Live & Learn
Solomon Islands

WASH in Schools
Insights from Water for Women

Introduction

This learning brief synthesises and shares lessons from Water for Women's investment in water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) in schools (WinS) as part of 20 projects led by civil society organisation (CSO) partners, with a mix of support for improved WASH facilities and activities aimed at WASH behaviour change. Combined, these activities reached more than 600 schools across Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR), Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea (PNG), Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste, Vanuatu and Vietnam in Water for Women's first phase from 2018 to 2022. This brief summarises the nature of school WASH improvements being realised, provides an overview of successful approaches employed by partners, lessons learnt and recommendations for sector consideration. It is based on analysis of secondary data sources available from Water for Women projects, including mid-term reviews, knowledge and learning products, project reporting and selected case studies.

In Brief

- **WASH in Schools is critical to improving child health**, safety and school attainment.

- Successful WASH in Schools **programs require significant and long-term program presence** in communities.

- The **high cost of construction of WASH facilities** in schools has been a major impediment.

- **Strengthening WASH in Schools systems** can influence national practices and support the institutions responsible for WASH and education policy development.

Water For Women

Australian Aid

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Abbreviations

BCC	Behaviour Change Communication
CFAR	Centre for Advocacy and Research, India
CLTS	Community-led Total Sanitation
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
EMIS	Education Management Information System
FWCC	Fiji Women's Crisis Centre
GEDSI	Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion
HfH	Habitat for Humanity
IRC	International Rescue Committee
JMP	WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Program
Lao PDR	Lao People's Democratic Republic
Live & Learn	Live & Learn Environmental Education
MEHRD	Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development (Solomon Islands)
MHH	Menstrual Health and Hygiene
MoEC	Ministry of Education and Culture (Indonesia)
MoH	Ministry of Health
O&M	Operation and Maintenance
OPD	Organisations of Persons with Disabilities
PEAs	Provincial Education Authorities (Solomon Islands)
PNG	Papua New Guinea
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SHOMOTA	Strengthening Gender Equality and Social Inclusion in WASH project (Bangladesh)
SLIP	School Learning Improvement Plan
SLTS	School-led Total Sanitation
SMC	School Management Committee
SNV	Netherlands Development Organisation
STBM	Sanitasi Total Berbasis Masyarakat program, Indonesia
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
WASH-FIT	WASH Facility Improvement Tool
WHO	World Health Organization
WinS	WASH in Schools

Setting the scene

Sufficient water for hygiene and drinking, user-friendly and accessible sanitation facilities, proper hygiene practices, access to soap for handwashing, and supplies for menstrual health and hygiene (MHH) are critical to improving child health, safety and school attainment. Adequate hygiene facilities and MHH techniques may improve attendance and reduce attrition for girls. School WASH facilities can reduce diarrheal disease burden and helminth (parasitic worms) transmission (McMichael, 2019), thereby improving cognition and nutrition, and reducing absenteeism and anaemia. Various initiatives have been implemented globally to put in place measures to improve WinS outcomes.

In 2010, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) report, Raising Clean Hands: Advancing Learning, Health and Participation through WASH in Schools[1] proposed six points of action for WinS programming:

1. Increase investment in WASH in Schools

2. Engage those who set policies

3. Involve multiple stakeholders

4. Demonstrate quality WASH in Schools projects

5. Monitor WASH in Schools programmes

6. Contribute evidence.

Improved WASH in schools is included in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Goal 6 refers to universal access to clean water and sanitation, encompassing all settings including schools (Chatterley et al., 2018). Goal 4 refers to safe and effective learning environments for all school children (SDG 4.a), including providing all schools with access to basic drinking water, single-sex basic sanitation facilities, and basic handwashing facilities. Governments have operationalised these global goals and targets in their own national targets for WinS. However, Asia and Pacific regions have made slow progress towards universal access to basic WASH services in schools (Chard et al., 2019) and have some ground to make. Table 1 presents the proportion of relevant school-age population by region in 2021 where data is available on basic WASH services in schools (% and # countries). This data helps countries identify where support for WinS is needed.

Table 1. Global availability of data on basic WASH in schools, 2021

Percentage of school-aged population (# countries, areas and territories)	Basic drinking water	Basic sanitation	Basic hygiene
Central and Southern Asia (14)[2]	83% (10)	82% (9)	81% (6)
Eastern and South Eastern Asia (18)[3]	37% (14)	37% (14)	32% (14)
Oceania (21)[4]	91% (13)	91% (13)	90% (12)

Source: Adapted from UNICEF / WHO (2022)

[1] UNICEF, Raising Clean Hands: Advancing Learning, Health and Participation through WASH in Schools, January 2010.

[2] Includes Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan.

[3] Includes Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Timor-Leste, Vietnam.

