

SCHOOL WATER, SANITATION & HYGIENE EDUCATION WATER FOR PEOPLE-INDIA (DRAFT PAPER)



BACKGROUND

It has long been recognised that investments in school sanitation and hygiene education together can create improved learning environments, thereby facilitating increased attendance and retention of students. The impact is most pronounced among girl students, when their special needs of adequacy and privacy are catered to. Children are effective change agents and serve to spread their best practices into their homes and communities. The overall long term impact of improved water and sanitation facilities in schools are thus phenomenal.

However, mere creation of infrastructure, that does not assign due importance to students' needs, can cater only to short term solutions and are by and large unsustainable. It is important to recognise and distinguish between the needs of girls and boys separately, of children of different age groups and the special needs of the physically challenged. Development of infrastructural facilities needs to be combined with raised awareness about the importance of proper hygiene and the various ways of preventing water related ailments. Also needed is the evolved attitude of the adults i.e. teachers, school authorities and parents, who should systematically support the initiatives with a positive disposition towards safe water and sanitation and healthy habits of children.

CHALLENGES

The overall average for sanitation coverage is about 22% in West Bengal. In schools, the figures show a reasonable coverage for both water and sanitation, but without stating the appropriateness in terms of adequacy, access and cultural acceptance or use.

Majority of the schools in rural West Bengal, especially senior secondary schools with large student strength, run with inadequate drinking water and sanitation facilities. This is not because investments have not been made. Structures have been installed, but without considering the needs of the school in terms of student strength or sex division. Further, systems for maintenance and upkeep of the structures have neither been thought about nor installed in the institutions, resulting in gradual degradation of the toilets and water sources and colossal waste of resources.

It is common to find only urinals, but no latrines for girls and sometimes boys, in the schools. In most senior schools, there is usually a single water source for a 1000 plus student strength, located outside the school toilets. This also serves as the only drinking water source and when occupied, children collect water from the nearby ponds to use in toilets. Lack of adequate water impedes hygienic behaviour, keeps the toilets dirty and unfit for use. For boys coping is easier as they are habituated to open urination and defecation, around the school premises. But girls find it difficult to manage and prefer staying away from school.

Problems for girls and lady teachers are more pronounced during their menstruation days. Poorly designed infrastructure, without considerations for disposal of menstrual waste, pose challenges that are both hazardous to health and challenging psychologically. It is not surprising that absenteeism is higher among girl students in these schools.

Managing with poor infrastructural support has become the norm where guardians and teachers act as indifferent and passive stakeholders, doing little to alter the situation. Schools receive sanctions from various departmental schemes for infrastructural improvements, which are used for adding rooms to the school building and rarely for upgrading water and sanitation facilities. When it is mandatory to do this, the resources are often not commensurate with the needs or capacity of the school. What is needed most is an inclusive approach aiming at convergence of all available inter-sectoral resources along with inbuilt mechanisms for operation and maintenance.

WATER FOR PEOPLE—INDIA INTERVENTION

Since 2005, Water For People—India has promoted initiatives for sustainable programmes for safe drinking water, sanitation and hygiene education in schools in rural West Bengal. Well programmed water and sanitation facilities along with effective hygiene education were considered to be a powerful incentive for children to attend schools. To ensure sustainability, these interventions needed to be spruced with arrangements for proper use and maintenance.

Experiences over the years directed the need to add a gender sensitive dimension to programmes. Periodic reviews prompted considerations for the special needs of girl students, especially during the menstruating days. With the conviction that young girls would be the best judge of their needs, attempts were made to involve them in designing the sanitary blocks being installed in the schools with support from Water For People and partners.

A series of discussions and workshops with school students and teacher bodies were facilitated by the organisation's partner NGO's that exposed and identified the special needs of the students (especially girls), about the existing water sanitation facilities. Students were encouraged to lay out a preferred design that would be technically sound and meeting their needs. These exercises also brought forth the need to identify and understand the implications of menstrual management practices of young girls and draw up a holistic programme for water and sanitation in schools that would be sustainable. A pilot study was commissioned for this and its findings were shared widely with stakeholders. The child friendly school sanitation programme of Water For People-India is an outcome of these exercises and a vital component of the overall WASH initiatives.

