Swiss Water & Sanitation Consortium

Blue Schools

Linking WASH in schools with environmental education and practice

Concept Brief

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Photo frontpage (Helvetas Benin): **Safe drinking water at the school in North of Benin**

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1st Edition

Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
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Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation SDC

Introduction

Background

The Blue School concept was pioneered in 2007 by the International Rainwater Harvesting Alliance (IRHA) in 52 schools in 13 different countries in Asia, West Africa and Latin America and was further developed by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC). A Blue School goes beyond activities related to Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH). It promotes a school garden 'as a practical place to demonstrate the relationship between food production and an efficient management of water; as well as a demonstrative place for watershed and land management practices' (SDC factsheet). The concept builds on good practices of the WASH in School (WINS) community of practice as well as other sectors.

The SDC-funded Swiss Water & Sanitation Consortium (SWSC), composed of eight Swiss NGOs[1], has implemented different WASH projects in 16 countries since 2011. With the aim of contributing to the know-how of the sector, SWSC members have piloted innovative approaches, exchanged experiences and documented good practices. This includes the Blue Schools concept, implemented in more than 200 schools in Bangladesh, Benin, Ethiopia, Madagascar, and Nepal.

Why working with the youth to achieve SDG 6?

In September 2015, the UN General Assembly adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: Transforming our world. The Agenda is commonly known as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and includes 17 areas for action. SDG 6 Water Supply and Sanitation is an important one that contributes to the realisation of many other SDGs.

Children are the leaders of tomorrow and key change agents in their communities. As changing behaviour of children is easier than changing those of adults, building a new environmentally-friendly generation is a promising path to contribute to the achievement of the SDG 6.

The Blue School concept contributes to all SDG 6 targets.

1 Swiss Water & Sanitation Consortium organizations: Caritas Switzerland, Fastenopfer, HEKS-EPER, HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation, Solidar Suisse, Swissaid, Swiss Red Cross and Terre des hommes

2 Source: IRHA

Figure 1. **SDG 6 contribution to other SDGs**[2]

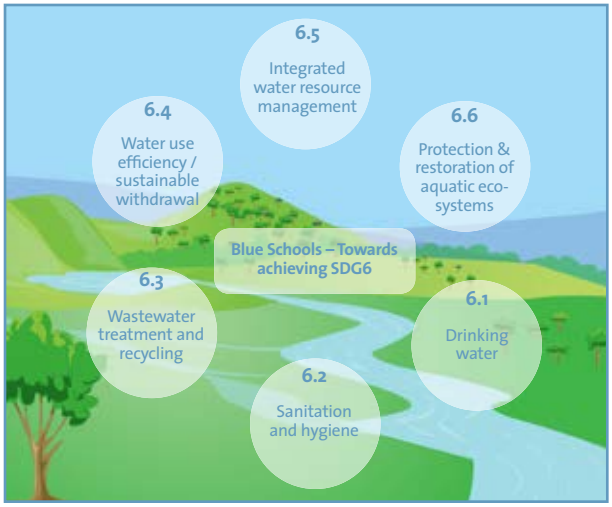

Figure 2. **The SDG 6 targets**

Students practicing handwashing in the North of Benin
(Photo: Helvetas Benin)

How was the Blue Schools Kit developed and why?

In 2016, the SWSC initiated a process to compile existing challenges, lessons learnt, and good practices from field teams that implemented Blue Schools. In general, most project teams introduced a school garden and tree planting in addition to the usual WASH activities. However, often there was too little focus on fostering the students' learning experience on the link between their health and the environment – and its preservation. Project teams, education authorities and school stakeholders expressed their need for more examples of practical exercises that could enrich the national curriculum as well as examples of environmentally-friendly technologies and practices that can be demonstrated in a school yard and replicated at home or in the community. These insights led to further develop the Blue School concept including support materials in the form of the "Blue Schools Kit".

The Blue Schools Kit is the result of a joint effort in 2017 and 2018 between field teams having implemented Blue Schools and WASH advisors from different organisations. The team consists of individual members from Caritas Switzerland, HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation, Terre des hommes, the SWSC Management Unit as well as the Swiss Federal Institute for Aquatic Science and Research (Eawag), the International Rainwater Harvesting Alliance (IRHA) and international consultants. In July 2017, the SWSC hosted a four-day "Blue Schools Workshop" in Nairobi to jointly develop the Blue Schools Kit[3].