[4] Includes Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu.

According to the latest estimates of the World Health Organization (WHO) and UNICEF Joint Monitoring Program (JMP) for Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene, secondary schools are more likely than primary schools to have access to basic drinking water and sanitation services (WHO/UNICEF, 2022). Expanding educational opportunities and ensuring quality education for all can be particularly challenging due to various factors, such as inadequate infrastructure and underfunding. As Figure 1 shows, the sector is affected by stagnating coverage levels and inadequate performance against SDG indicators. This suggests the need for new ways of working, including appropriate responses to the diminishing role of CSOs in service delivery as government and the private sector eventually take up their responsibility for WinS in full.
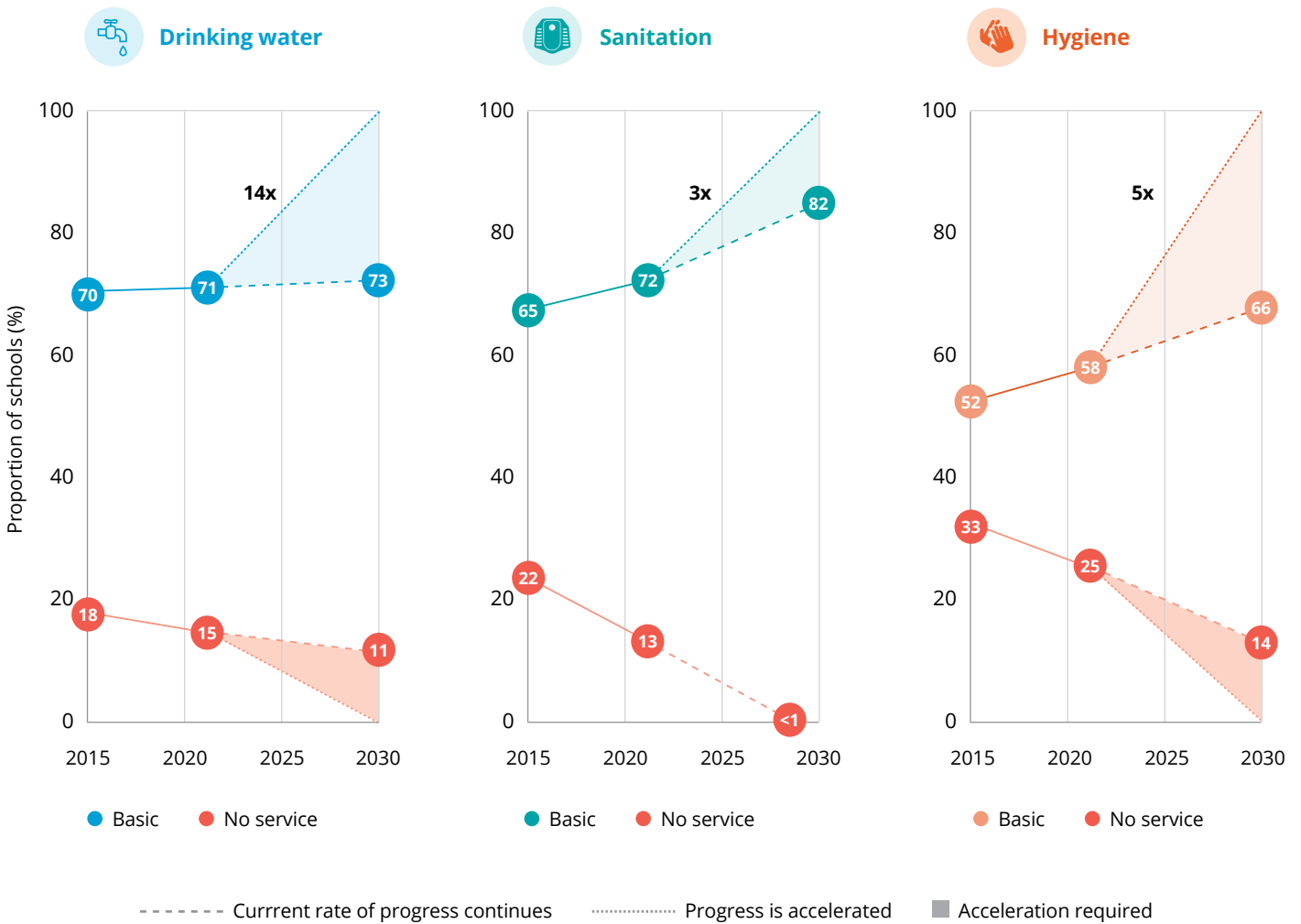

Figure 1. Global coverage of WinS (2015–21) and acceleration required to meet targets by 2030   Source: Adapted from UNICEF/WHO (2022)

Evidence for WASH in Schools programming

WASH and education are rights and critical to human development; education is a pillar of development, and WASH is critical to education. Studies show mixed results, but evidence indicates that access to WASH in schools is important for health and education outcomes.

