

Improving the hygiene practices of future generations by strengthening the WASH Friendly Schools Programme

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Quick read...

The WASH Friendly Schools Programme can be improved to advance the hygiene behaviours of pupils and contribute to the development of Madagascar. In addition to strengthening infrastructure — which is crucial to promote the adoption of a new behaviour — hygiene promotion methods in schools must be updated if their effects are to increase. For example, playful and practice-oriented approaches have proven effective, such as the hygiene competition between classes. Adoption of these methods will necessarily involve a review of the training provided to teachers. This evolution must also be accompanied by improved monitoring of activities by local institutions (the educational administration zone - ZAP - and the school health manager - RSS) in order to produce information and adjust activities to the needs of each primary school.

Hygiene practices are proven to be crucial for health, and the health of the population is a necessary condition for the development of a country, which has been proven over and over again. Childhood is the optimal period of learning. It is during this period of life that knowledge, interpersonal skills, know-how and social skills can be acquired sustainably. Schools therefore present an ideal environment to improve the hygiene practices of the population on a large scale and contribute to development.

In collaboration with the Ministry of Education, WSUP asked Hydroconseil and GRET to carry out research on the effectiveness of hygiene promotion in schools. The objective of the study was to compare several hygiene promotion approaches in EPPs by assessing their effects on student behaviour.

In Madagascar, the WASH Friendly Schools Programme (WFSP) of the Ministry of National Education (MEN), implemented with the support of its partners since the 2000s, covers hygiene promotion in schools. Apart from the provision of WASH infrastructure, WFSP today consists mainly of administering hygiene training to teachers in targeted schools so that they can integrate hygiene lessons into the school curriculum.

Following an international literature review, a participatory workshop brought together key sector actors to inform the selection of hygiene promotion methods for comparative analysis, with a view to integration in the WFSP. The two methods chosen for comparative analysis were the hygiene competition between classes and the creativity challenge, detailed below.

Hygiene competition between classes

This method involves competition between classes in the same school, which compete for cleanliness of the school environment and hygiene practices. The approach uses competition between classes as a positive stimulus to improve practices.

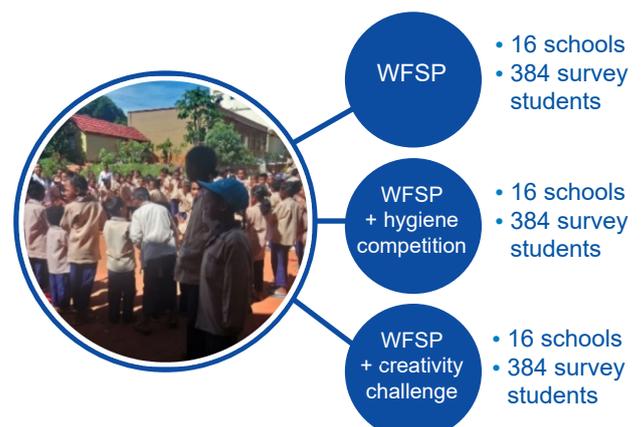
The approach provides for the establishment of a hygiene club made up of students responsible for grading and promoting hygiene practices among other students.

Creativity challenge

Under this method, each class creates an awareness-raising tool (song, poems, frescoes...) presented to the whole school. The best creations are identified and captured in booklets that are distributed to all classes.

These tools should aim to develop WASH habits through repetition. Creativity is intended to promote student self-determination.

The two approaches were explained to the trainers of the School Health Directorate (DSS), who trained the teachers of 48 schools (30 in Antananarivo, 9 in Toliara and 9 in Mahajanga), with the aim of implementing the WFSP and its adjustments as follows:



The results showed that the classic WFSP can improve students' knowledge of hygiene and the importance of handwashing with soap. However, on attitudes and practices, its results are limited. The two playful approaches allow greater appreciation of the importance of washing hands with soap by students and lead to improved practice.

The hygiene competition between classes generated a real rivalry within the school communities which motivated the students to apply good practices. It has also improved the cleanliness of the school environment. The researchers therefore recommend complementing the WFSP with playful approaches to improve students' practices.

The study also identified other aspects of the WFSP that need to be strengthened to support the achievement of its expected outcomes:

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| Equipment | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is a need to continue to improve WASH infrastructure in schools. Indeed, behavior change can only take place if it is possible and straightforward to implement. Without water, it is impossible to wash hands. Many of the schools visited were in areas where the water pressure is far too low during the day. The presence of tanks could allow for refilling at night. Tippytops, which can be built locally using very simple materials, improve the ratio of handwashing station to students, which greatly improves handwashing practices. Tippytops are therefore an inexpensive option that should be encouraged in all schools. |
| Training | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The trainings should be longer, in two sessions and with more practice activities, to prepare teachers to implement and disseminate the messages in a pedagogical way. Trainer capacity should be strengthened to facilitate more dynamic training. It would be desirable to train trainers at regional level to avoid transport costs at each training and to strengthen the link between trainers and trained teachers. Hygiene promotion methods should also be integrated into the initial teacher training programme. |
| Method | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The hygiene promotion methods of the WFSP should be complemented by fun and practice activities with competitions, routines, creative activities and peer-to-peer promotion. A manual of the new version of the WFSP should be developed, disseminated and made available to teachers to facilitate its implementation. |
| Monitoring | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The three-level marking of the WFSP should place more emphasis on the efforts of schools to promote hygiene-related activities, and be less closely linked to infrastructure, to encourage schools that are active in promoting hygiene but have few resources. It is necessary to ensure that the monitoring of school WASH activities is part of the role of ZAP chiefs, who should be equipped with observation tools including these aspects, that they send the information back to the RSSC, and that information must be relayed to the Schools Health Directorate of the Education Ministry in a systematic way. A hygiene competition between schools would strengthen the engagement of the management hierarchy, increasing their support for WASH activities. |

All these measures would significantly improve the effectiveness of school hygiene promotion, leading to behavioural change and positive long-term economic and social repercussions for Madagascar.

Hygiene and Covid-19

This study was launched in 2019. This means the first wave of investigation was conducted before the appearance of Covid-19, which resulted in mass communication on hygiene measures to avoid contamination. This makes it possible to measure, through the study, the effect of Covid-19 behaviour change messaging on children: any progress made between November 2019 and November 2020 is likely to be related to Covid-19 mass communication, with schools having remained closed for 7 months over this period.

According to information collected from students, communication on Covid-19 has led to an improved understanding of the hygiene-health link and microbes. 90% of students cited handwashing with soap as a way to protect themselves from Covid-19. Regarding the new habits related to the epidemic, the vast majority of groups of students surveyed in May 2021 cited the wearing of masks. Handwashing was cited in 82 out of 91 groups, 45 of which reported increasing frequency. This shows that efforts to fight the Covid-19 epidemic have had a definite positive effect on students' handwashing with soap.

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