3 Participants of the workshop included field staff from HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation in Benin, Nepal, and Madagascar, Fastenopfer in Madagascar, Caritas Switzerland in Ethiopia, Bangladesh and Kenya, COOPI in Ethiopia, Terre des hommes in Bangladesh and Swiss Red Cross in Nepal. A representative from IRHA also participated.

What is a Blue School?

A Blue School offers a healthy learning environment and exposes students to environmentally-friendly technologies and practices that can be replicated in their communities. It inspires students to be change agents in their communities and builds the next generation of WASH and environment sector champions.

In a Blue School:

- Students have access to ***safe drinking water, use well-maintained latrines,*** maintain ***good hygiene practices*** and ***participate in gardening activities*** and solid ***waste separation and collection.***
- Students experience ***sustainable land and water management practices*** through the school garden and the other environmentally-friendly technologies or practices in the schoolyard or in nearby locations.
- Teachers enrich the theoretical lessons from the national curriculum on biology, chemistry, agriculture, etc. with practical exercises so that ***students can learn by doing.***
- Students are also introduced, in a visual and fun way, to ***new concepts*** such as watershed, water cycle and solid waste reduction, reuse and recycling.

The Blue School Kit is neither a new curriculum, nor intended to add to the current workload of teachers. By using safe and improved WASH facilities and experiencing good land, water and waste management practices, students are enabled to adopt healthy and environmentally-friendly behaviours in school and at home.

The following eight topics are covered in Blue Schools:

Becoming a Blue School is a ***pathway:*** Once the basic WASH requirements are fulfilled, a school can continue its pathway towards an environmentally-friendly learning experience. Depending on different factors including land and water availability, the existence of some facilities and the governmental and school priorities, the starting point can vary from one school to another.

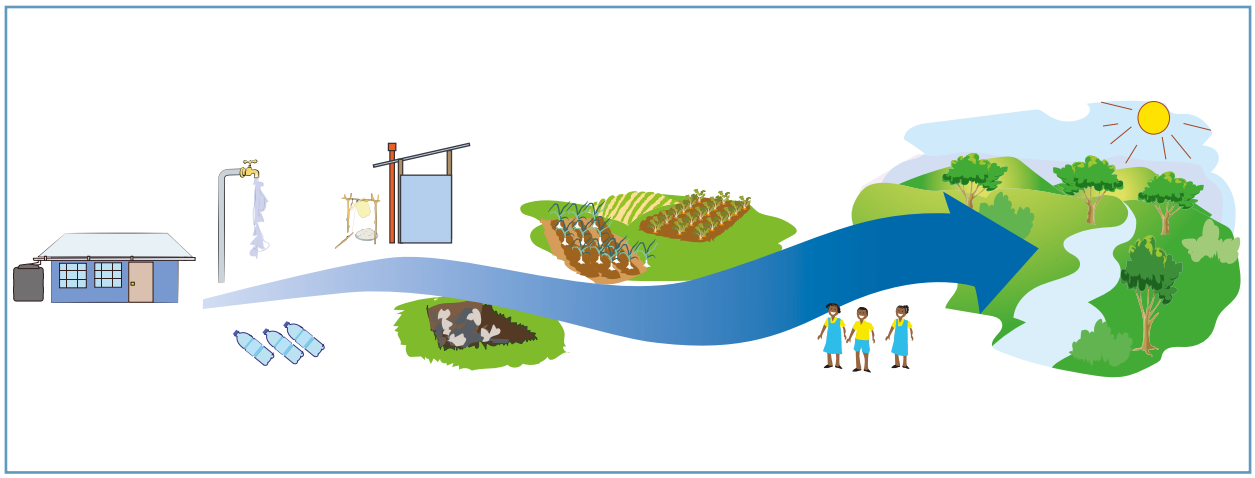

Figure 3. **Blue School Pathway**

Indicators, minimum standard and factors of success

The table below presents the recommended indicators and minimum standard for a school to qualify as a Blue School and the factors of success. It is based on recommendations of the United Nations Joint Monitoring Programme (JMP) for WASH in Schools (non-residential) led by WHO and UNICEF, as well as recommendations for gardening and solid waste management based on internationally recognised good practices. As each country has a unique process for factoring the SDG monitoring framework into its Education Management Information System (EMIS), it is recommended to adapt this table to the national standards.

