

# Towards child-friendly latrines in Viet Nam

by Julie Banzet, Intern, UNICEF Viet Nam, with thanks to the primary school children who advised on the research

**D**esigning latrines and toilets to be attractive to young children safeguards their health and encourages them to adopt sound hygiene habits from an early age. They can also become agents of change, by introducing new hygiene behaviours to their family and community.

UNICEF has helped to incorporate hygiene education into the Viet Nam school curriculum and has assisted in installing water supply and sanitation for over 3,400 primary schools and 800 kindergartens and day-care centres around the country. While the standard latrine designs have undoubtedly fostered better hygiene, a child-friendly approach, guided by children, generates designs more likely to suit children's sizes and preferences.

The value of child-friendly latrine design is being recognized in a number of countries, notably India, where non-governmental organizations have developed child-friendly community toilets for city slums. These toilets, built next to the adults' community toilets, are safe, attractive and pleasant for children. They solve the problem of long queues that motivate children to give up waiting and defecate in the open. Child-friendly toilets also feature in the school sanitation and hygiene education programme in Bangladesh, where UNICEF is promoting an affordable double-vault pit latrine which is pleasant and easy for children to use.

The design points that follow summarize suggestions made largely by Vietnamese children in grades three to five.

## A child-friendly latrine is...

### Safe to reach...

- If there are stairs, the steps should be low, with a sturdy banister
- Drainage should be good and the surface smooth, no puddles of stagnant water

- The pathway to the latrine should be clear, no vegetation or other obstacles

### Well lit and ventilated...

- Window openings in the walls, with mesh screens to keep out flies
- Electric light in the latrine if possible, installed to prevent hazards from the water nearby

### Pleasant and safe to use...

- The footrest low and wide for children's safety, stability and comfort
- The hole small to eliminate younger children's fear of falling in
- A grip bar on the wall for children to hold on to
- The seat small if there is a seat, and placed low for children or with a small step in front of it for easier access
- A roof if possible, to keep out the rain
- Colourful murals, which can be done at low cost by the children and their art teachers
- A receptacle for discarding used toilet paper

### In the right place...

- Discreetly sited, for the users' privacy and the general aesthetic
- Accessibly sited
- Sited near the water point, for handwashing and for swabbing the latrine

### Clean and well maintained.

- Enough water for regular cleaning
- Taps or buckets for flushing, placed near the urinals and latrines
- Regular slope and smooth cement finish for efficient floor drainage



*Ladder of increasing child participation.*

- A motivated, organized team of children and adults for maintenance.

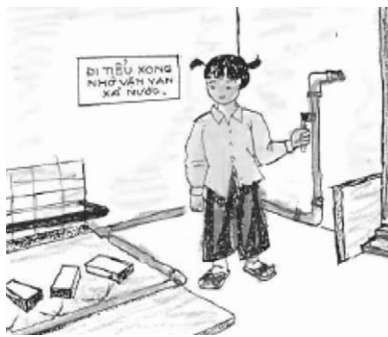
## Consulting the children

The Convention on the Rights of the Child promotes children's right to express themselves and participate fully in all undertakings that concern them. Their opinion is especially valuable for adults designing latrines to be attractive to children.

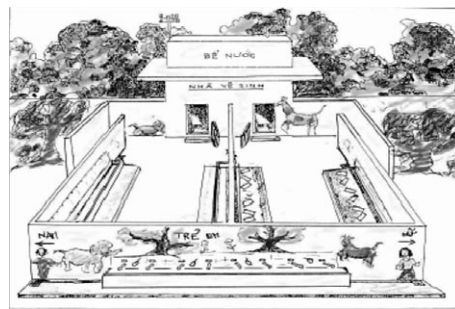
Accordingly, simple workshops were organized in three primary schools of Cao Loc and Loc Binh districts, Lang Son province. The adults acted as facilitators and initiated the activities but did not influence the children's opinions.

At the start of each workshop ten children – girls and boys from grades three to five – drew a happy face and a sad face on a sheet of paper. They gained confidence and relaxed during this creative activity.

They then wrote down what they saw as the good points of their school



*Child-friendly latrine cubicle for primary schools.*



*General layout for a child-friendly latrine in a primary school with over 100 pupils.*



*Child-friendly latrines.*

latrine under the happy face and the bad points under the sad face. They discussed their views in groups of five and agreed on the three principal good and bad points.

After this they considered solutions to the problems and the role that they could play to improve conditions.

Finally, child-friendly designs were presented to them to obtain their comments and suggestions.

The workshops concluded with a summary of what was to be done, how and by whom, with candies handed out at the end.

The children became very involved, offering ideas that were interesting, relevant, clear and realistic. The workshops included a similar session with parents and teachers, likewise positive and productive. Working in small groups allowed everyone to participate and express opinions. For the wrap-up the children's recommendations were presented to the adults for the whole

group to agree on what needed doing.

To sum up the approach, children are not just the beneficiaries who justify our actions in providing sanitation. They must become real partners and be fully involved with hygiene promotion in their school, their home, and their community. To quote one little girl in Cao Loc primary school, "If you ask our opinion, you have to consider it and then make changes." 🌍



*Children assessing the latrine at Mau Son primary school.*

### The children's suggestions

Some pointers for making any latrine child-friendly, whether at school or at home:

- Paint it!
- Plant flowers and trees around!
- Build a door or a wall to ensure privacy!
- Add a step to make a sit-down toilet safer for littler children!
- Clean it!
- Repair the floor with a little cement so that water and urine don't puddle and smell!
- Buy a new bucket to carry water for flushing!

*For further information and designs of child-friendly latrines from Viet Nam, e-mail [cbadloe@unicef.org](mailto:cbadloe@unicef.org).*

### Basic needs in Sri Lanka, from page 8

one, to alleviating poverty. In some locations home gardening is being practised on a small scale, generating produce for sale as well as helping to safeguard the family's food security.

### Policy and institutional arrangements

The rapid development of roof harvesting over the past seven years, and the energetic commitment of various NGOs, have influenced policy makers to assign a prominent role to rainwater

harvesting, including roof harvesting, in Sri Lanka's current national policy, planning and budgetary allocations for rural water supply. Following the lead set by the National Water Supply and Drainage Board, a number of provincial and district government authorities have taken up the approach.

One NGO in particular, the Lanka Rainwater Harvesting Forum, pioneered roof harvesting in Sri Lanka and carries much of the credit for developing and popularizing the technology, having

conducted most of the research, training and skills development that have generated the various low-cost designs for rainwater collection and storage systems. Other NGOs both large and small have also contributed appreciably.

Further details on the research and development of rainwater harvesting in Sri Lanka could be obtained from [www.rainwaterharvesting.com](http://www.rainwaterharvesting.com). 🌍