

# WASH & Education



## CATALYZING INTEGRATION SERIES

Efforts to reduce extreme poverty and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) require an in-depth understanding and reflection of the interconnected nature of people's lives. Development solutions need to be as multifaceted as the challenges they are designed to address. FHI 360 believes that an intentional, integrated approach to the design, delivery, and evaluation of programs has the potential to make an enduring difference in the lives we are dedicated to serve.

At its core, integration refers to activities in which actors from different sectors deliberately coordinate their work to maximize impact and progress toward common or complementary goals. Integration is most effective when it purposefully leverages opportunities to reach more people, offer better services, reduce inequality, or reduce costs.

FHI 360 has developed a **suite of resources** designed to advance integrated development approaches. Many of these resources also synthesize lessons learned and recommendations from integration across a diverse array of sectors. The Catalyzing Integration Series offers a closer look at integration between specific development sectors — including the rationale, evidence of impact, promising practices, key tools, and other technical guidance resources.

## BACKGROUND

Good student performance in schools depends on many factors. One critical but often overlooked consideration is meeting children's basic physical needs, including access to adequate safe drinking water and clean, accessible, child-friendly toilets with functioning handwashing facilities. When such facilities are inadequate or absent, children are more susceptible to illness and their learning capacity is compromised.

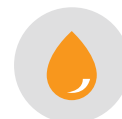
As girls reach puberty, the availability of water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) facilities and menstrual hygiene products affects performance and attendance. Inadequate WASH is linked to girl student dropout and low rates of retention for female teachers. Yet globally, one third of all schools lack access to safe water and adequate sanitation — and access rates are even worse in poor countries.<sup>1</sup>

## Schools in East and Southern Africa<sup>2</sup>:



**55%**

**DON'T HAVE  
ACCESS TO  
ADEQUATE  
SANITATION**



**47%**

**DON'T HAVE  
ACCESS TO  
AN ADEQUATE  
WATER SUPPLY**



**87%**

**DON'T HAVE  
ACCESS TO  
HANDWASHING  
FACILITIES**



A school is considered WASH-Friendly when it provides access to adequate water, sanitation and hygiene facilities, hygiene education, menstrual hygiene management (MHM) supplies, and an overall enabling environment, such as maintenance plans for latrines and bathroom-use policies that allow for menstrual hygiene.<sup>3</sup> Key components of a WASH-Friendly School include:

- **Adequate infrastructure for sanitation (including gender-designated toilets or latrines) and requirements for quality water supply**

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- **Support for hygiene habit formation with enabling technologies, such as handwashing stations**

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- **Comprehensive WASH and puberty education programs to challenge taboos and cultural stereotypes<sup>4</sup> and to educate boys, girls, teachers, families, and communities**

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- **A sustainable operations and maintenance (O&M) system within existing government institutions and within communities (e.g., parent-teacher associations, private sector)**

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- **Partnerships with nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and the private sector to reach national-level targets**

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- **Advocacy for a national policy and an improved institutional environment for school WASH**

With the recognition of current and potential gaps, the need to improve WASH in schools has been elevated to the global stage in recent years. Policy standards exist to guide adequate school WASH, including gender-segregated and minimum acceptable ratios of students to toilet options<sup>i</sup> for sanitation.<sup>ii,5</sup> Internationally accepted standards also guide programs on how to assess the quality and quantity of available water; improve hygiene (including menstrual hygiene); and integrate curricula to influence improved WASH practices and habits at schools, homes, and communities.

With support from international donors, national governments have focused their efforts and made investments to meet these standards to improve WASH access and practice in schools. However, implementing these standards at the individual-school level remains a challenge. Despite available guidance, some country standards and designs do not conform to international standards and undermine structural safety and sustainability. In addition, district education offices are typically responsible for school budgets and outcomes, but often they are not responsible for developing WASH infrastructure (i.e., siting a borehole for water or constructing latrines), which may be the task of the regional ministry of water, public works, or health. To remain fully functional, schools require coherent policies, financial outlays, commitment, and coordination from and between education officials and the community itself to maintain structural integrity.

i. Toilet options include "stands" (urinals) and "drop holes" (seated toilets)  
 ii. Global standards for acceptable student-to-toilet ratios are 25 girls and 50 boys per toilet