Component	Indicators and minimum standard	Factors for success
Water	Drinking water from an improved source is available at the school when needed, accessible to all, and free from faecal and chemical contamination. Minimum quantity of water for drinking and handwashing: 5L/person/day.	There are mechanisms in place for Operation and Maintenance (O&M) of the water infrastructure, with clear roles and responsibilities. There are clear financing mechanisms for materials, consumables and services provision. In case on-site treatment is needed, a special container for storing and distributing treated water is recommended. Students and/or staff monitor the functionality status of the water infrastructure and treatment technology and are involved in the regular maintenance activities.
Sanitation	Improved sanitation facilities which are single sex and useable at the school, accessible and used by all[4], of sufficient quantity[5], & inspected for cleanliness[6]; appropriate facilities for menstrual hygiene management[7] are provided. Minimum quantity of water for sanitation[8] is available (depending on the sanitation system). There are facilities for girls for menstrual hygiene management (MHM) such as separate room with tap and/or water container and bins for disposal of sanitary products.	There are mechanisms in place for maintaining cleanliness of the sanitation facilities with clear roles and responsibilities, ideally displayed in a cleaning roster. There are clear financing mechanisms for materials, consumables and services provision. Students and/or staff inspect the cleanliness of the sanitation facilities and are involved in the regular maintenance activities.

4 Toilet design is appropriate for children with special needs.

5 Sufficient toilets are available – one per 25 girls and one for female staff; one toilet plus one urinal (or 50 cm of urinal wall) per 50 boys, and one for male staff.

6 Although subjective, JMP recommends the following measures of cleanliness:

Clean: All toilets: absence of strong smell or significant numbers of flies or mosquitos; no visible faeces on the floor, walls, seat (or pan) or around the facility.
Somewhat clean: Some smell and/or some sign of faecal matter in some of the toilets.
Not clean: Strong smell and/or presence of faecal matter in most toilets.

7 Requirements for MHM: water and private space for washing, bin with lid, & system for safe disposal of pads.

8 Minimum water for sanitation: pour flush toilet: 1.5–3.0L/person/day; conventional flush toilet: 10–20L/person/day; 1–2L/person/day for anal cleansing.

Hygiene	Functional handwashing facilities with soap or ash at each sanitation facility are accessible. Students wash their hands at critical times[9]. Students receive menstrual hygiene education; MHM products are provided for urgent needs.	There are mechanisms in place to ensure that behaviour change is sustained in the school. There are mechanisms in place to refurnish soap/ash and refill handwashing water containers (if needed). Students and/or staff monitor the functionality of the handwashing facilities and are involved in maintenance activities. There is an active student club (or similar group) guided by staff and/or parents, to organize Blue Schools activities in the school and community outreach activities.
Gardening	Students are engaged in small-scale gardening activities of at least three nutritious crops in any season, cultivated according to principles of low external input sustainable agriculture (LEISA) with efficient irrigation[10].	Schools include small-scale gardening among approved extracurricular activities (at least one hour per week). When relevant, teachers use the school garden to demonstrate school curriculum dealing with agriculture, biology, etc. School stakeholders as well as parents and students have clearly defined responsibilities for mentoring and maintenance of the school garden. The size of the garden is appropriate to water and land availability in the school. A minimum of around 3*3m plot (keyhole garden) is recommended.
Solid waste Management	Students participate in separation and collection of organic and non-organic waste. Organic waste is recycled. Plastic waste is not burnt but recycled or safely buried.	There are waste bins for separating waste in different fractions in the classrooms and in the schoolyard. Compost is produced and later used in the school garden. Students recognise the different types of waste and apply the concept of reduce, reuse, recycle.

9 In non-residential school, critical times are at minimum after defecation, before preparing food / eating.

10 At least 3 of the following LEISA techniques are used in the school garden: mulching, natural pesticides and fertilisers, crop diversification and rotation, fabrication and use of compost, rainwater harvesting.