Improved WASH services can encourage parents to send their children to school, particularly in relation to girls during the transition from primary to secondary school. It is plausible that a lack of WASH facilities inhibits girls' attendance. Self-reporting by girls suggests that inadequate toilets in schools (lack of toilets, insufficient water, poor access to materials for menstrual health and hygiene) is associated with failing classes, absenteeism and high drop-out rates. One study in India found that a national government program to build school toilets led to an 8% increase in enrolment among pubescent boys and girls and a 12% increase among younger children (Adukia, 2014).

WASH in schools can improve staff and student health and thereby reduce absence from school. Being unable to use a toilet, wash their hands and drink water during the school day affects the health, dignity and wellbeing of children and their teachers, and distracts from the focus on learning safely and privately. It is expected that WinS programs will reduce disease (diarrhoea, helminths and trachoma) and improve hygiene in students' households and communities (Jasper et al., 2012; Mbakaya et al., 2017). A study from Kenya (Freeman et al., 2012) showed that handwashing with soap and point-of-use water treatment reduces girls' absences from school. Studies in China (Bowen et al., 2007) and Egypt (Talaat et al., 2011) confirm that improved handwashing with soap can reduce illness and thereby reduce absence from school. However, the long-term sustainability of handwashing behaviours linked to these impacts is unknown. Hunter et al. (2014) found a strong association between providing free, safe drinking water and reduced absenteeism in Cambodia in the dry season. This was due (in part) to improved hydration (rather than a reduction in waterborne disease) improving the school experience for children.

WASH improvements in schools can help reduce dropout rates and attract new staff. It is reasonable to assume that WASH interventions, either at home or in schools, will reduce illness and subsequently school absence. However, evidence of impact on pupil education has been mixed. WASH improvements alone are insufficient to offset the root causes of absenteeism and dropout; other factors can be more influential (Trinies et al., 2016; Chard et al., 2019). Poor school WASH facilities diminish motivation among teachers, are a major barrier to attracting new staff, and may reduce attendance, particularly of girls.

Schools are at the heart of driving efforts to improve hygiene in rural Solomon Islands, where some 6,000 Guadalcanal students have participated in the WASH in Schools program as part of the New Times New Targets project
Credit: Plan International Australia / Live & Learn

What works?

Good practice and learning in WASH in Schools

Dual approach

Service delivery in targeted schools can be used for demonstrating a successful approach to government authorities and other sector stakeholders responsible for WinS. Advocating for the approach — and that national governments' education policies have gender-friendly, inclusive WASH designs and national standards — catalyses greater impact than service delivery alone.

Although projects have primarily undertaken direct delivery of WASH infrastructure and behaviour change, some offer advocacy and influencing support, based on innovation and analysis (recognising that governments and the private sector will ultimately provide services). Research and learning have been shared to motivate and influence the sector to adopt technologies and approaches to improve practice on WinS. Projects have also supported the development of technical guidelines for WASH facilities. These are important steps in a transition from a project-based approach to scaling national WinS programming.

Influence in the household and community

Improved WinS may influence practice at home, with children encouraging their parents to change behaviours and practices. Teachers and school hygiene clubs can carry out behaviour change activities in their communities. In some cases, WASH behaviour change that began at schools has influenced people's homes and communities through the active engagement of parents and children. Projects support the school management and pupils' WASH clubs, whose members are expected to be ambassadors for sanitation and hygiene at school and in their homes.

Do No Harm

Implementation of WinS takes an active approach to Do No Harm, including the safeguarding of children. Projects have mainstreamed a Do No Harm approach and are tracking unintended consequences, in terms of impact on access to WASH or health, community leadership, and participation of women and vulnerable groups. Projects have also set up referral pathways for gender-based violence and child protection (e.g. in Bangladesh and Fiji).

Gender equality, disability and social inclusion

WASH in Schools programs should focus on equality and accessibility to meet the WASH needs of girls, and students/ staff with disabilities, and advance equality in WASH over the long term through changes in norms and systems. Water for Women projects have developed and tested inclusive approaches to school infrastructure and behaviour change. Projects have demonstrated an approach to GEDSI at multiple levels through skilling staff and partners to increase the awareness and ability of decision-makers to meet the diverse needs of pupils.

Menstrual health and hygiene

Menstrual health and hygiene is a critical aspect of school WASH. Well-designed WinS projects help girls and staff manage menstruation with dignity and safety, in ways that reduce the stigma many experience around this natural process. MHH should be part of the health, sexual health and hygiene curriculum. Water for Women projects have integrated MHH and tackled gender roles related to WASH to ensure adolescent girls and female teachers have privacy, dignity and safety to manage menstruation at school, which encourages attendance. Projects are also working to overcome harmful social norms that contribute to girls being absent from school.

