

Ensuring clean water and decent toilets in schools: links between SDG 6 and SDG 4

Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) requires “inclusive and equitable quality education” that will “provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all”. Providing drinking water, sanitation and hygiene promotion in schools is a crucial, and often overlooked, component of ensuring children can attend school regularly, remain healthy and fulfil their human right to education. Schools without safe water, decent sanitation and hygiene (WASH) facilities tend to have lower enrolment and increased absenteeism, limiting students’ progress. Ensuring these services is therefore fundamental to achieving SDG4.¹

For female students to manage their menstrual hygiene and fulfil their right to education requires single-sex toilets with a private place to wash and change, along with reliable access to soap and water. When schools do not have these facilities, and hygiene education does not address menstrual taboos and stigma, girls are at risk of decreased self-esteem and missing school. This can lead to lower education levels, higher likelihood of dropping out and decreased earning potential, which perpetuate gender disparities, in education and later in life.²

Adequate and inclusive WASH facilities in schools are especially important for students with disabilities. Fully accessible school environments include WASH facilities with a ramp, handrail and adequate space.³ The needs of young people with intellectual disabilities must also be considered, including specific education that ensures their access to WASH. All students, regardless of age, gender or ability, must have access to adequate WASH facilities at school. This should be a guiding principle for all efforts to achieve SDG 4.

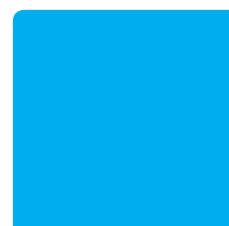
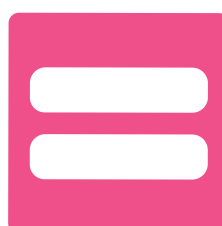
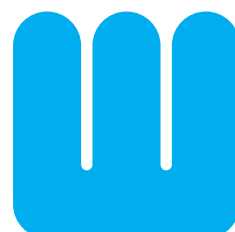
Sustainable Development Goal



WaterAid/ Eliza Powell



Tahiana in front of his school's new sanitation block in Moramanga district, Madagascar.



WaterAid

Data snapshot

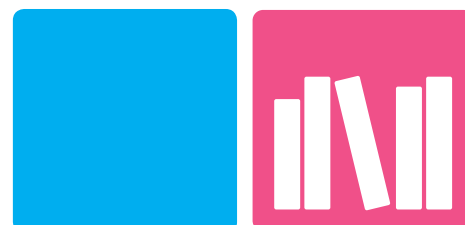
- In 2018, an estimated 620 million pupils did not have decent school toilets.
- In Ethiopia, for example, 60% of schools lack sanitation (with either no facility at all or only unimproved services) – and just 47% of children complete primary education.³
- Access to WASH is substantially lower in pre-primary and primary schools than in secondary schools – yet younger children may be more vulnerable to WASH-related diseases.⁴
- In 2016, 335 million girls went to school without water and soap for washing their hands when changing sanitary products.⁵
- Few countries have data on the proportion of schools that provide menstrual hygiene education, supplies and facilities.

Country case studies

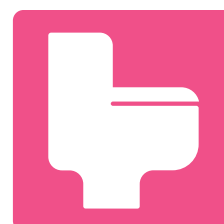
Ghana

Around 79% of Ghanaians do not have access to a basic toilet and, while most secondary school students have access to limited sanitation facilities), 8% have either no or unimproved facilities.⁴

At Salaga Senior High School in the East Gonja District, students used to have to wake up at 1am to walk 4km to fetch water before school. Without toilets, they were forced to defecate outside before sunrise. 'Total WASH', a pilot project led by WaterAid Ghana, supported by HSBC Malta, provided an integrated solution that both improved access to WASH for more than 2,145 students and teachers and helps power the school kitchen. The programme installed a solar-powered mechanised water system and three toilet blocks, with single-sex facilities, and two rainwater harvesters. A biogas digester attached to the toilets processes waste into gas for the kitchen and fertiliser for the school farmland. This multi-pronged intervention is the first of its kind in the northern region of Ghana.