GUIDELINES FOR SCHOOL PROGRAMME

1. Facility:

Ensuring **adequacy** in terms of number of urinals and latrine units would be one of the key focus areas of the intervention. Construction would be as per the design suggested by the students and school authorities, taking into consideration their special needs. School sanitary blocks will be designed using the following guidelines:

- **Adequate** number of urinals and latrines in accordance with the student strength. Urinals for boys should be placed at different heights, to accommodate boys of all age groups. Urinals for girls should be adequately wide to provide enough space to conduct her activities comfortably. Height of door knobs should be kept within the reach of students. Doors should be sturdy and provide the necessary privacy.
- **Running water** should always be available in all the urinals and latrines.
- **Hand-washing stations** located near the toilet block, should always have soap for proper hand-washing.
- **Drinking water stations** with multiple water taps, placed at differing heights to accommodate students of all age groups.
- **2-3 enclosures with special fittings in the sanitary block, designed to help girls accommodate their menstruation management needs.** E.g. Connection to a disposal pit (incinerator) for used menstrual cloth, 2 tap connections at different heights with running water, a wash basin with a mirror, provision for hanging garments, wall cupboard/an accessible place for storing napkins, and adequate space catering to the needs of menstruating girls.
- **Proper drainage** for safe disposal of waste water from sanitary block.
- **Arrangement for safe disposal** of all solid waste, ensuring environmental cleanliness
- **Special arrangements** for physically challenged.
- School sanitary block / water and sanitation facilities, within **safe distance** from school.

Improvement/ Modification of existing structures

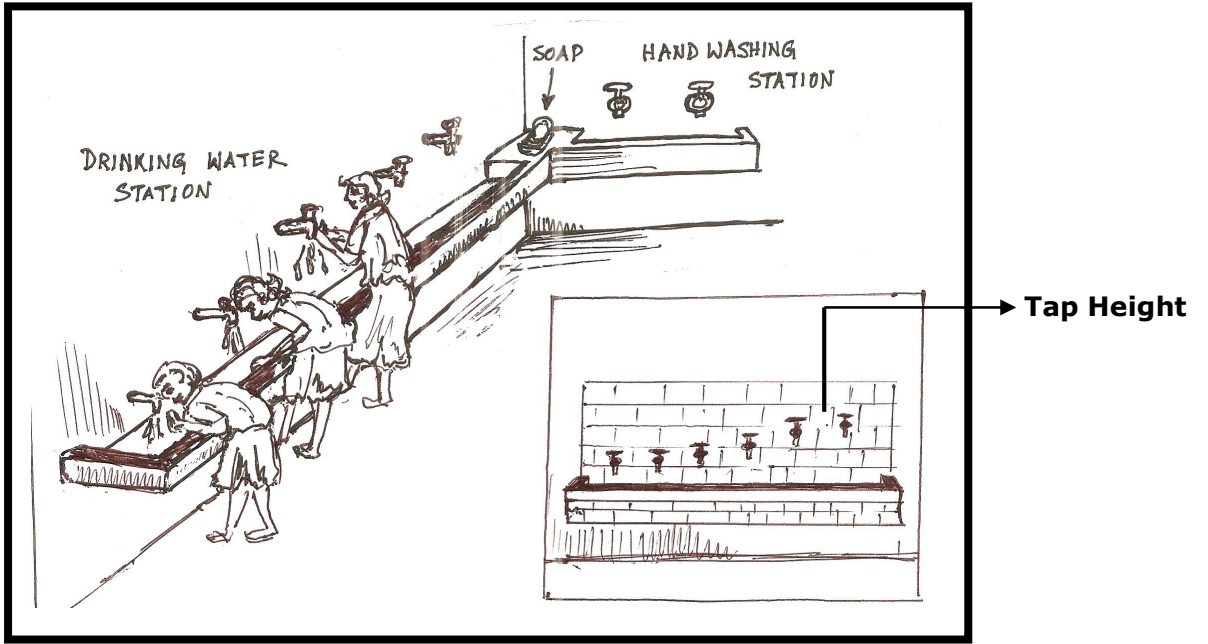
Water For People proposes the following improvement/modifications of the existing sanitation facilities to incorporate needs of **young adolescents and children**.