Monitoring

WASH implementing organisations need strong monitoring systems, with all partners adding monitoring data to an education management information system (EMIS) to track progress towards universal WinS. Participatory monitoring with SMCs, teachers and local government is also important.Alongside project monitoring, Water for Women project teams have advocated for the inclusion of WASH indicators in EMISs and including WASH in routine school inspections.

Effectiveness

Programs should be designed based on assessments of needs in order to achieve their goals (Chard, 2018).

- Reach: coverage of enough children to make a difference
- Dose: schools/children receive enough of the intervention to change WASH services and practices
- Fidelity: the extent to which the intervention was implemented as planned
- Length of time in the program area.

It is not clear whether the Water for Women projects' reach, dose, fidelity or length of time in the program areas has been sufficient to be effective.

Area-wide approach

WASH in Schools programs do not stand in isolation, but should contribute to area-wide plans for universal WASH coverage to meet the broader development needs of the district. Concurrent WASH improvements in schools and surrounding communities are known to maximise impacts and sustainability. Governments have been mobilised to scale up WinS, facilitated through low-cost models. This will directly support consolidation of gains achieved to date in an area-wide approach.

Operation and maintenance

Continuous supply of anal cleansing materials, and soap and water for handwashing, are vital. Operation and maintenance (O&M) also includes training of teachers, WASH clubs and school staff. Water for Women projects have supported O&M through ensuring school WASH infrastructure is maintained through effective management approaches and that sufficient maintenance funds are available. Teachers, parents, school management committees (SMCs) and children have been enabled to take ownership of WinS.

Sustainability

An essential outcome of all WinS programming is ongoing services and hygienic behaviour. Sustainable school WASH requires service delivery and maintenance, and behaviour change. Schools must budget for the life cycle costs of the WASH asset/ service. Water for Women projects have been designed to ensure that facilities do not fall into disrepair or that clubs stop their activities once the project ends. The incorporation or reinforcement of WinS in curriculums and integration into national teacher training supports sustainability. Projects have advocated for increased budgeting for WinS at the local level and supported the development of a roadmap for financing and scaling up WinS. Life cycle costing has been promoted in schools to ensure O&M. Schools are using the data, and tools such as bottleneck analysis and school WASH improvement plans, to seek funding support from actors such as local members of parliament, departments of education, and the private sector. Advocacy has aimed to ensure governments provide school WASH maintenance funding in education budgets.

Students outside a new toilet block at their school in Liquiçá, Timor-Leste
Credit: WaterAid / Tariq Hawari

WASH in Schools implementation

Lessons learnt

- Agencies that take a systems approach to community WASH also engage in direct delivery for schools.

- Equity-based criteria can guide school selection (e.g. those in remote rural areas) in consultation with government and schools themselves.

- If projects have only provided hygiene behaviour change in schools, schools must provide soap and water for handwashing and drinking themselves through a range of means and plan for toilet rehabilitation or construction. Engaging agencies directly for delivery of WASH projects could be problematic from a sustainability perspective due to discontinuity once the project comes to an end.

- It is difficult to judge the effectiveness and sustainability of the approaches being applied. To address this challenge, projects utilise a range of monitoring and evaluation approaches including mixed methods and participatory processes.

- Projects routinely report that they have strengthened management of O&M, but systematic approaches for partners to assess and track changes in school management capacity are an area for ongoing improvement.

Water for Women's achievements in improving access to water, sanitation facilities and promotion of handwashing with soap to date are outlined in Table 2.

Table 2. Penetration of WASH services in Water for Women project schools, 2018–22

	Achievement to date	
	Total number	**% of target**
Number of schools and HCFs providing basic or advanced drinking water (JMP)	700	94%
Number of schools and HCFs providing basic or advanced sanitation (JMP)	680	88%
Number of schools and HCFs with basic or advanced handwashing facilities (JMP)	1,023	107%
Number of schools in which student access to WASH services has improved	628	88%
Number of schools in which access to MHH facilities has improved	397	79%
Number of adolescent girls with increased access to MHH facilities in schools	71,716	104%

Water for Women projects[5] have typically delivered a full WASH package to ensure sustainability of behaviour change or services (although individual elements have been sequenced). In some instances, projects have worked on behaviour change communication (BCC) in schools. Plan International in Indonesia plans to establish the 'software' (good WASH behaviours, including MHH) prior to providing the hardware (WASH facilities) in schools, and encourages school management to adopt provisional measures to improve water supply. In Fiji, Habitat for Humanity (HfH) completed infrastructure upgrades in schools, including pipeline remediation, rainwater harvesting systems and menstrual hygiene management facilities, in conjunction with behavioural change engagements in communities and schools.