## The Importance of Integrating WASH and Education



AT LEAST ONE-THIRD OF ALL CHILDREN ARE AT A LEARNING DISADVANTAGE BEFORE EVER ENTERING SCHOOL



LACK OF ACCESS TO WASH SERVICES AT HOME KEEPS THEM FROM FULLY PARTICIPATING IN SCHOOL

Improving WASH facilities in schools could dramatically improve the quality of education across the globe.<sup>6,7</sup> Evidence suggests that schools with functioning WASH systems achieve better education outcomes through improvements in school attendance and achievement, health, nutrition, hydration (which is linked to cognition) and gender equity. In turn, better outcomes have an indirect impact on future learning, earning, and health. The impact of prolonging school attendance is far-reaching. Keeping girls in school produces better-educated women who are more likely to plan child birth, have healthier and better-educated children, and are paid higher wages.<sup>8</sup>

At the household and school levels, cleaner environments resulting from improved WASH practices are associated with reduced diarrhea, improved health, and better child growth.<sup>9</sup> Most stunting is attributed to the first 1,000 days of life<sup>iii</sup>, affecting not only physical stature<sup>iv</sup> but also cognitive and emotional potential, long before a child reaches school age. Stunting rates are as high as 45 percent in some countries of sub-Saharan Africa and up to 29 percent throughout the developing world, so that at least one-third of all children are at a learning disadvantage before ever entering school, and an even higher proportion are impaired in areas with greater food and WASH insecurity.<sup>10</sup> As children reach school age, a lack of access to WASH services at home keeps them from fully participating in school because of water- and feces-borne illnesses (e.g., diarrhea and worms) or because of time spent fetching water instead of attending school or completing schoolwork.

iii. The first 1,000 days of life are considered from conception to 24 months

iv. Low weight-to-height ratios



# The Impact of Integrating WASH and Education



## WASH in Schools Attracts Pupils and Teachers and Reduces Absenteeism

- A clean, comfortable, safe environment with adequate supplies improves the learning environment, instills pride, and attracts students to school.<sup>11</sup>
- Introducing well maintained, quality WASH services and programs in schools can reduce absenteeism from students and increase attendance and retention from female teachers.<sup>6,12</sup>
- Parents prefer to put children (girls and boys) in schools with proper sanitation facilities.<sup>12</sup>



## Improving WASH Increases Cognitive and Reading Abilities

- Inadequate water supply, hygiene practices, and sanitation contribute to contracting worms. Individuals lose an average of 3.75 IQ points because of worm infestations, which corresponds to a total loss of 633 million IQ points among people in the world's low-income countries.<sup>13</sup>
- A child's hydration status is correlated with good brain functioning.<sup>14</sup>



## WASH in Schools Improves Girls' Education

- Providing a separate latrine facility for girls can increase their school enrollment rates by up to 15 percent.<sup>15</sup>
- Addressing girls' puberty and menstruation needs through separate, clean, and private toilet facilities may keep girls in school, rather than staying at home, going home before the school day ends to better manage their menstruation, or dropping out of school entirely.<sup>16</sup>



## WASH in Schools Improves Reproductive Health

- Keeping girls in school produces better-educated women who are more likely to plan child birth, have healthier and better-educated children, and are paid higher wages.<sup>8</sup>
- Girls' attendance in formal school is positively associated with delayed sexual initiation, later marriage and childbirth, lower rates of HIV/AIDS, and improved gender equality.<sup>17</sup>



## WASH in Schools Can Lead to Better WASH in Homes

- By participating in WASH-Friendly School programs, children teach their parents about better hygiene, former taboo topics such as open defecation and menstruation are openly discussed, and households are more likely to install latrines and handwashing facilities.<sup>3</sup>



## Investing in WASH in Schools is an Investment in a Country's Future

- Each 1 percent increase in female secondary schooling results in a 0.3 percent increase in economic growth.<sup>18</sup>
- Adults who were de-wormed as school children have higher wages at better jobs and eat more than adults in untreated control groups.<sup>19</sup>

## Challenges and Entry Points

While not a core component for delivering education such as school buildings, trained teachers, and materials (e.g., curriculum, books, blackboards), WASH elements are important underlying determinants of learning and essential to achieving educational outcomes. Because WASH programs are inherently integrated—linking water, sanitation, and hygiene into one entity—WASH implementation at global, national, or local levels implicitly requires collaboration among sectors. These collaborative efforts are complex and challenging, but when done efficiently, they provide a path for the successful integration of WASH.