Proposed child friendly design

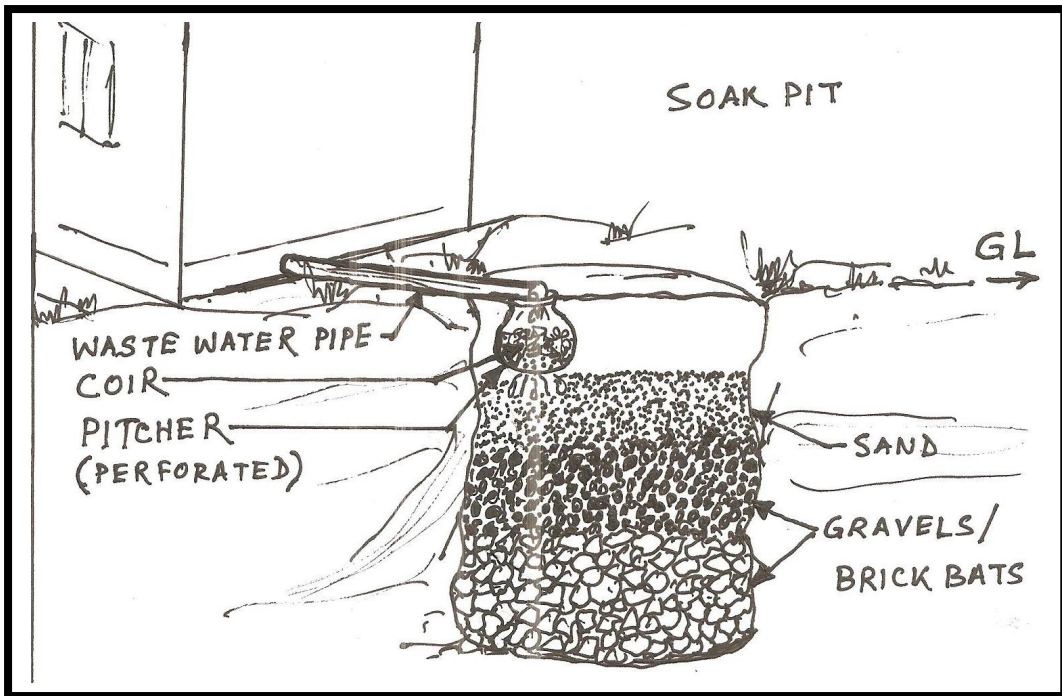
The water and sanitation facilities in the school would follow the minimum specifications as proposed for design and construction of child friendly facilities suitable for the children.

A. Drinking water and hand washing facilities:

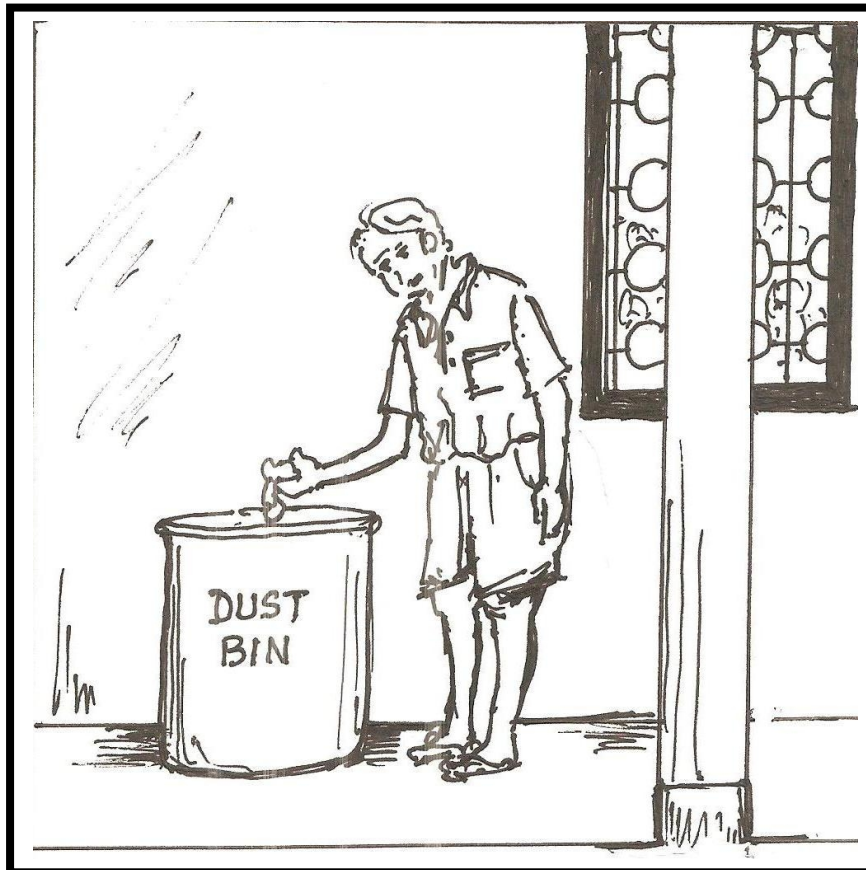
- a. Drinking water station with height of drinking water facilities and taps as per the age of children.
- b. Hand-washing station with soap where younger children can easily reach it. Proper drainage of after every hand washing is ensured.
- c. Hand-washing facility located near toilet so that children are likely to wash their hands after defecation



