

South-South Learning on WASH in Schools, in the crisis response to COVID-19 & post-crisis sustainability

Importance of WASH-in-schools in SWA partner countries

WASH-in-schools is a major preoccupation in SWA partner countries. The [Country Briefs](#) prepared in the run-up to the 2019 SMM showed that WASH in schools was one of the main themes related to Leave No One Behind. Inadequate WASH in institutions (schools and health care facilities) is a major reason for inequalities. Accordingly, several countries present priorities, plans or commitments related to WASH-in-schools, with countries such as Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Gambia, Namibia, Sudan, Cambodia and Nepal, working on different aspects of this important area.

Place of WASH-in-schools in crisis and post-crisis response to COVID-19

Over the past few months, with the spread and impact of COVID-19 the world over, stronger WASH facilities in schools have become one of the most common measures taken by countries. Water supply and hygiene in schools are implemented as major [preventative measures against COVID-19](#). WASH-in-schools is thus key in both the crisis and post-crisis response to COVID-19 the world over.

SWA support to countries on WASH-in-schools

Several SWA partner countries expressed the need to learn more on this topic, with a view to implementing large-scale WASH-in-schools. This is a common theme across several countries that is emerging from bilateral calls to identify specific country needs and adapted solutions to these needs. In keeping with the growing country focus of SWA, as stated in the SWA [Strategic Framework 2020 – 2030](#), the SWA, via its Secretariat, is helping identify, mobilise and provide support to partner countries on the areas of need. Support on WASH-in-schools consists of several elements – link with technical expert bodies like [Hygiene Hub](#); peer-to-peer, South-South learning from countries working over the past several years; collaborations with multi-country partners like UNICEF and international expertise from partnerships in education.

South-South learning on WASH-in-schools

Following the expression and confirmation of this need, the SWA Secretariat facilitated a South-South learning between SWA partner countries on 16 June. 25 participants from over 10 countries and across the five constituencies learnt notably from the multi-year experience in Côte d'Ivoire, where the "Programme de Latrines des Ecoles en Milieu Rural" (Rural school WASH programme ¹) is an integral part of the government's social programme 2019-2020. Hélène Bragori, Director of Rural sanitation in the Ministry of Sanitation, spoke of the programme's evolution, current status, technical features and future plans.

WASH-in-schools situation in SWA partner countries

As an introduction, Mali presented the overall status of WASH-in-schools. The situation in Mali is representative of many SWA partner countries – WASH facilities in schools are severely inadequate and consequently effect the health and education of children (dropouts among adolescent girls are high, and schools are often places in which children catch water-borne and hygiene-related diseases). An inter-ministry collaboration has been established between ministries of Education, Health, Water and Sanitation, and a strategic plan for WASH-in-schools exists along with norms and standards for WASH-in-schools. However, there are severe gaps that hinder Mali achieving the standards for WASH-in-schools, in terms of financial resources, coordination and harmonisation of interventions

¹ "Latrines" includes building of latrines in schools, their operation and use. Since it also includes hygiene and water supply – as well as sensitization – we will refer to it as the Rural School WASH programme.

according to norms, common understanding and indicators for WASH-in-schools, and sustainability of services. One of the notable actions in Mali is the collaboration between the WASH and Education clusters to create a minimum WASH package for schools.

Intervention from Côte d'Ivoire

The Rural school WASH programme has been one of the key axes of the government's social programme for 2019 and 2020. The number and variety of questions from the audience related the detailed explanation provided – at-scale operation, water-sanitation-hygiene link, the technologies used for the latrines, behaviour change communication around uptake of practices, menstrual hygiene management in schools, and linkages between WASH and education sectors.

Learning 1: Rationale for WASH in schools - WASH in schools has two impacts - improve health outcomes in rural areas since WASH is a major determinant of health; and reduce school dropout rates and improves education system performance. Rural WASH is not possible without WASH in rural schools.