School toilets are particularly problematic: their high cost is often a major bottleneck for scaling WinS programming. Toilets getting dirty or broken and inconsistent supply of anal cleansing materials discourage use. Once pits are full they are costly to empty, as is construction of new toilets. The lack of improved sanitation facilities is likely to explain slow progress in access to MHH facilities within toilet blocks; this is an area for further investigation with Water for Women partners.

[5] The 20 Water for Women projects include those implemented by IRC Pakistan, Plan International Australia and Yayasan Plan International in Indonesia, SNV Lao PDR, WaterAid PNG, World Vision PNG, iDE Cambodia, HFH Fiji, Thrive Networks/East Meets West Vietnam, Thrive Networks/East Meets West Cambodia, World Vision Vanuatu, Plan International Solomon Islands, Plan International PNG, World Vision Bangladesh, WASH consortium PNG - WaSH Em i Bikpela Samting (WEBS), SNV Bhutan, SNV Nepal, WaterAid Myanmar Humanitarian WASH Project, WaterAid Timor-Leste, CFAR India, RTI India.

## Equity considerations to guide partners in school selection

Within Water for Women projects, schools are selected/prioritised according to a combination of equity-focused criteria, geographical targeting strategies and in agreement with government and schools themselves. In Solomon Islands, Plan and Live & Learn Environmental Education (Live & Learn) use a strengths-based approach to identify common priorities with the community, before agreeing to progress activities and interventions. Partners also work closely with the Provincial Education Authority (PEA) and the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development (MEHRD) to identify schools to take part in the project. Undertaking introductory workshops (co-facilitated with MEHRD) with school leaders was a key method of developing trusting relations with schools.

Other project partners developed selection criteria that required schools to commit upfront to supporting WinS, including committing to school budget lines for facilities and supplies (Plan International in Indonesia). In Timor-Leste, school selection was based on criteria agreed between the Municipal Department of Education, WaterAid, and local partners. Similarly, in Bangladesh, school selection involved the relevant government departments (the Directorate of Primary Education and the Department of Public Health Engineering) as well as the participation of women and girls and people with disabilities. A school-led approach means that most school staff are willing to cooperate with the project. This is shown by their active engagement with stakeholders and their independent use of project outputs to improve WASH practices and source funds for school improvements.

The following sub-sections focus on interlinking aspects of WinS programming: implementation (encompassing services and behaviour change and O&M), strengthening WinS systems, and cross-cutting strategies (GEDSI, MHH, climate resilience, sustainability and scalability). Projects are mostly delivering WASH in institutions (directly) as opposed to doing so via institutional strengthening (indirectly). The sub-sections set out considerations for school selection, impacts of WinS for the wider community, and the sequencing of implementing WASH in schools. WinS behaviour change and service level improvements are discussed before reviewing the WinS response to COVID-19.

Programmatic approaches

Water for Women supports CSO partners to adopt/adapt programmatic approaches to WinS to their context, so several different approaches are being applied. Overall, these approaches are aimed at improving students' WASH behaviour, scaling up and sustaining gains, increasing the climate resilience of WASH facilities, and increasing the focus on inclusion in WASH, particularly for children with disabilities. Table 3 indicates the approaches (often concurrent) that various projects have used to drive change.
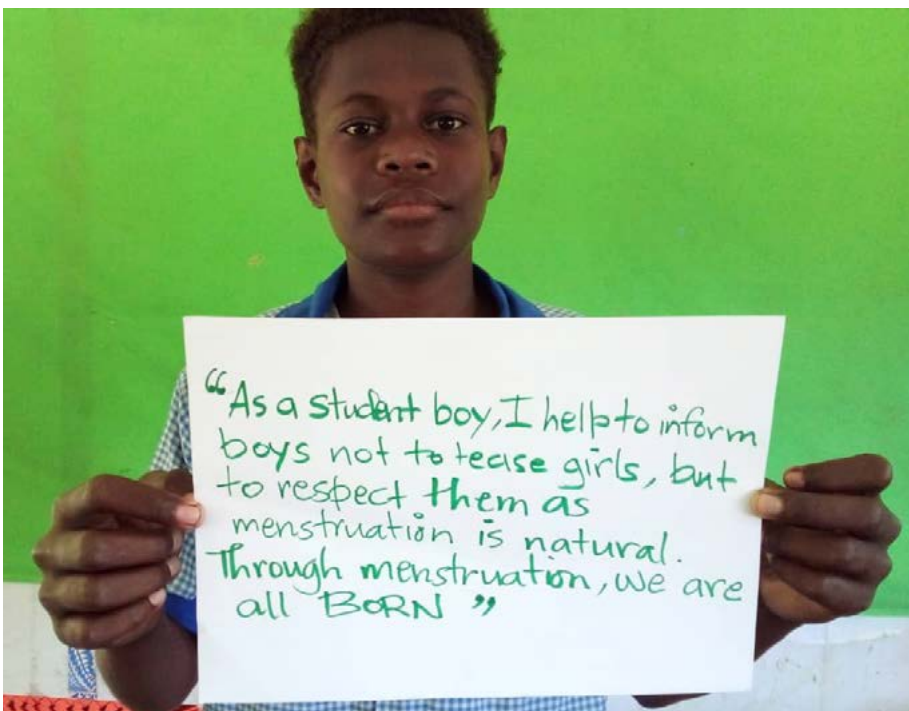
A male student expresses solidarity and support for girls, his fellow students, at a school in New Ireland Province, where Plan International and Live & Learn have been training teachers to deliver MHH education and awareness through the Resilient WASH in the Islands Region of Papua New Guinea project
Credit: Live & Learn PNG