B. Proper drainage (soak pit) for safe disposal of waste water.

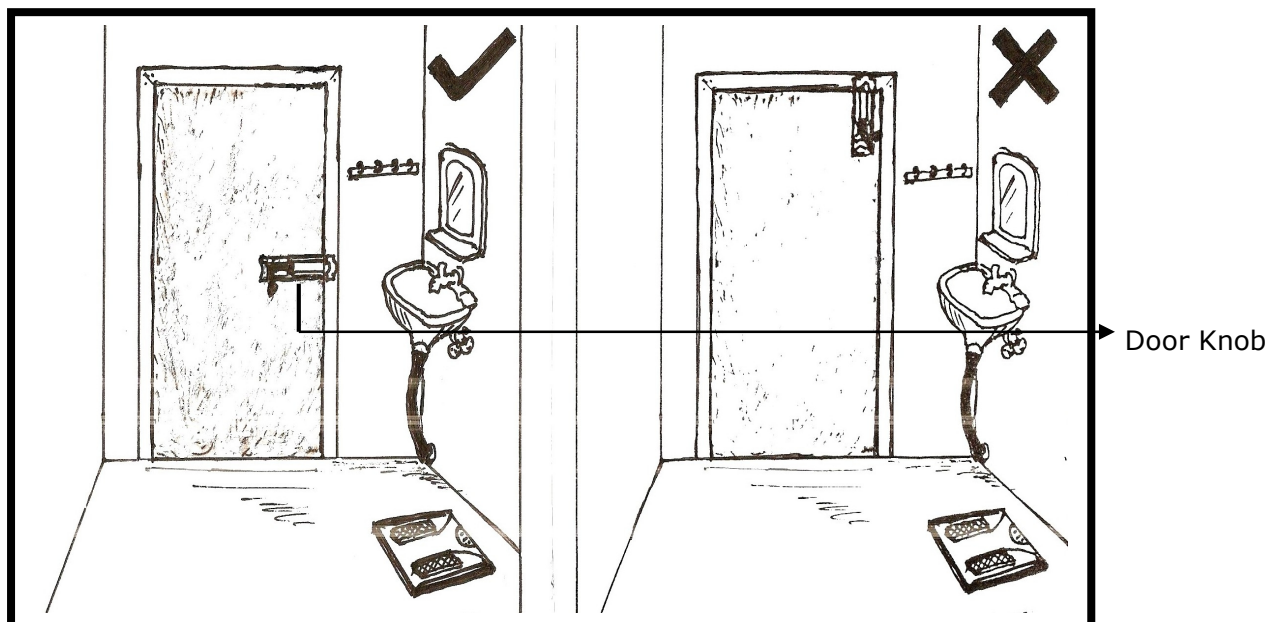


C. Safe Disposal of solid waste to keep the school environment clean