Rationale and impact of the Rural school WASH programme in Cote d'Ivoire

The beginning of the Rural school WASH programme dates to 2016, with the creation of the Directorate of Rural sanitation which was prompted by a 2016 study that showed very low WASH access rates in rural Côte d'Ivoire. A decision was made to take a holistic approach with two arguments – firstly, that rural sanitation is not possible without adequate WASH in rural schools; and, secondly, that mere construction of toilets is inefficient in raising WASH access and use unless accompanied by sensitisation. These two arguments helped define the Rural school sanitation programme, which was then integrated as part of the government's two-year social plan. This approach has led to increase in rural WASH infrastructure, and access and use of this infrastructure. The impact of this has been two-fold: firstly, WASH access rates in rural Cote d'Ivoire have increased; moreover, the rates of school dropout among girls has dropped appreciably.

Learning 2: Holistic approach to WASH-in-schools - WASH infrastructure is a necessary, but insufficient, condition – availability of services alone is insufficient and ineffective unless accompanied by sensitisation and behaviour change communication

Future prospects

600 villages have been reached via the WASH programme; this is slated to increase to 2000 villages by end-2020, spurred on by the attention drawn to the programme due to COVID-19. In effect, it is now widely accepted that the work done via the WASH programme over the past two years (sensitisation and access) has helped in preventing the rapid spread of COVID-19 in rural Côte d'Ivoire. In the near future, the WASH-in-schools will be used to advocate for broader WASH in communities, by demonstrating its feasibility, effectiveness and impact. Moreover, plans have been made to conduct research on the link between the toilets and their use and the reduction in water-related diseases, which would further strengthen the evidence base in favour of rural WASH.

Learning 3: Advocating for and through WASH-in-schools – The argument for WASH in schools is strengthened by research linking increased WASH access with reduced incidence of water-borne diseases. In its turn, the feasibility and success of WASH in schools is a strong argument for better WASH in communities.

Lessons to be learnt for WASH-in-schools

The audience raised a series of questions following the presentation of the School WASH programme. Responses to – and discussions around – these questions help identify factors in the success of WASH-in-schools:

- In the first phase, the WASH facilities – toilets and handwashing facilities – were add-ons to the schools. In the next phase, for new schools in construction, WASH facilities are integrated into the initial architecture plans of the schools.
- The successful running and use of the latrines is dependent on a constant water supply, and thus needs collaboration between two sub-sectors (similarly, the success of hygiene depends on both the hygiene intervention itself and the availability of water). Therefore, priority must be given to working with the water supply ministry (or department) so that water supply is prioritised to schools. In parallel, to ensure success, provisions must be made for “offline” water supply via localised water storage solutions.
- Sensitisation about WASH practices is as important as installation and operation of WASH services. Keeping this in mind, large-scale sensitisation was done via selected local NGOs specifically trained for the purpose. This sensitisation is being extended to other government bodies using topical arguments like cholera and COVID-19 to sensitise on importance of WASH services.
- Resistance to installation and use of WASH in schools and communities was overcome using contextualised arguments. Firstly, communication is done around an ambitious overall vision (“to have the first ODF generation”) to rally support. Secondly, detailed discussions with communities and their leaders allow the programme to formulate adapted responses – for instance, the economic (cost-effectiveness) argument, or the argument related to health (combating water-borne diseases like cholera).
- The successful implementation of WASH in schools over the past two years has helped Côte d’Ivoire fight the spread of COVID-19 in rural areas, since the hygiene facilities and practices were already a part of “business as usual”.

Learning 4 – Success factors for WASH-in-schools

- Integrate WASH right into the plans and architecture of schools
- Make sure there is reliable water supply so school sanitation and hygiene succeed
- Sensitise at several levels - populations, community leaders, local government and decision-makers; and rally support using a solid evidence base and an ambitious vision.
- Mobilise local actors, NGOs, technicians and leaders to work on the WASH in schools
- Overcome resistance to installation and use, by clearly understanding and then addressing the specific reasons for resistance.

Follow-up to the learning

The South-South learning on WASH-in-schools has given rise to three further actions and collaborations. Firstly, an in-depth bilateral conversation is planned between the Sanitation directors in Côte d’Ivoire and Madagascar, on the strategic aspects. Moreover, a technical discussion is planned on sanitation technologies used in Côte d’Ivoire’s programme, and also used in the Sanitation Services Delivery project conducted in multiple countries in collaboration with USAID. Finally, the SWA Secretariat will explore ways to support Côte d’Ivoire in the future evolution of the Rural schools WASH programme, notably in strengthening the evidence base and then using it to advocate for scale-up.

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