Table 3. Sample approaches to WinS programming used under Water for Women

Approach	Countries	Description
Community-led total sanitation (CLTS)	Indonesia	Plan International in Indonesia uses Sanitasi Total Berbasis Masyarakat (STBM), a five-pillar approach to achieving 'total sanitation'. The STBM approach includes WinS considerations, including MHH.
School-led total sanitation (SLTS)	Bangladesh, PNG	As a complement to CLTS, SLTS aims to trigger schools and communities to eliminate open defecation as well as promote hygiene and sanitation. World Vision Bangladesh is implementing SLTS projects, including teacher training. In PNG, World Vision has triggered schools through SLTS methods, with a focus on MHH, general hygiene and COVID-19 messaging.
GIZ/UNICEF	Solomon Islands	Plan International Solomon Islands is implementing the GIZ/UNICEF Three Star school rating program, with the ambition of achieving MEHRD-endorsed criteria for a minimum of 'two-star' status. The approach requires a school-led bottleneck analysis and the development of WinS action plans.
Child-to-child approach	Bangladesh	World Vision Bangladesh is implementing hygiene promotion activities through the child-to-child approach, including daily school staff-supervised handwashing, cleaning of toilet facilities, and improved sanitation. The hygiene message is disseminated in targeted schools and their catchment areas.
Healthy Island trainings	PNG	WaterAid has held Healthy Islands training sessions for local governments and set up Healthy Islands committees to support changes in WASH practices in PNG.
Integrated hygiene promotion approach	Solomon Islands, Bangladesh, Vietnam	Plan International Solomon Islands uses an umbrella approach to integrate transformative climate-resilient water safety planning: the WinS Three Star approach, health centre WASH Facility Improvement Tool (WASH-FIT), and CLTS. World Vision Bangladesh uses an integrated hygiene promotion approach, running interactive sessions in the communities within school-catchment areas, and disseminating messages through multiple channels. Thrive Networks/East Meets West Vietnam undertook handwashing education in schools as part of the COVID-19 response and the Vietnam Women's Union broader community handwashing campaign.

WASH in Schools service level change

WASH in Schools requires cost-effective replicable WinS designs – child, disability and gender-responsive facilities that are adapted to the local context and easy to clean and maintain. Water for Women partners have reported a range of hardware improvements, including universally accessible designs for school WASH (WaterAid PNG, in conjunction with the PNG Department of Technical Services). Sanitation improvements include accessible and girl-friendly ablution facilities, with MHH provisions for students (Plan International in PNG), while in Pakistan, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) has improved menstrual waste disposal services. Other improvements to hygiene services include hygiene corners in Bangladesh[6] (World Vision Bangladesh) and handwashing facilities installed or improved in most schools, supported by improvements in water supplies (Plan International in PNG). In Indonesia, Plan International is providing demonstration models in sub-district elementary schools and health centres with inclusive WASH facilities (including universal accessibility) to showcase approaches for other schools to replicate or government to scale up. Alongside improvements in service levels, SNV Nepal has tested audit tools for WinS projects.

In most cases, schools implement WinS Action Plans with infrastructure improvements based on the specific needs of each school. These plans focus on monitoring and maintaining the schools' WASH management systems and identifying areas of improvement and actions needed to solve WASH problems. Other partners are taking incremental steps to improving school WASH facilities using the GIZ/UNICEF Three Star approach to WASH in Schools. In Solomon Islands, Plan International is supporting schools to achieve two-star WinS status. Other project partners have supported schools to reach basic hygiene service indicators (handwashing facilities) through the construction of tippy taps.

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[6] Hygiene corners include resources aimed at reminding students of the importance of hygienic habits, in addition to storing toothbrushes, soap, towels and so forth.