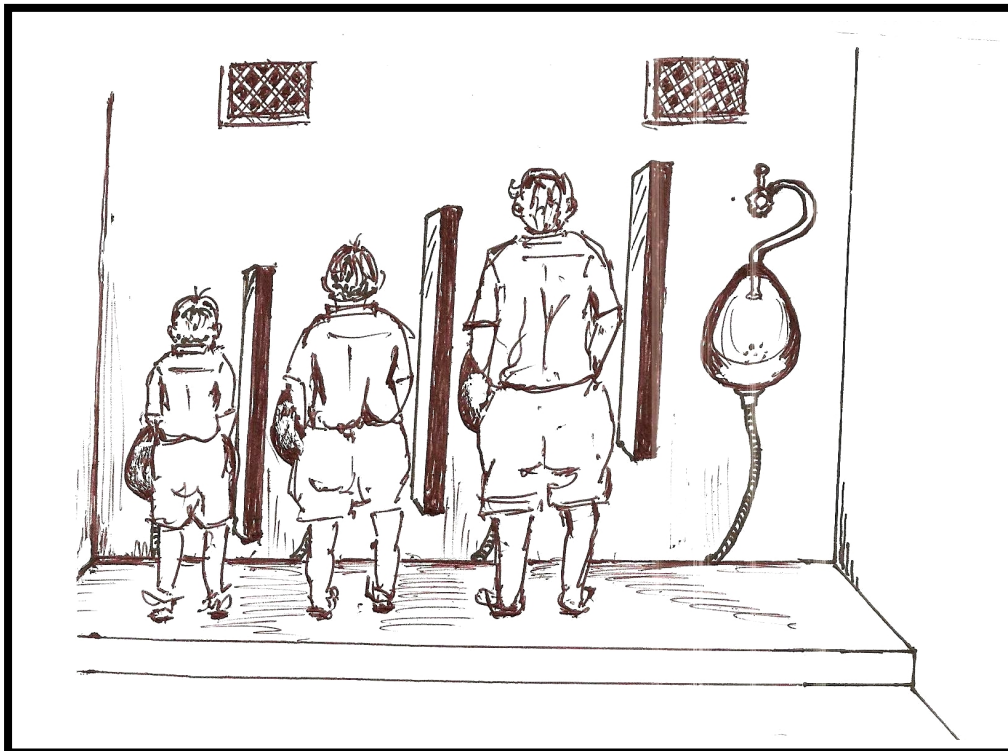


D. Catering to children of all age groups

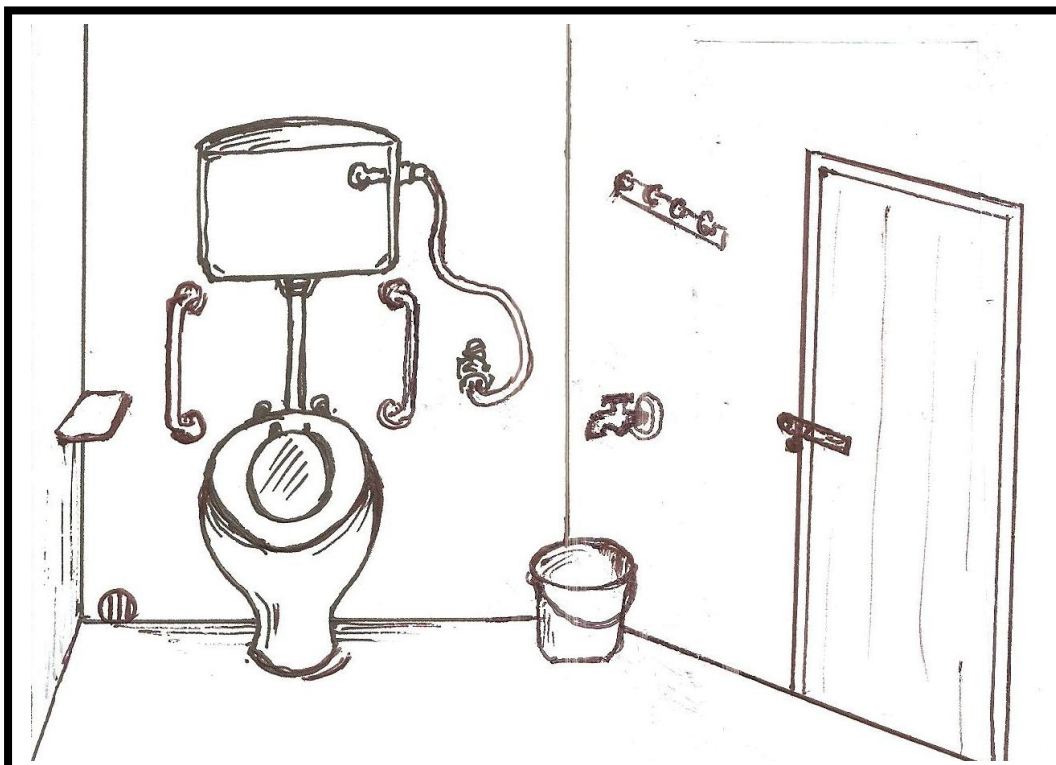
I. Height of door-knobs and locks within reach of every child



