

Mobile Arts for Peace (MAP)

Policy Brief

- DRAFT -

Information about the project

The Foundation for Tolerance International (FTI), together with the University of Lincoln (UK), is implementing the MAP project to work with school youth. The project is funded by the Arts and Humanities Council (AHRC) and Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF) in the UK.

The project aims to strengthen peace by teaching youth positive skills to express their own ideas and to promote their stronger engagement in community life through the use of innovative arts-based methods. The main objective of the project is to empower young people to promote intergenerational dialogue between youth and adults for peacebuilding. To achieve this goal, the project seeks to support youth to express their feelings and personal experiences through various types of art including theatre, video, painting, music, and dance. From September 2020 to May 2021, the project participants were trained in conducting research, analysing problems, identifying stakeholders, and expressing selected social issues through engagement with various art forms.

Brief information about the authors

This draft was prepared by members of the young researchers' club from Secondary School B. Osmonov in Jalal-Abad city. In January 2021, young club members conducted a study among their peers on the problems that affect young people. Together with their peers, they prioritized the problem of unsanitary conditions of their school toilets. They analysed the causes and consequences of the problem. In April, participants prepared a video on this topic and presented it to decision-makers.

Unsanitary conditions of the school toilet at Secondary School B. Osmonov in Jalal-Abad city

Situation

Secondary School B. Osmonov in Jalal-Abad city was built in 1965. It was originally designed for 840 students, but now, like many other schools in the country, it is overflowing with 2610 students studying at its premises. While an outdoor toilet was built, its conditions, according to schoolchildren, leave much to be desired. Firstly, it is located at more than 70 metres from the school which creates inconvenience, especially in the cold season. Many children point out that it is especially difficult for primary school students. Secondly, the sanitary condition of the toilet, despite a constant treatment by the cleaners, remains in poor condition: *'It is impossible to breathe, the stench is strong, in the summer the clothes immediately absorb the unpleasant smell, and in winter the concrete floor is wet and dirty, ice is often building up,'* says Atil, a 7th-grade student. Thirdly, girls who participated in the study noted the problem of the inability to observe intimate hygiene, especially during the menstrual cycle. The water tap is not located nearby and there is no soap to wash their hands. Most girls say that they are afraid to go to the toilet, especially alone. There were cases when drunken strangers could enter the school toilet. In addition, due to being in the immediate vicinity of the garbage heap, rodents are often introduced, which also creates fear in schoolchildren and the risk of contracting infectious diseases. Many schoolchildren admit that they prefer to endure the wait until home.

When a child starts attending school, most parents look at the condition of the classroom, cafeteria, or assembly hall but few people go to the school toilets. Good sanitation is one of the fundamental aspects of a comfortable and healthy school environment.

According to the school director, they have been trying to conduct projects and raise funds to improve the condition of the school for many years:

'Thanks to the help of local authorities, donors and parents, a lot of work was done at one time, including fencing. But despite this, there are different people, sometimes it happens that strangers go to the toilet, so we try to send primary schoolchildren only with a teacher. It is also planned to

put video cameras. One time, when the school fund was working, we could provide a security guard, but currently not, because the funds are also closed.'

The solution to the problem rests mainly on financial needs. During the presentation meeting, suggestions to solve the problem were proposed by parents, teachers, young people, and representatives from the city hall. One of the suggestions was to appeal to the mayor's office from the school administration, parents and the school club of young researchers with a request to assist in assessing the condition of the school toilet and preparing permits for the reconstruction of the internal bathroom. It became unusable due to the wear and tear of sewerage and water pipes. According to the participants at the presentation meeting, the problem is pressing and needs to be addressed promptly. One of the parents who attended the meeting said:

'It is very unfortunate that our children are forced to raise such problems by themselves when there are us, the adults. Because it is we who must think and create favorable conditions for children. The problem is pressing, it is difficult for children, but many do not pay attention to it, a very good initiative has been raised. I think it is necessary to move at least in small steps,'

The problem of school toilets in Kyrgyzstan was first discussed a short time ago when studies began to be conducted on problems like garbage, lack of water and conditions in schools for the safety of children. The topic is extremely relevant for our country. According to national statistics, in 2012, flush toilets used in schools accounted for 14.9 per cent of schools, of which 48.3 per cent of schools are urban and 6.6 per cent are rural schools. School toilets with a cesspool have different types, the condition of most outdoor toilets is dangerous to the life and health of students¹.

