indicators. In July 2020 UNICEF Chhattisgarh partnered with the Samarth Charitable Trust, a civil society organization, to support eight districts in preparing sample school swachhata action plans, understanding the importance of school WASH indicators, orientation of teachers, hand hygiene promotion through campaign and sensitization on COVID-19 appropriate behavior through wall painting, community art and interpersonal communication with parents, school management committees, children and local elected representatives through volunteers at school and village level. "I am eagerly monitoring the WASH indicators of my village schools so that the children have functional WASH facilities when they come back to school after reopening. I am also facilitating *mohalla* (Street) classes - an alternative method of continuing education among children in my village in which I continue to sensitize the children

¹ As per U-DISE 2018-19, Department of Education, Government of India

² Boys: 2166293 (Rural), 679476 (Urban), Total: 2845769 Girls: 2164641 (Rural), 668771 (Urban), Total: 2833412, U-DISE 2018-19

with messaging on COVID-19 appropriate behaviours, and demonstrate handwashing with the right steps,” says Yogesh Kumar Patel, a village volunteer of Piparda village, Janjgir Champa who has been trained by UNICEF.

Monitoring on School WASH facilities and services: To effectively address deficient WASH facilities and services in schools, it is important to first understand the extent of the problem and subsequently prioritize action where the needs are greatest. During the closure of school in last August to September 2020, the coordinators of Samarth Charitable Trust provided technical support to schoolteachers in preparing School Swachhata Action plan on a sample basis in UNICEF supported districts. The action plan followed the 39 indicators of the Swachh Vidyalaya Puraskar (SVP), initiated by the Government of India in 2016. “We devised an action plan to improve school WASH components in September 2020. Although children are not coming to the school during this time, we are trying to maintain the school’s existing facilities like before as per our plan,” says Ramnath Kulpati, Headmaster of Government Primary School, Pithampur, Mungeli.

On a pro rata basis, a District School Swachhata Action Plan (DSSAP) for eight districts, respectively, was prepared in consultation with the district education officials and teachers. The District SSAP is a comprehensive plan for improving the school's WASH services and facilities. Post preparation of the District SSAP, UNICEF directly oriented around 12,00 teachers virtually and educated them on DSSAP and its implementation for sustaining the facilities during the school closure.

100 days campaign and access to safe water in schools of Chhattisgarh: The launch of the 100-Day campaign on 2nd October 2021 supplements the advocacy effort of UNICEF Chhattisgarh with Government counterparts and local elected representatives to improve the WASH facilities of schools. The campaign aims to ensure piped water supply in Anganwadi centres and Schools across the country. The Public Health Engineering Department, Chhattisgarh, initiated rapid action to provide piped water connections in these institutions. As per the SVP 2018, only 6.40% of schools have running water facilities, and another 4.85% of schools ensure filtered drinking water for children. The progress reported by the Districts on the MIS of Jal Jeevan Mission shows that Chhattisgarh has achieved 24.92% school coverage with a running water facility as of 30th April 2021.

Way Forward: Sustaining WASH facilities during school closure remains a challenge due to limited resources and mobility, however, there is an ongoing effort to retain those WASH facilities in schools and improvement in them by continuous advocacy, technical support in strategic planning, orientation, engagement with education and PHED officials at state and district level, teachers, community, and children. UNICEF Chhattisgarh has also partnered with World Vision India to work in 13 districts of Chhattisgarh for the WASH in schools’ programme. This support at the district level and continuous sharing of learnings with upstream advocacy seeks to enable the schools to improve various on WASH in school indicators in the State.

Few photos:



Child friendly handwashing stations developed locally in Mungeli district



Handwashing promotion in schools



Sensitization on WASH in schools and a pledge to protect the same at Bilaspur



WASH volunteers with community for conducting community art on WASH and CAB in villages