



## Integrated school sanitation programming

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THE CONDITIONS OF school sanitation facilities in South Africa range from excellent to appalling and shocking. Most facilities can be classified as poor or unacceptable. It is estimated that about 90 per cent of rural and peri-urban schools lack well designed and appropriate sanitation facilities. In the Gauteng Province, the economic capital of South Africa, sanitation in schools are of equally low standard.

Gauteng Integrated School Sanitation Improvement Programme (GISSIP) is a pilot programme involving 70 schools. It aims to improve school sanitation through focusing on building facilities, providing health and hygiene education with a special focus on maintenance issues.

### Background

In 1996, the Departments of Education and Public Works took the lead in addressing the shortage of school toilets in Gauteng. The main objective of the programme at that point was to provide the sanitation facilities.

The Public Works Department, as the custodians of all government property, and the Department of Education, responsible for the schools, was the two partners. Thirty-five schools were targeted and the sample included primary and secondary school in townships, informal settlements and private farms. The technologies used, varied from full water borne septic tank to ventilated improved pit latrines (VIPs).

### Reconstruction and development

The construction was co-managed with the school government bodies (SGB) and the funds for purchasing materials and payment of labour were kept by the schools. Apart from the external support for technical designs, the entire project management was within the school.

Before the completion of the toilets, the Departments were concerned about the sustainability, operation and maintenance of their initiative and that the conditions of new facilities should not deteriorate and be sub standard. The Department of Health and Mvula Trust, a national non-governmental organisation (NGO) working in water and sanitation in South Africa, were approached to assist in this programme. The different roles were not clear at that stage.

### The research study

It is important that action be based on the real findings from the schools. A research study was commissioned in 1997,

to look at the attitudes, perceptions of learners and staff on sanitation. Another 35 schools were added to the list. The new schools were not part of the initial sample and had not received any additional assistance. The conditions were as follows:

- Toilets were in a bad state, and were breeding places for germs. The conditions of the toilets allocated to the teachers were better.
- Toilets were situated in the learners' space and teachers never frequented these areas.
- Toilets were vandalised and there were no privacy for girl students. There were faeces and vulgar graffiti on the walls.
- Many learners preferred not to use the toilets unless absolutely necessary. They feared contamination from the unhygienic conditions and the unsafe environment of the toilets.
- Toilets were used for unauthorised social purposes (bullying, smoking, avoiding lessons, dealing with drugs)
- Vandalism occurred in toilets
- The roles and responsibilities were unclear (role of learners, caretakers/ factotums, teachers,)
- Parental involvement around toilet, hygiene and concomitant problems was low.
- Hand washing and hygiene, although it was known, was not practised.
- Water is usually available but there were few taps and poor drainage
- The perception prevailed that toilets are not important to the learning environment. The priorities included obvious essentials such as textbooks, libraries, uniforms, etc.

The research findings were presented at a joint meeting of all Gauteng Provincial departments, namely Education, Health, Public Works, teacher organisations and NGOs. Senior officials attended this meeting and decided to commit further funding to sanitation. It was also decided to keep the list of GISSIP schools to 70, i.e. keep two sets of schools: those that were part of the initial research study as well as the 35 schools that were included later.

It was clear that one government department could not solve the problems. An integrated approach was needed. What was clear was that a solution would be difficult. Treasury and other bureaucratic red tape were not conducive to an integrated or multi-sectoral approach to the problems.

It stands to reason that schools are institutions of learning and behaviour change. But if school sanitation facilities are absent or badly maintained, the institution becomes a health hazard.

### **The role of the NGO, Mvula Trust**

Each department sub-contracted the Mvula Trust to undertake the programme management of the 70 schools. The Mvula Trust raises additional funding for GISSIP from international partners.

The Trust has been hosting all meetings which has encouraged and enhanced the participation of the different government departments. Each department sees GISSIP as a partnership and they are not merely helping one department achieve its own narrow agenda, especially considering the pressure on government to deliver services.

### **Management arrangements**

GISSIP has management and steering committee. The management committee meets monthly and has representatives from the three government departments and the Mvula Trust. The Steering committee is a bigger structure with representation from all the sub-structures of the different government departments.

All three departments have contributed financially to the project. The government departments have contributed equal amounts and Mvula Trust and the European Union provided additional funding. Mvula Trust keeps the funds and does the financial management. The funding reports are presented to the Management Committee, which has decision-making powers regarding expenditures.

### **School sanitation promotion**

GISSIP lobbies and advocates at different levels.

#### **Political heads**

The political heads of the Departments are lobbied so that they can support the programme. Seminars are held and they are invited to give talks, based on the research findings. The political heads are important as the decisions regarding allocating more funds and staff time to sanitation improvement rest with them. The political heads have committed and visit toilets whenever school visits are conducted, especially the Department of Education.

