

Each and every child should know SODIS



The simple solar water disinfection procedure – the SODIS method – is disseminated only insufficiently by word of mouth. The SODIS team is therefore pushing for more effective, sustainable and broadly based solutions to spread its use. Our aim is to reach more and more people, and trigger a decisive change in their behaviour concerning consumption of only safe drinking water. Project work with local NGOs, collaboration with international organisations and advocacy efforts with the respective governments contribute towards reaching our target.

SODIS goes to school ...

Current SODIS projects focus increasingly on the involvement of schools. The experience already gained from projects in Latin America, Kenya, Laos, and Nepal flow into current project design. Regula Meierhofer (CEO, SODIS) explains.

What are the advantages in training school children in the use of the SODIS method?

RM: Our experience reveals that knowledge about safe drinking water and sanitation is best disseminated if supported by a broad campaign. It is important to reach people through multiple channels simultaneously to effectively achieve a change in behaviour. Involvement of schools is therefore one promotional element.

What is specific to training in schools?

RM: We give due regard to the traditional aspect of dissemination of knowledge. In most communities, teachers are highly respected persons who enjoy great esteem as opinion leaders. Moreover, compared to adults, children and young people show a greater willingness to try out innovations and adopt them. They are far more open to behavioural change and receptive to innovative ideas.

How are the school children trained?

RM: We have learned that the SODIS method is most effectively disseminated by a playful, participatory approach. Children analyse their own environmental behaviour: what happens to our waste, where is wastewater or excreta discharged?



Which lessons learned did you get from promoting the SODIS method in schools?

RM: We have received enthusiastic feedback from the teachers involved. They observed a clear change in awareness in their classes: the children are far more careful with regard to their hygiene and handwashing. They have understood the usefulness of treating drinking water. Teachers confirm that SODIS knowledge was also well received by the households, and that health improvements are apparent. Encouraging to note is the fact that the number of diarrhoea-related absences from school has dropped sharply.

What are the objectives of the SODIS school projects?

RM: Our future aim is to involve schools more closely in our projects. We plan to systematically update the knowledge acquired from school projects and our comprehensive training material to make them available to new projects in other countries. Through active advocacy together with the ministries of education, we aim to establish a sustainable cooperation between governments and SODIS.

They realise soon enough that bacteria and pathogens on hands and in drinking water will get into their mouth. Children thereby become well aware of the entire hygienic interdependence between handwashing with soap, latrine use and treatment of drinking water.

It is of vital importance that children learn to apply the SODIS method regularly and also consume the treated water. Subsequently they bring this knowledge home and remind their mothers to place the drinking water bottles in the sun.

School projects in Bolivia

By Matthias Saladin, a long-standing Project Manager in Latin America

The Fundación SODIS in Bolivia has a vast experience in promoting the SODIS method in schools. The first pilot projects were conducted in Potosi, Bolivia, in 2001. The positive experience has shown that school-age children rapidly understand and implement the method with enthusiasm. Compared to adults, the children do not have to change well-established behavioural patterns and courses of action. With the help of teachers, they apply the method daily. Systematic and regular school routine also helps to turn SODIS into a habit – a key element in achieving long-term effects.

Based on the findings of the Bolivian pilot project, the Fundación SODIS launched – in collaboration with partner organisations (e.g. UNICEF, the NGO Project Concern International etc.) – other projects that focus exclusively on schools. This is an interesting and positive development since large numbers of organisations work exclusively with schools. Nonetheless, these projects reveal that the approach to work solely with schools do not fully meet the set target – the children drank clean water in school, but it was difficult to change the deeply rooted behavioural patterns of their parents.

The Fundación SODIS therefore decided not to pursue the purely school promotional approach any longer. The current projects still focus heavily on schools. However, they now also involve more close the families. SODIS is promoted for example at parents' gatherings, during cooperation work with local health authorities and government administration but also with opinion leaders such as healers, priests or village elders. Only by involving the entire, complex system can a sustained behavioural change be achieved within the families.



Transfer of SODIS application from the school to the family presents a challenge. Yet, various supporting means of communication can be used to face this challenge. For example, if the SODIS animated cartoon “Superamigos” is shown publicly, which is an important event in many villages, especially in rural areas. Such a special occasion can boost SODIS’ popularity. Also wall paintings, radio campaigns or clearly visible SODIS bottles are more strategically used means of communication and can lead to discussions about SODIS in the villages. Thereby the ultimate objective can be met; drinking of clean water becomes commonplace.