Land & water management (Depending on the context)	Students participate in sustainable land and water management practices in the school yard and/or in nearby locations.	Rainwater is collected and stored for the school garden. Students practice water efficient irrigation and soil conservation techniques. Students take part in planting/watering/ maintaining trees in the schoolyard and/or nearby locations. The school organises environmentally-friendly activities and campaigns with the community.

Students nursing the plants in the vertical bag garden in Kenya
(Photo: Caritas Switzerland in Kenya)

Students demonstrating their keyhole garden in Bangladesh
(Photo: Terre des hommes Bangladesh)

The Blue Schools Kit

The Blue School Kit provides ideas to project staff, education authorities and school stakeholders on how to transform a school into a Blue School. More specifically, it contains a number of materials that have different target audiences and different purposes. It contains:

- ***A Concept Brief*** (this document), to share with parties interested to learn more about Blue Schools. The Concept Brief defines a Blue School and its different components and provides a road map on how best to engage government institutions, build ownership of the school stakeholders and ensure sustainability.
- ***A Catalogue of Technologies,*** to support project staff, education authorities and school stakeholders in selecting the appropriate Blue Schools technologies that can be put in place in a particular school. It provides references to low costs technologies with particular focus on sustainable land and water management, gardening and solid waste management. The environmentally-friendly technologies are meant for students to experience them at school, learn how they work and get inspired to replicate some of them at home and in their communities.
- ***A Catalogue of Practical Exercises,*** aiming to inspire teachers with hand-on and low cost exercises to complement the theoretical lessons. The examples provided facilitate students' learning by doing and can be replicated in the students' home and in their communities.
- ***A Facilitator's Guide, for teachers and training of trainers,*** designed to provide a visual support to introduce the Blue Schools topics to students, as some topics might not be in the existing curriculum or might be overlooked, such as gender, menstrual hygiene management and transformation of solid waste into resources. For each topic, it suggests learning objectives, questions for discussion and examples of practical exercises as per the Catalogue of Practical Exercises.

The Catalogue of Practical Exercises and the Facilitator's Guide target students in upper primary school and/or secondary school, but the concept as such can be implemented with any age group.

Several recognised methodologies for hygiene and sanitation promotion in school exist, such as CHAST (Caritas Switzerland), Safe Water School Training Manual (Eawag), Fit for School (GIZ), the Three Stars Approach (UNICEF and GIZ) and others. The Blue School Kit does not prescribe any methodologies. Rather, it focuses on 'experiencing' by ensuring that an enabling environment for students is in place to transform the learning into practice.

As far as possible, the introduction of Blue Schools should be combined with sensitisation campaigns and interventions at the community level.

11 Images should be adapted to the local context and culture as appropriate.

Road map to implement Blue Schools

This road map is meant as a general guideline on how to initiate the process and the key enabling factors to consider. Overall, the support to provide to governmental institutions and to the school stakeholders for sustainable implementation of the Blue School concept requires a minimum of two years. Figure 4 below summarises the different steps recommended for a school to become a Blue School.

Preparatory phase

Implementing Blue Schools is a multi-sectorial process involving a range of stakeholders having different interests.

The first step is for project team to understand the institutional and regulatory framework. This helps identify the right structures and stakeholders that should be engaged. It also enables alignment with national plans and sector strategies and ensures compliance with and adherence to the rules and regulations, national standards and guidelines of the different sectors covered by Blue Schools (See green boxes in Figure 5).

The project team must also assess the national school curriculum in order to identify the Blue Schools topics already covered within the national curriculum and those topics that would be new. For that, it is recommended to initiate a dialogue with the education authorities responsible for school curriculum and teacher training. They are the best placed to recommend how the Blue Schools Kit can help enrich the lessons from the national curriculum.

Next, it is important to be clear on how a typical school is structured and affiliated within the local government system by identifying the school stakeholders[12] (see yellow boxes in Figure 5), their respective roles and responsibilities and their link to the local government institutions (i.e. the support they currently receive on the one hand and the reporting mechanisms on the other hand).

Other stakeholders in the areas such as local services providers should also be mapped, as they might play a key role for maintenance or delivery of other services in the school.