In recent decades, the condition of latrines, mostly built during the Soviet era, has deteriorated. As water systems have become unusable, many schools have reverted to using outdoor toilets without running water, for which there are no official regulations in public sanitation. Minimum requirements for water supply, sanitation and hygiene in general education organizations are fixed in 'Sanitary and epidemiological requirements for the conditions and organization of education in general education organizations' (SanPiN), approved by the Government Decree of the Kyrgyz Republic No. 201 of April 11, 2016.

A UNICEF assessment of the country's schools showed children's attitudes towards school latrines, with 90 per cent of children responding that toilets were 'scary, dirty, smelly, dark and cold'. The same responses were received from students during a peer study by the Young Researchers Club as part of the MAP project.²

Reasons

- There is little discussion about improving the conditions of the sanitary and hygienic culture of schoolchildren, as well as financing the operation and repair of toilets
- Lack of uninterrupted supply of consumables (e.g. toilet roll) with hygienic materials
- Poor cleaning and treatment of street toilets
- The number of pupils in schools exceeds their capacity
- The toilet on the street is far away and it is not in the best condition, built long time ago, there were cases when drunk people entered
- Unsuitability of drainage pipes and the need for their replacement
- Previously, no one from this school had approached the local authorities with this problem, there was only one mention of the problem at various sites
- Lack of local budget funds
- Children have not previously raised this issue openly. Schoolchildren note that hygiene lessons are held at school, but in order to comply with these rules, conditions (soap, faucet) are needed
- Most parents don't see this as a problem

¹ Pilot monitoring: safety of the educational environment in schools of the Kyrgyz Republic / Bogatova N.A., Mendikulova Z.K., Savochkina V.V., Semenov N.S., Umetov U.T., Nasyrova A.R. – Bishkek

² Universal basic education by 2015 Global Out-of-School Children Initiative. STUDY ON KYRGYZSTAN

Consequences/Risks

- a) Intentional retention of urination. Due to the poor condition of the school toilet, many students endure until they reach home or visit public toilets
- b) Girls are stressed due to the lack of privacy (there are no doors). Most girls noted that it is inconvenient for them to observe intimate hygiene in such conditions, especially in the cold period. Due to the situation, some girls do not come to school during their cycle.
- c) From the point of view of sanitary and hygienic standards, the school toilet can become a source of many physical diseases including intestinal infections, rotavirus infections, acute respiratory infections, and others. When children forget or simply do not wash their hands, they unwittingly become carriers of pathogenic microbes.
- d) The safety of children is not given due to strangers who can enter the toilet and school ground through the fence.
- e) Children develop a low level of trust in adults. Children noted that they see and compare how school toilets look in other cities and countries:

'Adults do not consider the poor condition of school toilets a problem, since they themselves grew up in such conditions. But we hope that changes will begin and we will be able to safely visit clean and safe toilets.' Participant, presentation meeting, 2021

Recommendations

School Parliament / Young Researchers Club

- Promote information campaigns alongside hygiene and safety activities among schoolchildren with the involvement of youth councils and parents.

Parents

- Pay more attention to the safety and hygiene of children, talk with children, teach; check the outdoor toilet, provide the necessary means
- Work closely with the school administration to find solutions

School

- Send a letter to the mayor's office asking for assistance in assessing the condition of the street school toilet and reconstructing the internal bathroom
- Spend classroom hours at school on hygiene and safety
- Inform parents at parent meetings that children need to be given toiletries (paper, wet and dry wipes, soap, pads) and teach them to behave correctly in the toilet (do not stain the walls, do not sit in the wrong places, do not walk alone)

Local authorities. City Hall (social department, department of capital construction)

- Study the practice of other countries in solving the problem, find donors, assist in the preparation of financial estimates and other documents
- Introduce into the budget for 2022 funds for the reconstruction of the internal bathroom
- Distribute information and explanatory campaigns among the population, to organize round tables aimed at discussing the problem and finding solutions.

City Education Department

- Integrate hygiene education into the school curriculum. More attention needs to be paid to gender sensitivities (e.g. the hygiene of girls during menstruation)
- Adapt the experiences of GIZ and UNICEF (WASH environment) in schools.

Health authorities

- Improve the quality of inspections of sanitary facilities, considering the opinions and needs of schoolchildren.