#### **Learners**

In 1998, School Sanitation week was held for the first time in the Gauteng Province. Children are the agents of change and have an important role to play. The learners played an important role through promoting sanitation awareness. Although the main focus was on health and hygiene promotion, maintenance issues were highlighted.

Learners conducted sanitation surveys in neighbouring communities and played a role in materials development through school competitions. Through this initiative, GISSIP was able to reach youngsters from out of school as well as parents and the communities at large.

The Department of Health played a big role in promoting appropriate health messages through different forums.

The Department of Health will take the Sanitation Week initiative forward, make it an annual event and reach other schools outside GISSIP.

#### **Local authorities**

GISSIP had to work with technical and environmental officers in local government. As most of the facilities were water borne sewers, some of the schools were having problems with irregular water supplies and low pressure. This was quite problematic during peak time, for example tea breaks and between lessons. In South Africa, officers working for local government are not permitted to inspect government institutions such as schools, but GISSIP reached an agreement with the relevant role-players to allow this..

#### **Principals and teachers**

Schools were presented with the report because it was felt that if teachers are not involved, they may negatively influence the school sanitation programme. Teachers have since played an important role in facilitating GISSIP initiatives within the schools and encouraging learner and parent involvement.

#### **Planning for improvement**

GISSIP has restructured its objectives such that there is proper integration of software and hardware issues. There is equal partnership by the departments and all are involved in decision making and initiatives.

#### **Linking up with other initiatives**

GISSIP has linked up with the National Department of Water Affairs- sanitation desk responsible for the National Sanitation Programme.

GISSIP schools are encouraged to link their acquired skills with other school initiatives. For example, hand washing before meal times and the school-feeding scheme.

GISSIP also encourages schools to learn from each other and share their experiences within the programme.

#### **Curriculum development**

Inadequate training of teachers on sanitation issues and the lack of teaching materials is a problem that is not being ignored. Support from the senior officials within the Gauteng Education Department is also important in allowing and encouraging the teachers to train the learners. The new political changes in South Africa have also opened a window for Curriculum revision.

GISSIP has developed teaching aids to enable teacher to be effective promoters of school sanitation. All partners reviewed the material and it was field-tested before final production. The package comes with a teacher guide so that he/she can have working knowledge of water, sanitation and hygiene behaviour and skills to work with learners on sanitation issues and find ways to bring about improve-

ment. The materials are practical and link knowledge, attitudes and behaviour. It is action oriented and encourages learners to take action for health and hygiene in schools.

The Life Orientation slot in the school syllabi is a slot where teachers can teach different life skill issues. The trainers in the Department of Education do teacher training. They are also responsible for monitoring the effectiveness of the material.

School sanitation has also offered the sections of Physical Planning and Curriculum Development in the Education Department an opportunity to work together.

### **Support by the health workers**

GISSIP has developed material for Health Officers to promote sanitation and are able to support the schools with their expertise.

This material is linked to the classroom material used by teachers and has the same characters. Teachers are free to call these officers whenever they need assistance in sanitation matters. These officers based at the Department of Health or local government.

### **Lessons learnt**

GISSIP is model demonstrating that school sanitation is not a problem that can be tackled by one department. The willingness of the school; SGB, learners and teachers especially the principals to partake in such a programme are crucial.

Working with the newly established SGB can be an ideal starting point for school sanitation because they decide on funding priorities for the particular school.

Partnerships can lead to sustainable programmes. The school sanitation programme provides one of the ideal and rare opportunities for the governments to collaborate.

Different departments learn about each other's systems, which may affect their work. The challenge is how to keep all departments continuously interested in school sanitation when issues move or seem to have gone beyond their mandate.

Mvula Trust has had to learn accounting to different, equal structures with different interests and systems.

GISSIP's success and sustainability relies on the continuous work and commitment of the field staff in the government sector. It was thus crucial that all activities fit within the work of the departments. This will hopefully enhance the sustainability of the programme.

The awareness programme that GISSIP has embarked on is massive and it has become difficult to target only the selected schools. There are continuous calls to GISSIP from other schools to get involved. Another difficulty is caused by government representatives involved in the programme who have to work in all the schools in their work areas. This makes the selection and excluding of other schools within their work areas problematic.

The issue of appropriate technologies cannot be overemphasised. It is important that the school community is familiar with the technology used. Schools need robust systems, which can accommodate high peak hours such as tea breaks and free periods. Children have to become familiar with the technology so that they can not mess it up or be unable to use it properly.

There is a great need for national policies around the responsibilities for toilet facilities. In all schools, it is clear who cleans the classrooms and to some extent the school yard but not the toilets. Junior classes are actually forced to clean the facilities or teachers use it to punish learners.

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