12 Schools stakeholders include the head teacher (called in some countries school director), all teachers, the board of management (called in some other countries parents teachers association), and the parents

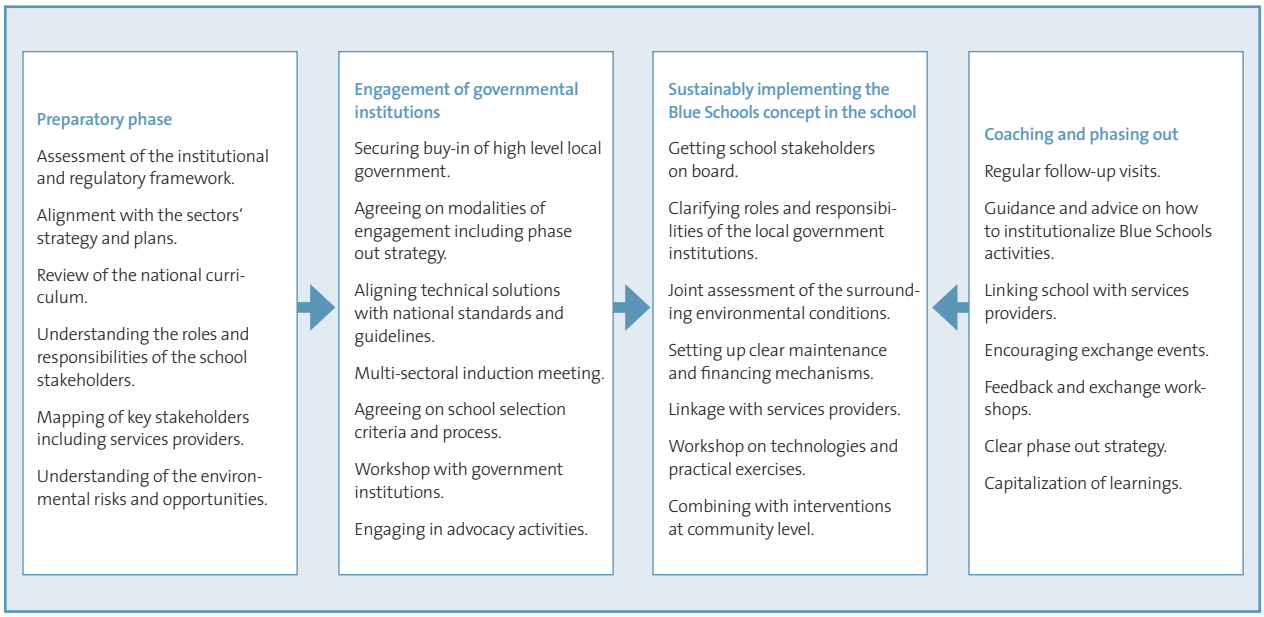

Figure 4. **Road map for Blue Schools implementation**

The project team needs to become familiar with the climatic patterns, water availability, soil conditions, topography, vegetation etc. and the associated environmental risks and opportunities. Consideration for these aspects – and how they may vary considerably among schools in the same region – is key to ascertain which Blue Schools technologies would be most appropriate in the specific context. This can also be discussed with the relevant government institutions.

Engagement of government institutions

The role that governmental institutions can play for a successful implementation of Blue Schools is country and context specific. As much as possible, government institutions should steer the process and be engaged in, among others, selecting the schools, facilitating the training of teachers, and carrying independent follow-up visits. Their engagement is key for sustainability and for replicating Blue Schools in the area or even in the country.

The Blue Schools topics cover different sectors, the project team should involve governmental institutions overseeing education, water, sanitation, natural resources management, agriculture, environment, youth affairs, etc. To secure buy-in, they should begin by engaging with high level government representatives, who can then commission relevant local government officers to examine the technical and implementation aspects.

Blue Schools implementation should also align with each sector's strategy and plans. All technical solutions must be designed according to national standards and guidelines.

The collaboration framework also needs to be clearly discussed and agreed at all levels. This includes:

- The 'project' scope and duration;
- Support to be provided by each party in terms of expertise and financing;
- Roles and responsibilities of local government institutions and how the project team can support;
- Respective tasks, the foreseen time allocation required and the lines of communication;
- Project team phase out (exit strategy).