Design options and catalogues of technology ideas have been produced and used to increase choice at school level. Approved national school toilet design standards (for instance, those including MHH rooms) may well be unaffordable, hindering rapid scale-up. The high capital investment cost for these services is a deterrent for governments to invest in WinS. Lower cost of facilities and reduced operation and maintenance costs would support replication. Few countries have comprehensive costed models and plans to scale WinS. If schools are also evacuation centres, WASH systems are also designed to meet the associated standards. More widely available and affordable products, construction materials and services would allow for more cost-effective and appropriate designs and operation of school toilets.

WASH in Schools behaviour change

This section describes the software aspects of WinS that complement the hardware (infrastructure). Various successful and proven WinS implementation approaches and guidelines have been developed (e.g. the Three Star approach). Behaviour change requires innovative approaches that consider motivations, emotions and social norms. Examples of software include behaviour change in toilet use and handwashing. It can also include gains such as improvements to the curriculum or capacity-building for teachers. Success has been achieved when partners have a comprehensive package of software and hardware interventions, WinS programming approaches that are highly structured and directive, planned for at-scale, cost-effective to implement and adhered to by every organisation supporting WinS in the area.

Behaviour change communications

Water for Women partners are increasingly shifting from educational approaches to sustainable behaviour change using innovative and creative interventions. These consider behavioural determinants and emotional and cultural drivers of better hygiene practices. The length of the behaviour change component is associated with the sustainability of change. For instance, in Solomon Islands, Plan International is using a range of motivators (health, pride, dignity). The extent to which BCC materials are project-based or government owned/endorsed materials is a consideration. Partners have supported schools with a range of materials to use during BCC sessions. For instance, Yayasan Plan International Indonesia has produced 'government owned/endorsed' posters on MHH as part of their STBM approach, switching to online workshops with students during school closures. IRC Pakistan also provided material for schools on topics including water treatment and handwashing with soap.

Change agents

Several projects identify social change agents (often community members) and give them the knowledge and motivation to lead and promote improved WASH services in communities, including schools. Change agents include:

- community leaders, people with disabilities, women, adolescents and mothers (World Vision Bangladesh)

- village health workers, youth champions, peer educators, district health officers, teachers, principals, communities and students (HfH Fiji)

- schoolchildren (IRC Pakistan)

- community leaders, health centre workers, school managers, teachers and students, church leaders, Provincial Women's Association members, politicians and private sector stakeholders (Plan Solomon Islands/Live & Learn).

Training of teachers in improved WASH

Many programs carried out capacity building training sessions for teachers, recognising that their cooperation with other stakeholders is key to success and sustainability. In Pakistan, IRC provided training for female teachers, including enhancing their skills in supporting children with a disability to use WASH facilities in schools. Through attending GEDSI and MHH training and awareness sessions, teachers and students have improved their knowledge and understanding of MHH issues. Teachers report higher levels of confidence with respect to menstrual health, resulting from enhanced teacher training and public events celebrating Menstrual Hygiene Day. The WinS teacher training package includes a module on MHH and GEDSI in schools. Gender training has been incorporated into teachers' annual in-service activities by HfH in Fiji, while in Bangladesh, World Vision provided training to teachers, SMC members, student councils, student cabinets and Upazila education officers to facilitate behavioural change on personal hygiene.

School health clubs

Student hygiene clubs (including student cabinets, brigades, and councils) have been established or reactivated in schools. Membership of the clubs is targeted at boys and girls, as well as male and female teachers and leaders of marginalised groups (including those with disabilities). School health clubs in PNG have a 50:50 boy–girl membership ratio (World Vision PNG). In Bangladesh, the clubs focus on BCC and address, among other things, handwashing, MHH and the use and maintenance of sanitation facilities (World Vision, Bangladesh). For example, girls and children with disabilities are consulted on the design and accessibility of MHH and WASH facilities. The clubs also advocate for more funds from the annual school budget for WASH-related activities (IRC Pakistan).

Student health or WASH clubs are likely to become dormant if teachers are not motivated to sustain them or if pupils do not receive any reward or recognition for their participation. In some cases, clubs such as these have been institutionalised within the primary education system in a way that incentivises teaching staff and school inspectors to take them seriously. Without further institutionalisation of these clubs, their operations are likely to remain short-lived.

Curriculum changes aim to institutionalise WASH improvements

Curriculum changes are helping to improve WASH practices. Plan International in Indonesia and UNICEF are sensitising the Ministry of Education and Culture (MoEC) and the Ministry of Health on the need to mainstream MHH into the National School Health Program/school STBM curriculum. Similarly, WaterAid PNG ensures that schools adopt WinS learning and improvement plans in line with national education policy. In Fiji, HfH has made adaptations to the WinS training package and linked it to the schools' curriculums. Primary schoolteachers and school management and district-level Ministry of Education, Heritage, and Arts staff have encouraged buy-in from the ministry with respect to the WinS tools being incorporated into the national curriculum of Fiji.