II. Urinals at different heights for children of different ages

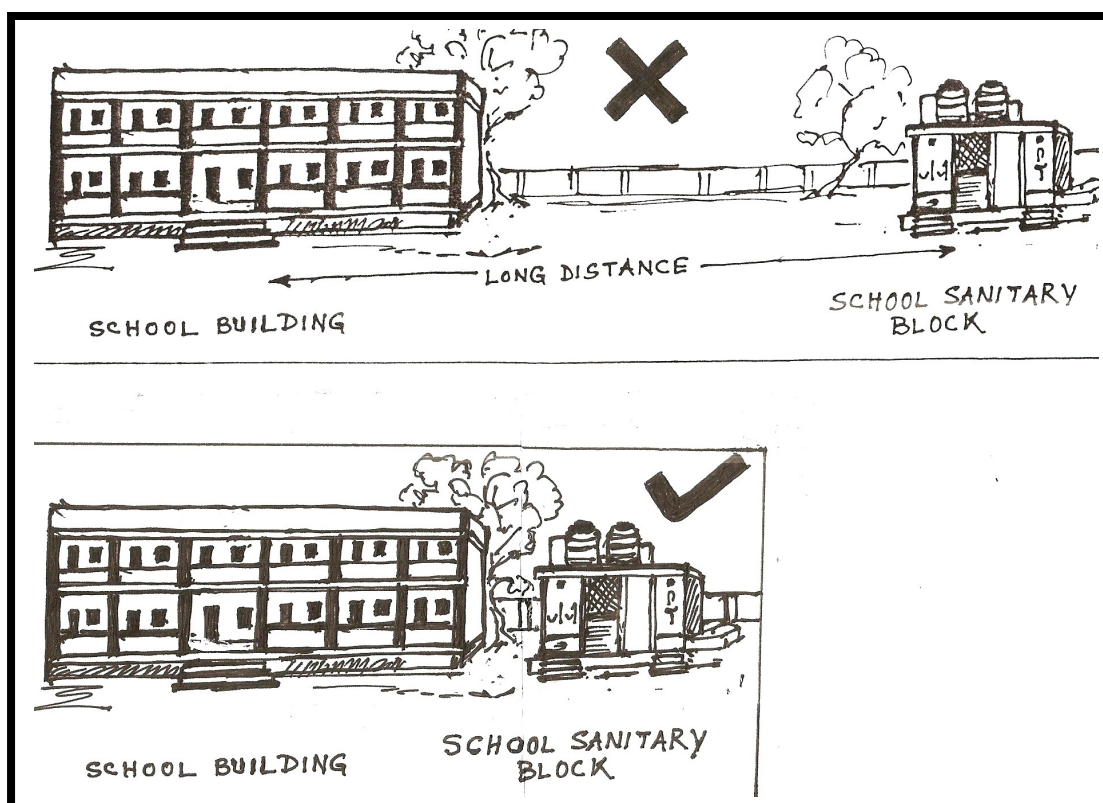


E. Special arrangements for the physically challenged



F. Maintaining safe distance from school:

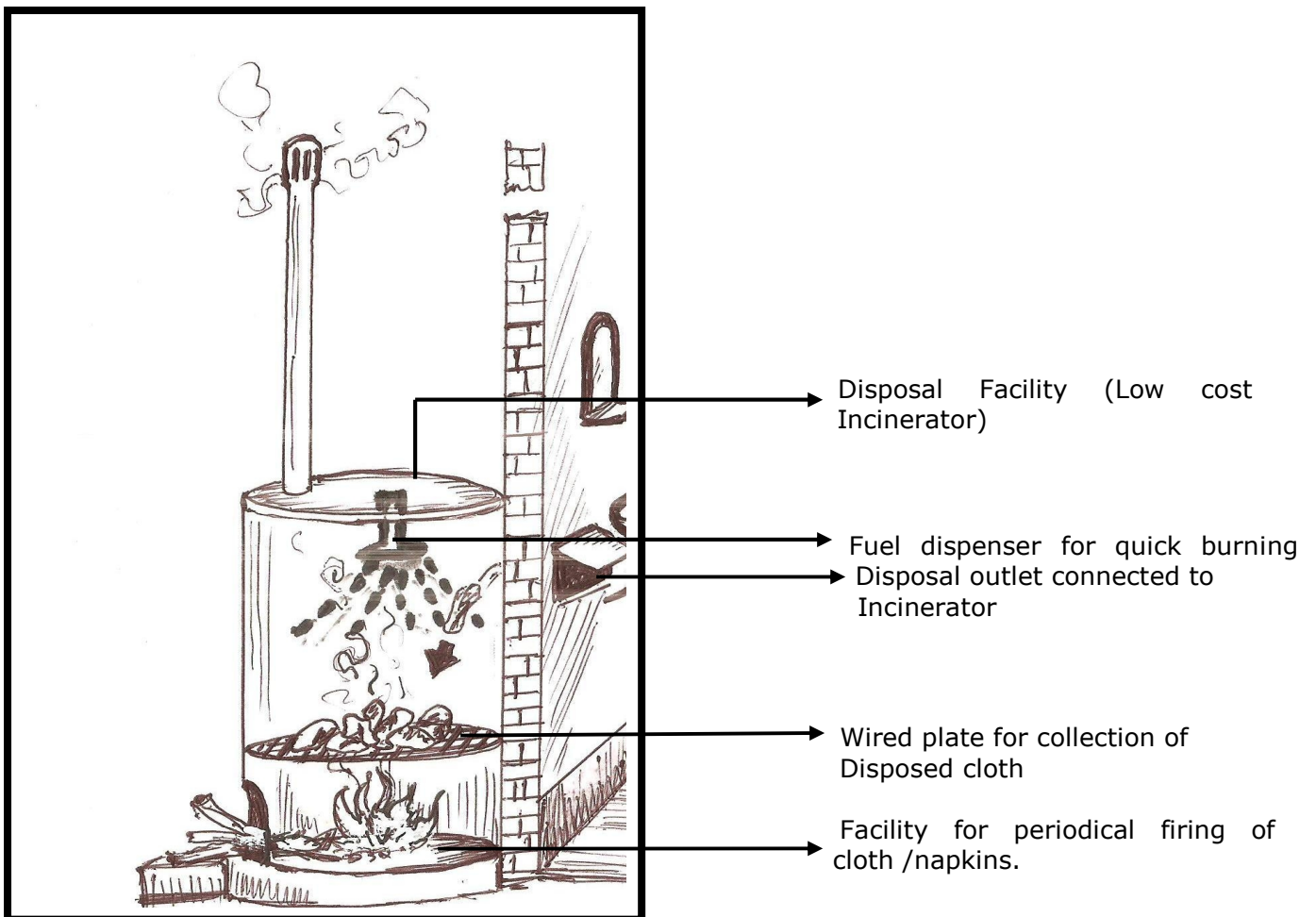