The collaboration should be formalised in a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU).

To best engage all relevant sector institutions, it is recommended to hold a multi-sectoral induction meeting to introduce Blue Schools and jointly define selection criteria for the school as well as the steps for initiating Blue Schools activities. Based on these criteria, schools can be selected through an introduction and application process, or through a joint assessment. Water availability, land availability, motivation of the head teacher and the school capacity to implement Blue Schools are some examples of selection criteria.

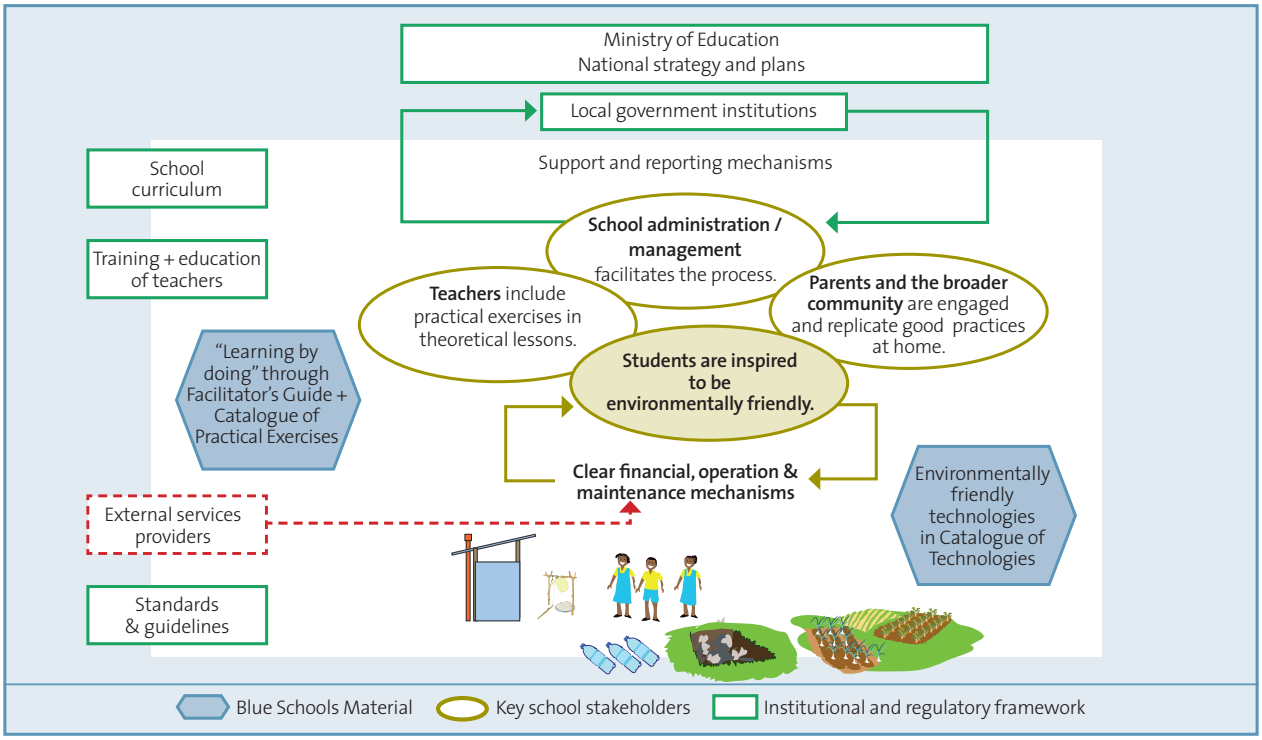

FIGURE 5. **INTEGRATING BLUE SCHOOLS IN THE NATIONAL EDUCATION FRAMEWORK**

"One student one tree" campaign in Madagascar
(Photo: Fastenopfer Madagascar)

Next, a workshop on technologies and practical exercises with government institutions (teacher training centres, extension workers or any other relevant stakeholders) can be organised to ensure anchorage at institutional level.

Ideally, the project team should also engage in advocacy activities at local and/or national levels on topics such as the development (or review process) of national standards or guidelines for schools, taking part in a national curriculum review process, adaptation of visual supports from the Blue Schools Kit to the local context and measures to bring Blue Schools (or some part of it) to scale. This can be in collaboration with other key sectors players having similar interest.