Amina (left) and Rahama (right) in front of their school toilets built by WaterAid with funding from HSBC Malta.



Nepal

Disability and menstruation are heavily stigmatised, and people with disabilities who menstruate can face increased discrimination. In Nepal, school-aged girls with disabilities often do not attend school, and lack support to manage their menstrual hygiene.

WaterAid and the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM), with funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, developed a groundbreaking behaviour change intervention in Nepal. The Bishesta campaign is the first intervention of its kind on menstrual hygiene management for young people with intellectual impairments and their carers in any low- or middle-income country. The pilot project centred around two fictitious characters: a girl named Bishesta ('extraordinary' in Nepali) with an intellectual impairment and her carer Perana ('motivation').

The campaign provided training for young people and their carers, including using a Bishesta doll to model menstrual hygiene practices, and provided a Period Pack for participants, with storage bags, reusable pads and a bin. The campaign improved the young people's menstrual hygiene management, increased their self-confidence and strengthened their carers' understanding, among other positive benefits.⁶



WaterAid / Shruti Shrestha

Meena carrying a Bishesta doll at an event to celebrate the project in Banepa, Nepal.

Policy interventions on WASH in schools

Ghana WaterAid Ghana – together with the Ghana Education Service, UNICEF and other partners – has supported creation of a costed strategy and national plan to increase access to WASH in schools. This policy will set minimum standards for WASH in all schools in Ghana.

Nepal WaterAid Nepal – with organisations including UNICEF and the World Food Programme – recently supported Nepal's Ministry of Education to produce guidelines on WASH in schools, with menstrual hygiene management as a key component. WaterAid Nepal has assisted in rolling out these guidelines nationwide, continuing their commitment to accessible and equitable WASH in schools.

Pakistan The Federal Directorate of Education, Provincial Government of the Punjab (School Education Department) and WaterAid

Pakistan have promoted a menstrual hygiene management model as part of the Girl Friendly Toilets component of Pakistan's education strategy. Punjab's Provincial Government has committed funding to implement this model in the next fiscal year.

Sierra Leone The 2018 Sector Performance Review revealed that only about 56% of schools have access to improved water and 40% to basic sanitation, 17% to handwashing facilities and less than 10% to menstrual hygiene services. With the rapid surge in school enrolment due to free quality education, the Government is reviewing its policies to accelerate access to improved WASH in schools. WaterAid Sierra Leone is working alongside the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education to undertake a review of guidelines for WASH in schools.

We recommend:

- **A school without basic access to water, toilets and hygiene should not be called a school.** Education and finance ministers and donors must recognise the fundamental importance of WASH in schools to improving education. Investment in these essential services must be scaled up in line with credible plans for achieving universal access by 2030 at the absolute latest.
- **School sanitation must meet the specific needs of women and girls.** Facilities must ensure privacy, safety and dignity, to enable girls and female teachers to manage their menstrual hygiene.
- **School sanitation must be inclusive and age-appropriate. Students of all ages and abilities must have access to clean, safe and accessible toilets at school.** Educational interventions around WASH in schools should also consider young people outside traditional schooling, such as people with intellectual impairments.
- **Increase cross-sectoral integration and coordination.** Encourage collaboration between WASH, health and education sectors to design and implement policies and programmes that fulfil the human rights of all.

References

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Further Reading

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4. WaterAid (2018). *The crisis in the classroom: the state of the world's toilets 2018*. Available at washmatters.wateraid.org/publications/the-crisis-in-the-classroom-the-state-of-the-worlds-toilets-2018

Find out more at

washmatters.wateraid.org/sustainable-development-goals
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WaterAid is an international not-for-profit, determined to make clean water, decent toilets and good hygiene normal for everyone, everywhere within a generation. Only by tackling these three essentials in ways that last can people change their lives for good.