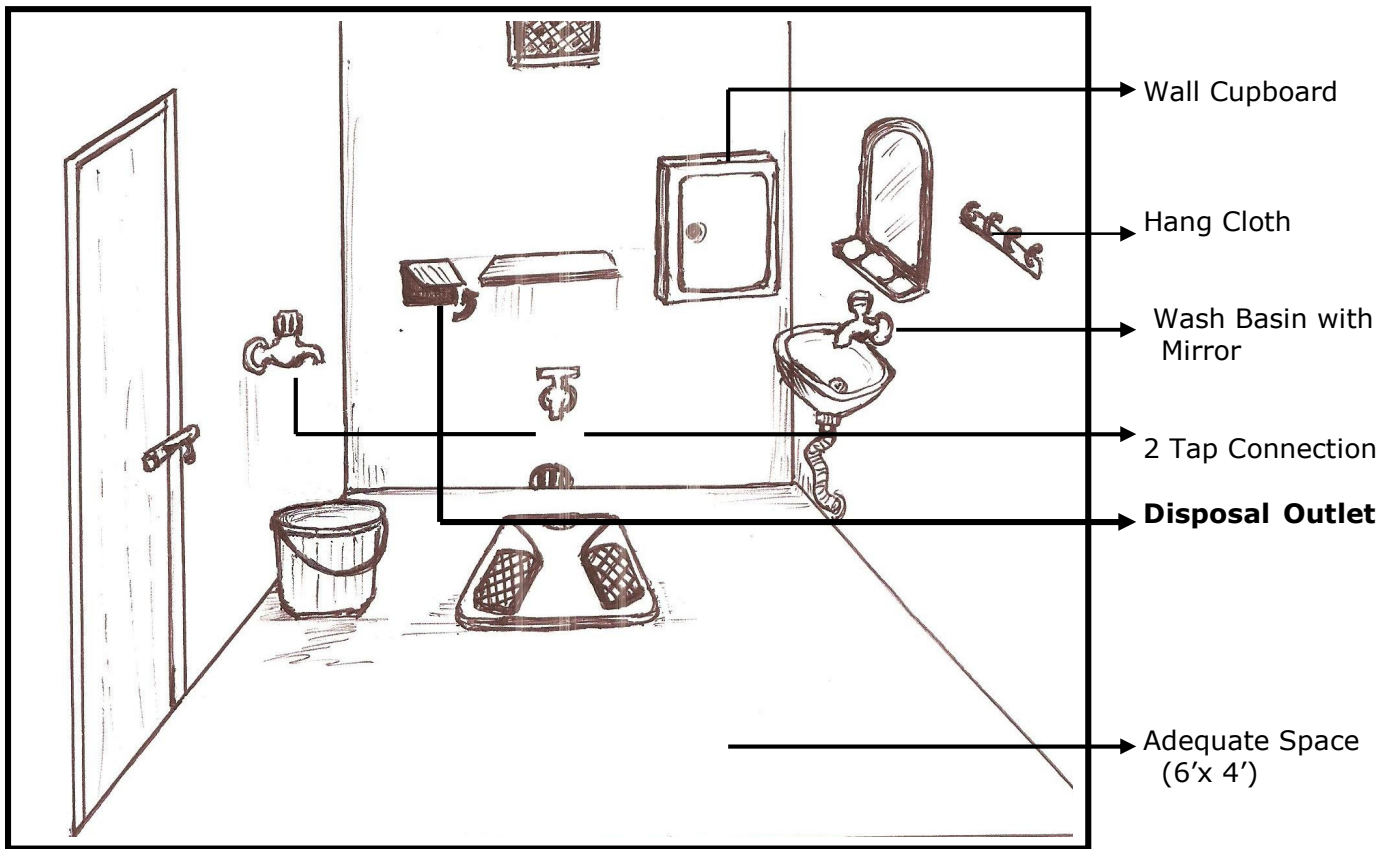
- a. School Sanitary blocks should be constructed in close proximity to school. Children especially girls should feel safe and comfortable to visit the toilet. Menstruating girls need privacy when entering the toilet and using facilities.