### TENSIONS AND CHALLENGES

Although schools are usually required to have adequate and functional WASH facilities, different sectors are involved in making this goal a reality. For example, water ministries usually provide infrastructure inputs to schools (e.g., digging a borehole), ministries of education create educational policies that include guidelines for WASH infrastructure, and health ministries, public works, or communities must finance and build latrines. Individual schools or communities are responsible for proper cleaning and maintenance of the WASH facilities — although too often contingencies for repair and upkeep are not adequately addressed. Moreover, district-governing boards may be absent from this equation. Therefore, the challenge of maintaining the functionality of WASH facilities is exacerbated when local stakeholders do not prioritize the necessary investment and engagement with these other sectors. This process is further complicated when education officials are not conversant in WASH; education budgets do not adequately cover supplies (e.g., wiping paper, soap or menstrual hygiene materials, or repair parts); and replacing infrastructure requires re-engaging the other ministries.

Many education systems have also developed and deployed age-specific components for a hygiene education curriculum. Different lessons target different age groups and do not engender a sustainable, continued practice of healthy WASH habits for children. Although the concept of having children transfer good practice from school to home is noted in most curricula, the intermittent nature of these lessons does not reinforce the practice.

### Disconnect Among Sectors

Collaborating effectively across sectors is complex. Each sector has distinct frames of reference, language, and desired outcomes that may not resonate with the others. Communication among actors from different sectors can be complicated (vocabulary and meanings may differ widely; messaging can be complicated and difficult to explain). Therefore, understanding the different frames of reference is critical, as is learning how to discuss the issues.

FHI 360's **SCALE+ methodology** has successfully united stakeholders on a shared action agenda for change and collaboration.<sup>20</sup>



### Measurement

When an integrated program is designed at the outset with indicators from multiple sectors, key outcomes can be prioritized, targeted, and measured. The USAID-funded SPLASH project in Zambia, for example, had to respond to and report on education and WASH indicators and be accountable for meaningful results in both sectors. Not having common integration indicators is a challenge because each sector has its own array of indicators. Further, no current set of indicators can measure whether WASH integration is being implemented well or make the case that integration would improve overall results.

### Funding Streams

Financing the integration of WASH and education is challenging because most funding is siloed within a specific sector. Government sectors and development partners' budgeting cycles often differ, so responding to the funders' priorities can complicate the planning and implementation of joint activities. During the annual government budgeting process, WASH efforts may be considered less important than competing line items and may be under-budgeted when decisions are made to reach a "bottom line." Further, funding that is tied to specific outcomes and indicators can also present challenges. For example, it may be difficult to show that improved WASH activities lead to improved reading scores, which can hinder funders from supporting the integration of WASH if they only prioritize education outcomes.

## ENTRY POINTS AND MODELS FOR INTEGRATION

### Shift Focus from Hardware to Simple, Scalable, and Sustainable Efforts

School WASH practitioners recognize that communities must build local demand for WASH in the education system. This means shifting from an infrastructure-based approach to one that prioritizes the provision of a clean, healthy environment for children by focusing on feasible contributions through local action and support

from communities, rather than expensive hardware inputs. Advocates of WASH promote UNICEF's **Three Star Approach** that reframes how schools, communities, government leaders, and donors address school WASH programs. This approach provides a roadmap for all schools to meet children's needs and encourages national education systems "to sustainably expand the approach nationally at low cost."<sup>21</sup>

### Look for Planned and Opportunistic Integration Opportunities

Emerging best practices embrace the concept of WASH integration on a continuum. If possible, integrated programming should be developed from the start (planned integration); otherwise, WASH can be integrated as opportunities arise (opportunistic integration). Comprehensive integration brings together technical specialists from all involved sectors to share best practices and discuss strategies for collaboration, implementation, and evaluation from the inception. The SPLASH project is an example of planned, comprehensive integration, where WASH specialists were embedded into the district education office, and together both sectors planned the hardware and software components for district planning, with the involvement of the community.

Opportunistic integration serves as an entry point for integrating WASH at any level in the system and must also be strategic, as time and resources are always limited and should be reserved for opportunities that meet designated criteria. An opportunistic approach can come from any involved sector, and can be formal or informal. For example, WASH or other health projects can develop school club activities to mobilize children to make small changes to the WASH infrastructure, such as re-hanging doors to allow privacy for girls and making handwashing stations for hygiene. WASH projects might also approach a school district to provide training on reusable menstrual pads as part of a school health fair demonstration, or link them with rain water catchment projects in the district.