Last year, we trained 400 000 households in the application of the SODIS method.
SODIS already numbers 4.5 million regular users worldwide.

www.sodis.ch

SODIS worldwide

Africa

Angola A pilot project with school and household promotion has been launched.

Burkina Faso Procedural steps for government recognition of the SODIS method have been initiated.

DR Congo The project has recently tested SODIS bags as an alternative to the PET bottles, which are difficult to obtain in the conflict area of North Kivu.

Ghana The diocese of Mampong is working with SODIS promoters in five parishes.

Cameroon In 2009, some 6 000 households could be reached in the slum areas of Yaoundé. In 2010, health workers will extend SODIS promotion to the Mfou region.

Kenya SODIS has been recently introduced to schools in the Nyalenda slum of Kisumu: teachers are observing fewer absentees due to improved hygiene behaviour of the children and clean drinking water.

Zambia We have extended our activities to a district in the west of the country.

Senegal We plan to conduct a SODIS project with the "Service national d'hygiène," (Ministry of Health) – an important step in anchoring the SODIS method in Senegal. Teachers of the SODIS method will train 283 schools in the Casamance.

Sierra Leone Hygiene awareness, construction of latrines and introduction of the SODIS method improve the health condition in the villages.

Zimbabwe A new project phase is being planned, research is completed and results will be published this year.

Togo In 2010, the SODIS method will be spread also through nurses and midwives of the local health centres.

Tanzania Local promoters train villagers and relatives of patients in the application of the SODIS method at the Iringa hospital.

Uganda Several local and international organisations have included the SODIS method in their projects.

Asia

India The Ministry of Health of West Bengal participated in the dissemination of the SODIS method in rural areas. In Delhi, SODIS promotion in several slums has started successfully. In Tamil Nadu, the SODIS method is actively disseminated by various partners: government authorities, NGOs and self-help groups.

Laos Schools collect PET bottles and treat their own drinking water with the SODIS method.

Nepal Through cooperation with UN Habitat and private companies, 12 000 families in urban areas of Nepal were trained last year in drinking water treatment.

Pakistan 1000 additional employees of the national health programme (Lady Health Workers) have been formed and are spreading the method.

Papua New Guinea SODIS has started a demonstration project to combat regularly recurring cholera epidemics.

Latin America

Bolivia The second project phase with the network of NGOs "PROCOSI" was very well received by the teachers. A radio campaign is ongoing.

Ecuador The project with the Ministry of Health was launched in the Pichincha region.

Guatemala A new project with the Ministry of Health was launched in the Quetzaltenango region.

Honduras After difficult months of political unrest (military coup), the project conducted with the Ministry of Health has restarted field activities.

Nicaragua The main sponsor (USAID) extended until 2011 the project conducted jointly with the network of NGOs "NicaSalud".

Peru A new project was launched with the local NGO "Agua Limpia" (Clean Water) in the Huaraz region.



Advocacy in Cameroon

During the "Journée Amitié Europe Cameroun" (Friendship Meeting Europe Cameroon) in November, our partner organisation Aquacare introduced the SODIS method to a broad audience. Several Cameroonian ministers and ambassadors from Europe visited the project and were impressed by the results achieved. The subsequent large media presence greatly raised the interest of the population and Cameroon government in the SODIS method.



Dense network in Nepal

The cooperation between SODIS and Enpho started in 2001 with the training of households. In the third project year, we sought a systematic cooperation with the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education and the municipal authorities of Kathmandu and Lalitpur. Today, every child in Nepal becomes acquainted with the SODIS method in school. Since 2006, UNICEF, USAID, UN Habitat, the Department of Water Supply of the Nepalese government, and other organisations are committed to the dissemination of the SODIS method.



Intensified promotion in Zambia

Since dissemination of the SODIS method in urban slums proved to be most successful, we are extending our activities to rural areas this year. We also provide intensive advocacy to other organisations and local government agencies to encourage them to also disseminate the SODIS method. Initial contacts have already been established and new ideas discussed.