G. Ensuring proper menstrual management for girls

In addition to latrines and urinal units, a provision for 2 enclosures with special fittings within the school sanitary block (girls section) is planned to take care of the needs of menstruating girls. The following facilities would be available within the rooms:

- a. Adequate space within the unit. A preferred size of (6'x 4') as suggested by the girls is being planned. Privacy of menstruating girl's would be ensured.
- b. Two tap connections with running water, one at a lower level for washing after urination and another slightly higher level for washing menstrual cloth.
- c. A wash basin with a mirror above it.
- d. A provision to hang clothing while using the urinal.
- e. A wall cupboard for storing soap, detergent, and other cleaning agents.
- f. A safe, dry and accessible place to store sanitary napkins / menstrual cloth.
- g. Provision for disposing used sanitary napkins/ menstrual cloth.
- h. At least 2 urinal units to be connected to a disposal pit with incinerator facilities. Arrangements for clearing the disposed napkins would be ensured.



2. Hygiene promotion:

Hygiene taught at school has ripple effects, as children can act as primary agents for hygiene promotion and behaviour change in the communities they come from. Through the interventions in schools, Water For People-India has strategically focussed on a child centric hygiene promotion campaign, building awareness and finally the demand for safe water and sanitation in their homes and communities.

- Developing and using **effective communication tools** to promote child friendly hygiene education. Exploring ways that aid children to experience, discover, create and construct their own knowledge. Encouraging schools to communicate hygiene messages through joyful learning sessions and organise events like drawing / poster competitions, drama, wall paintings, quiz, health exhibition, rallies, around the subject of safe water and sanitation and proper hygiene behaviour.
- Constituting student committees (**WATSAN committees**) whose primary responsibility will be to monitor and supervise hygiene promotion and behaviour change among fellow students and oversee maintenance and upkeep of the school sanitary block and drinking water facilities.
- Periodic **training of teachers** about key messages of hygienic behaviour and practice and developing their skills to impart the same education to their students.
- Special training on **addressing issues on menstrual management behaviour** - building teachers' and student's awareness about menstruation hygiene and the health impacts of poor management. This will be accompanied by promoting appropriate sanitation facilities in schools and training the groups about best practices in menstrual management.

3. Sustenance and Maintenance

- Involving student's to regularly monitor and promote behaviour change using child to child, peer education techniques. Promoting constitution of **WATSAN committees** (students and teachers), for supervision and maintenance of the sanitation infrastructure.
- Collection of **Annual subscription** from students to ensure resources for long term maintenance of the sanitary block. Mobilise parents and school authorities to communicate the necessity of designated funds for water and sanitation infrastructure.
- Requesting schools to create a separate bank / post office account to deposit the **WATSAN fund**.
- Design and execute a simple **Monitoring system** to help the schools to track and assess periodical maintenance of the sanitary block.
- To develop a **self sustaining environment and system** in the school that would ensure periodic operation and maintenance of water and sanitation facilities.

4. Stakeholder Involvement:

- Bring in as many stakeholders as possible into forums where each gets an opportunity to be appraised and contribute towards sustainable water – sanitation initiative in schools. Promote an Association of school committee members, guardians, and teachers that actively addresses **maintenance management** issues in the school.
- Ensure **periodic meetings** within school managing committees, teachers and guardians, for sustenance of school water & sanitation systems and leveraging financial and other support from the guardians and local government. These stakeholder consultations, through the effective medium of Parent Teacher Associations (PTA) would preclude finalisation of the sanitation programme. This would give the school an opportunity to lend their suggestions about the programme and optimise the use of available resources for the construction.
- Organise **Block / District level workshops** to strategise mechanisms for overall sustenance of school sanitation programme generating awareness at community level on safe water and sanitation.