### Strengthen Local Education Systems

National, regional, and district education officers are concerned with the core business of education: teaching children. Yet, without a favorable learning environment, positive outcomes may be elusive. One feasible strategy for change involves the creation of a position within the district education office. A government official in this new position would work with school principals to ensure that schools meet the minimum standards for water availability, gender-separated sanitation facilities, hand hygiene facilities, and menstrual hygiene services. For example, under the SPLASH project, WASH project staff members were housed in the district offices of the Ministry of General Education (MGE), creating inter-sectoral teams with the ministry's education staff. This strategy enabled WASH supporters to advocate the inclusion of WASH activities and indicators in strategic district and provincial MGE plans, budgets, and monitoring tools. Schools faced several challenges before the SPLASH project:

1. O&M systems to manage the WASH infrastructure were lacking;
2. Toilets and water systems were nonfunctional or absent;
3. WASH O&M or services were not budgeted;
4. Parents and communities were unwilling to contribute to infrastructure systems; and
5. Districts were not linked to national WASH structures.

The SPLASH project worked to embed WASH into the MGE system. Now, O&M and WASH are part of education protocols, and the official School Monitoring Instrument has an extensive WASH section. Communities are also now engaged and eager to support the maintenance of their school facilities.

### Support Local Sectoral or Inter-Sectoral Working Groups to Facilitate Integration

In many situations, it will be necessary to create new cross-sectoral working groups, but in other instances it may be sufficient to integrate WASH expertise into an existing “community of practice” for education. The following list of activities can be used as guidance for promoting cross-sectoral communication and disseminating lessons learned on WASH integration.



Learn the language and culture of the “other” sector to encourage understanding between stakeholders in the education and WASH sectors when discussing issues and opportunities. Share a glossary of commonly used technical terms (e.g., “drop hole,” menarche, anal cleansing) and the indicators commonly used by each sector.



Identify key integrated activities for strategic collaboration while pursuing planned and unanticipated opportunities. Activities may start small — such as fixing doors on existing latrines or segregating facilities for boys and girls — but look for opportunities to gradually increase the level and complexity of these activities.



Delineate a budget for integration activities, including a reserve for unexpected opportunities (e.g., training, materials development, and time/level of effort).



Identify funding gaps and seek ways to address these gaps. This may include advocacy with donors already working in WASH or education, or linking with NGOs and development partners.



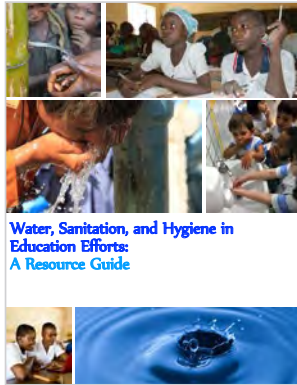
Document and share lessons learned about integration. Showcase what did and did not work, and bring these lessons to the working group so others can learn from the experience.



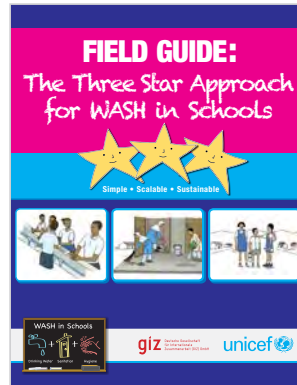
Present lessons learned to working groups at national forums.

To illustrate this approach, the USAID-funded WASHplus project worked with district governments in Uganda to strengthen WASH infrastructure and practice. The project provided assistance throughout the budgeting process to ensure the existence of adequate resources while bringing in other development partners for assistance where government budgets were not available to prioritize WASH. Teachers received practical training and became champions of WASH-Friendly Schools by reviving or creating WASH clubs and integrating curricular materials to improve existing hardware while supporting improved WASH practices. Development partners supplemented these efforts by strategically addressing the stigma associated with MHM and ensuring accessible sanitation by building hygiene skills with school children and families at community health fairs.

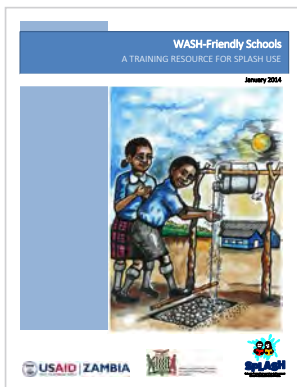
# Key Tools and Resources



**WASH Education Resource Guide**



**UNICEF Three Star Approach for WASH in Schools**



**WASH-Friendly Schools Training Guide**



**Deliver for Good Education Brief**



**SCALE+: system wide collaborative action for livelihoods and the environment**



**WASHplus Menstrual Hygiene Management Toolkit**

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