

ABSTRACT: Football-based Life Skill Education proves effective in achieving sustainable hygiene behaviour in school children and their families - *Lessons from Football for Wash program in Ghana, Kenya and Mozambique 2012-2019*

The Football for Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (F4WASH) programme was launched on World Water Day 2012 as an innovative approach with a unique focus on Football (play)-based behaviour change and sustainability. The ultimate aim was to achieve both sustainable Wash facilities in schools and sustainable behaviour change in school-children necessary for improved health and education. The approach has been developed in a Public private partnership between Dutch Ministry of Foreign affairs, Dutch Royal Football Association (KNVB), UNICEF, Aqua for All, Akvo Foundation and Vitens Evides International (VEI) and tested in the field until 2019. A Theory of Change was jointly developed as a basis for these partners to jointly implement at schools (See Annex)

The main challenge in achieving this sustained hygiene behaviour in WinS programs was and still is to bridge the gap between knowledge on hygiene and the actual practice of hygiene behaviour. In this case hygiene behaviour included; personal hygiene such as handwashing, environmental hygiene and Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) aimed at primary school children in Kenya Ghana and Mozambique. On top of regular Wash interventions and health education, the program selects and trains Worldcoaches in the schools and communities that will continue to train the school children and create awareness in the community on the importance of Wash. F4WASH based its approach on 1) the scientific evidence that knowledge transformed into the right habits is the basis for sustained behaviour change and 2) on the assumption that sports is an effective way to guide and stimulate preferred behaviour and takes away impediments to preferred behaviours. Less scientific but visible are the effects of “fun” “popular role models” and use of “football competitions” which increases the motivation of children and their families to participate.

A proof of concept study has been done independently by Kantar Public Kenya between 2017 and 2020. The Proof of Concept study was a feasible, objective instrument to gather evidence on the effectiveness of the programme’s integrated approach with a focus on children’s behaviour change and sustainability compared to regular WinS programmes. This (semi-academic) study demonstrated that F4WASH schools were outperforming schools in the control groups on health, hygiene behaviour, community outreach, and menstrual hygiene management indicators. These findings combined showed that the F4WASH approach adds value by bridging the gap between hygiene education and behaviour change. This led to improved health (less water related disease), improved school performance and increased attendance, especially for girls. Football (or any sport) based life skill education has proven to contribute to bridging the gap between knowledge and practice in achieving sustainable hygiene behaviour.

The approach identified 4 key learning areas in which continued investment is needed to achieve sustainability of WinS investments.

- Sustain and expand behaviour change over time.
- Focus sustainable operation and maintenance (O&M) and cost-recovery
- Enhancement of local ownership.
- Ensure institutionalization and embedding in local and national structures.

In summary, the outcomes of the programme show that this innovative model has the potential to provide a sustainable solution for WinS. The model also proves to add value in achieving the desired behaviour change required for health impact. The urgent need for an effective methodology on hygienic behaviour change, like F4WASH, was exposed again by the COVID-19 crisis. This pandemic also put the programme approach to the test with positive results so far as stakeholders show increased interest in the methodology. It will require perseverance, time and courage of partners, funders, investors, governments and other stakeholders to move along this path and to realize that safe sanitation takes more than building toilets. It demands increased investment in Life Skill education and sports alongside regular Wash interventions.