

SCALING UP OF RIGHT TO CHILDREN ON WASH IN SCHOOLS SUMMARY

The side event was composed of two sections, which were presentation and panel discussion. Dr. Roy Kunjappy opened with the message about the main objective of the side event, which is to scale up the water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) initiatives in schools, inspired by the intervention in Kerala and other parts of the world and how these initiatives are needed to empower children as the agents of change while achieving Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. The event continued with a video showcase “Flush of Happiness” which presented about how Kerala provided examples of WASH interventions inside the state, based on the constitution of India.

Building on the video, Rio Hada stated how WASH is one of the forms of human rights that will become a game changing right for accessing other human rights. Rio also highlighted the importance of education as the enabling right, foundation of peace, and channel of WASH awareness. Leo Heller further affirmed the message about WASH in the context of India and beyond households. In the 2019 trip, Leo described the lack of WASH facilities in some schools in India, civil society’s frustration on the public WASH facilities, and how the trip to India inspired Leo to create a special report about water and sanitation beyond households, in public facilities like schools, healthcare centers, prisons, etc.

The conversation on WASH issue context in India was continued by Upasana Chauhan and Priyanka Shendage. Upasana is advocating menstrual hygiene management in India and how her organization supports schools in Kerala to access WASH facilities and education. Upasana described major issues in WASH, for instance open defecation, unsafe drinking water, and multiple kinds of violence that women in India face daily. She further stated how these issues need to be brought into light to the policymakers to prevent further disadvantage that is faced particularly by some women that decided to drop out of their education at the age of menstruation. Priyanka Shendage continued by explaining the works of UNICEF India in the state of Maharashtra, in the form of Maha Youth for Climate Action (MYCA) and Climate Change and Environmental Curriculum: Greening School Syllabus. MYCA is a platform to educate youth concerning WASH-climate nexus and the syllabus by UNICEF India has been taught to the teachers in the state.

The later part of the event was arranged in the form of youth panel discussion. Noemie Plumier discussed how specific laws on WASH and human rights will be an important measure to scale up commitment for WASH. Bhumi Sharma added on how the youths need to be hopeful by seeing WASH success story examples in India and other places. Ziadath Achimi raised another point on how investing in capacity building for youth and financial support, while looking at community based solutions, can scale up WASH commitment. On the topic of actor involvement, Gabriela talked about children as right holders of WASH and how her organization tried to promote access to WASH through water well construction and local community networks. Odwa added the discussion in actor involvement by explaining how traditional leaders of South Africa have big influence in WASH implementation, with the emphasis of also promoting indigenous knowledge and equal burden share within all members of society to break the taboo barriers, especially in Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM). The event was closed by a short commitment pledge by the participants of the side event to scale up and advance WASH action, such as awareness building, breaking taboo barriers, educating each other, and continuing and spreading good initiatives concerning WASH.

Lessons Learned

- Rights of children to have good access to water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) need to be protected by the constitution and novel, specific laws.
- Local integration, as shown by the State of Kerala, India, needs to be scaled up in advancing WASH in schools.
- Right to sanitation, along with education, is a game-changing right to access other rights.
- There is a need for more discussion among the policymakers in protecting particularly the young women and students to access WASH.
- Bottom-up approach for youth engagement in WASH will produce optimum outcome when combined with teachers engagement.
- There is a need to publicize the positive works and trends in WASH to scale up the commitment and effort.
- Financial support and investment in capacity building need to be allocated to community-based solutions in WASH.
- Coupling of improvement in water infrastructure, along with meaningful engagement of children as right holders, is needed to advance WASH in schools.
- Inclusion of traditional leaders, indigenous knowledge, and shared accountability are needed to break the barriers in advancing WASH, particularly to remove the taboo barriers.
- Every personal commitment for scaling up WASH counts.

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