Sustainable implementation the Blue Schools

How to best mobilise a school and the relevant school stakeholders to engage in the process varies with the country and the context. In general, it is recommended to visit the selected schools to get school stakeholders[13] on board and clarify the project scope, the rules of engagement and the support they can expect during the project and beyond. The roles and responsibilities of local government institutions in terms of coaching the implementation of some activities, as well as long-term support should be clearly defined from the start to ensure that the activities introduced are sustained.

From there, the head teachers and other school stakeholders, the local government representatives and the project team should conduct an in-depth joint assessment of the environmental conditions, i.e. current sources of water and rainfall potential, existence and status of latrines, topography, soil type, etc. Based on this, looking at the Blue Schools Catalogue of Technologies, and considering local availability of consumables, materials, and possible external services providers, the school can decide on appropriate technologies to put in place.

From the start, it is essential to put in place operation and maintenance mechanisms with clear roles and responsibilities for the WASH facilities, school garden or other technologies and practices introduced in the school. The involvement of students through a school health club or any other students' groups in the monitoring of WASH facilities status (including waste management and cleanliness of the toilets) is important. However, it should not be used as a punishment and should not infringe on students' safety and free time outside of school. Teachers and other stakeholders must assume their responsibilities to safeguard children and ensure balanced routines. In parallel, financing mechanisms for materials, consumables and services provision need to be discussed and agreed upon between the school stakeholders. The local government institutions and the project team can support the school in linking them with the relevant services providers.

It is recommended to organise a workshop on technologies and practical exercises with teachers and relevant stakeholders to provide hands-on guidance on how to implement different low-cost technologies in the school yard and/or imme-

13 Key school stakeholders include: school administration, head teachers, teachers, school management (sometimes called parents teachers association), care takers, parents and, if relevant, some student representatives.

Girls and boys making reusable sanitary pads in Mid-Western region Nepal
(Photo: Swiss Red Cross Nepal / Nepal Red Cross Society)

diate surroundings (where possible). It is the occasion to promote an understanding of the benefit of practical exercises to enrich the theoretical lessons. Such an event is most fruitful if held with representatives of parents[14]. Ideally, this workshop should be organised by the local government institutions, with support from the project team as necessary. Depending on the specific context, efforts to engage education authorities and to train teachers may enhance advocacy for including some of the Blue Schools practical exercises in the official teacher training process.

Student outreach activities stand to influence their parents and the broader community. Ideally, the implementation of Blue Schools should be combined with interventions at community level for bigger impact.

Coaching and phasing out

Regular follow-up visits to the school with the relevant local government institutions should be organised to assess whether teachers use the practical exercises or need further support. The visits are an opportunity to provide additional guidance on how to sustain the mechanisms for O&M of WASH facilities and other practices or technologies and sustain behaviour change. The project team might need to provide further support to link up the school with relevant services providers.

Organising experience sharing events between schools, such as exchange visits, joint events for special days or competitions, creates a good platform for peer learning and exchange of challenges and ideas through healthy competitions.

It is also recommended to organise feedback and exchange workshops for teachers to discuss experiences, challenges and lessons learned in implementing and maintaining the WASH facilities, the school garden, the waste collection and separation or other Blue Schools technologies. These workshops are also a good opportunity for teachers to share experience in how they made use of the Blue Schools Kit in their school. Other platforms that can be used for experience sharing on Blue Schools include the regular meetings between head teachers of different schools in a similar area.

The project team should have a clear phase out strategy. As the process develops, the project team should let the local government institutions and the school head teachers to take a leading role in follow-up visits, providing direct advice to the school stakeholders and initiating the next actions. Local government institutions as well as school stakeholders (parents, teachers, administrators) should also be able to promote Blue Schools to other schools in their area but also to regional and national authorities. The support that school stakeholders can expect from government institutions should be clear from an early stage.

14 Involve parents, either via an existing parent 'association or by general invitation, during initial meetings, workshops, and on special days when technologies and practical exercises are demonstrated. Parents often have key decision making roles and could support sustainability of Blue Schools activities and replication at home and/or in the community.

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