



Water, Sanitation and Hygiene: a much-needed investment amid the pandemic

We are presented with a glaring truth: even before the pandemic, Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) in the Philippines is besieged by a lack of facilities to provide Filipinos with basic water and sanitation facilities.

Key findings from the 2017 National Demographic and Health Survey show that one-fourth of household units utilize unimproved sanitation – 17% utilize a common toilet facility of a generally worthy sort, 3% utilize an unimproved facility, and 5% have no facility. Six percent of households in rural areas have no toilet facility, compared with only 3% of urban households.¹ The same paper also presents that 4.5 million people do not have toilets and are most likely doing open defecation, while another 18 million people utilize unimproved toilets.² It is lamentable that fundamental toilet, water and sanitation facilities are not always accessible. More than half of schools do not have access to potable drinking water, while 56.8% of schools have gender-segregated toilets.³ Two (2) in ten (10) government facilities do not have enough water supply, while 3 in 10 health facilities lack access to clean toilets.⁴

UNICEF's '7 facts about toilets' stresses that 'without toilets, diseases spread rapidly'.⁵

Global data estimates that over 750 children under five die every day due to diarrhea brought by unclean water, sanitation and poor hygiene. The lack of proper hygiene facilities in schools is also one of the reasons why girls skip going to school.

Why would people have to defecate in bushes or unsafe areas when this can be addressed by sufficiently funding water, sanitation and hygiene facilities.

Historically, government spending on the country's water supply and sanitation services is estimated to be around 3-4 billion pesos annually.⁸ This amount is far from targets set to achieve current parameters like the SDG⁹ targets, which should ideally be pegged at P 100 billion per year from 2020 to 2030.

Given these contexts, let us zoom in on the DOH and DepEd's particular programs that immensely affect WASH. For the 2021 proposed DOH budget, the funds for Environmental and Occupational Health sub-program suffered a huge cut from P352 million in 2020 to a meager P2 million for 2021. With the crucial need to improve our country's access to improved toilets -with nearly 2 million households particularly impacted, and another 3 million households sharing toilets with others - the unreasonable cut in the budget for Environmental and Occupational Health is illogical and unacceptable.

1 <https://dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/SR253/SR253.pdf>

2 *ibid.*

3 UNICEF Technical Budget Notes on WASH

4 *ibid.*

5 www.unicef.org/stories/7-fast-facts-about-toilets, November 2018

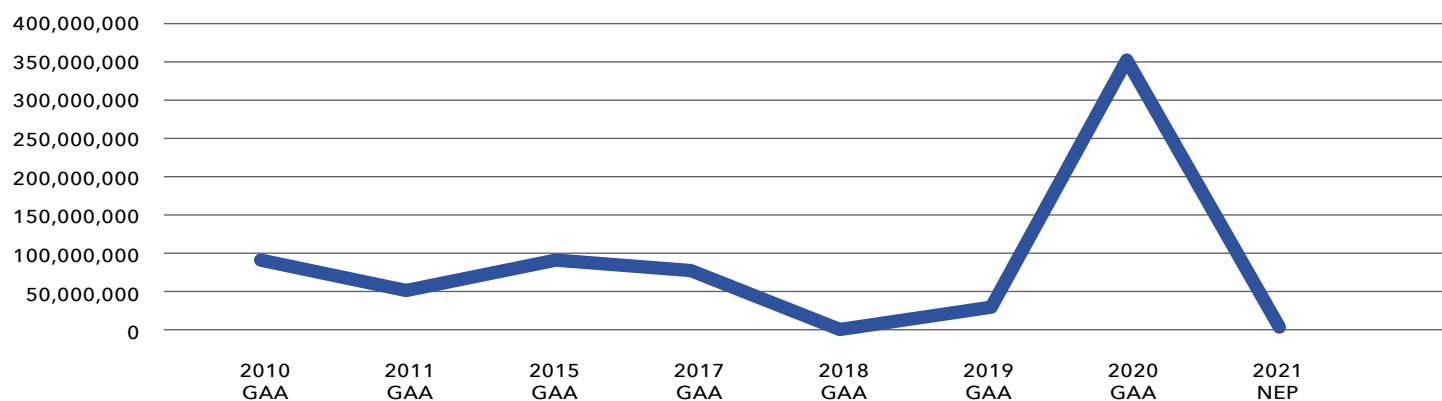
6 *ibid.*

7 *ibid.*

8 www.neda.gov.ph

9 www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/sustainable-development-goals/goal-6-clean-water-and-sanitation.html

Comparison of budget allocation to DOH Environmental and Occupational Health Sub-Program



Below are our specific asks to address WASH, particularly those that gravely affect children's health and well-being:

For the DOH Proposed budget for 2021:

- Roll-out the Philippine Approach to Sustainable Sanitation (PhATSS) to all areas nationwide, which involves subsidizing for continued advocacy and deliberate program checking to help government execution assessed at P114 million.
- Utilizing public assets with private sector money to accomplish scale in dispensing sanitation facilities to most susceptible families. The DOH recommendation for an Output-Based Aid Blended Finance Program for Household Sanitation needs P196 million to finance 20,000 most vulnerable families in putting up their own toilet.
- Putting up an Environmental Sanitation Information System (ESIS) to monitor both automatic execution (yields) and result pointers, and screen progress against national targets and the SDGs. At least PhP 3.7 million is required for DOH Central Office and 16 Centers for Health and Development to build up the online module and roll-out at the local government level, as a major aspect of the 'new normal' priority plan.
- An estimated PhP 4.7 million allocation to Central Office and 16 CHDs is required to support WASH-FIT¹⁰ roll-out across the country. This is to improve WASH services in Health Care Facilities (HCF) which are crucial in the fight against COVID-19.
- To ensure access to safe drinking water and sanitation facilities and to appropriately deal with the expansion in volume of infectious waste materials, supporting medical care offices and quarantine facilities is important. A separate allocation must be allotted to this under the Health Facilities Enhancement Program (HFEP) to guarantee that gaps in WASH facilities are addressed.

For DepEd, below are specific recommendations with regard to WASH:

- 3,861 schools without water supply needs an estimated 26,629 group handwashing facilities - The DepEd developed handwashing facilities with water storage tanks that can be filled manually from a source close-by require an estimated budget of P 5.54 billion. This plan empowers schools to actualize a framework for gathering and putting away water and guaranteeing the usefulness and manageability of the group handwashing facilities.
- Repair of some 657,389 existing group handwashing facilities in 43,289 schools with water supply -The repairs will proficiently address the shortage and guarantee usefulness of the handwashing facilities, given the presence of water source.

Our recommendations:

Retain -if not increase- the DOH Environmental and Occupational Health Sub-program, which suffered a tremendous cut.

Support to regions with the highest number of households without access to an improved toilet, such as Regions 5, 6, 7, 8 and BARMM should be given priority.

Sufficient funds must also be appropriated for smart subsidies to sanitation facilities for poor and susceptible households. This includes increasing capacities and providing technical assistance for the application of pertinent WASH programs, and make sure that program monitoring and reporting are available.

Ensure that a distinct appropriation for government-owned facilities must be allocated to address existing gaps in WASH facilities including those for health care waste treatment.

(This falls under the DOH Health Facilities Enhancement Program).

A separate budget for the 47,150 schools should be allocated to construct 3,861 new group handwashing facilities and repair existing 657,389 group handwashing facilities. These are all crucial to allow children to protect themselves from infectious diseases such as COVID-19, especially if physical classes resume.