Challenges

Access to schools for engagements and construction can be restricted by the school calendar, the availability of provincial officials, teachers and school management staff, or weather (e.g. cyclones). Other challenges include maintaining the engagement of the Ministry of Education in prioritising school WASH infrastructure and permissions required to conduct ongoing school engagements.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated longstanding inequalities in access to quality education. Full or partial school closures and other factors reduce the health and wellbeing of children, their families and educators. WinS activities were affected by COVID-19 and a number of strategies implemented to manage associated challenges during closures and once schools reopened.

Members of the student WASH Club at a primary school in Markham District, PNG, promote good WASH practices among their peers
Credit: World Vision

WASH in Schools responses to COVID-19

Pivots

Most partners stopped their regular activities due to school closures and restrictions on travel. Face-to-face capacity building training was difficult or impossible, and staff travel and field visits were not allowed due to lockdowns. Most projects could not implement school-related activities, but some continued with community-level activities by adhering to social distancing, avoiding mass gatherings, and taking health precautions for COVID-19.

COVID-19 lockdowns meant schools were closed for long periods. In Lao PDR, activities in schools were curtailed to reduce the spread of COVID-19 to schoolchildren from external partners who travel between many locations. Water for Women partners provided a wide range of technical assistance to government counterparts on safe reopening, including advice on infection prevention and control to school stakeholders and practitioners from the WASH, education and other sectors. Partners developed general and WASH-specific guidance and technical resources for the safe reopening of schools, and related guidance on the need for MHH facilities and products, handwashing station fabrication, and so on.

Funding

In some cases, the pandemic increased funding for WASH in schools. Various new international funding mechanisms associated with the COVID-19 pandemic include provisions for governments to fund WASH interventions or investment opportunities for the business sector to provide WASH services. For instance, schools in Solomon Islands received Ministerial COVID-19 funds to install handwashing facilities, complementing school WASH action plans. In contrast, in Lao PDR, most of the government's development budget was diverted to fighting and recovering from COVID-19, reducing the allocation to improve WinS.

Approaches

COVID-19 response activities in the education sector have accelerated handwashing with soap (HWS) in schools. In Timor-Leste, WaterAid and partners delivered COVID-19 prevention activities through a WhatsApp campaign, sending messages about COVID-19, vaccinations and preventative behaviours. Secondary schoolteachers were trained in COVID-19 prevention, hand hygiene, gender sessions and MHH, and each school was given resources on COVID-19 prevention and handwashing promotion. Yayasan Plan International Indonesia ran a child-friendly BCC campaign for teachers, students (as peer educators/champions), school administrators, cleaning staff, and parents to reinforce good hygiene behaviours for COVID-19 prevention. In Fiji, change agents applied hygiene promotion learning by supporting their communities to set up household handwashing stations to minimise risk of transmitting infectious diseases, including COVID-19.

The COVID-19 pandemic led to the rapid revamping of school standards and national standards for WinS in some countries. In PNG, Plan collaborated with the Department of Transportation and Water to develop standard designs for school ablution facilities. These designs consider universal accessibility, both within and to the facility; gender-specific needs and separation, and specific spaces for girls to manage their menstruation. These designs were constructed as a pilot with COVID-19 ministerial funding allocated to improve WASH infrastructure in schools. Tippy taps, made locally by hand, have been promoted or recommended as a low-cost, easily replicable technology. Partners also constructed/rehabilitated water supplies in schools and communities and distributed handwashing facilities (buckets and taps) to schools, as well as hygiene materials. In Indonesia, commercial sanitary pads became difficult to obtain during the COVID-19 pandemic. In response, Yayasan Plan International Indonesia held reusable sanitary pad-making sessions for students, staff and parents.

Child protection

The COVID-19 pandemic may have made children more vulnerable to violence and psychosocial distress. Quarantine measures, including school closures and travel restrictions, disrupt children's routine and social support. Children and families who are already vulnerable due to poverty or those who live in overcrowded settings are particularly at risk. The Fiji Women's Crisis Centre (FWCC) reported an increase in phone calls related to domestic violence. HfH Fiji staff worked with trained counsellors from FWCC to provide information on domestic violence hotlines and child protection information materials, ensuring vulnerable people in targeted communities access to social protection pathways.

Operation and maintenance

This section discusses WinS O&M and sustainability. Dirty toilets and broken and stolen taps are widespread global challenges; toilets may be locked or set aside by teachers, and overflowing pits are not always emptied. WinS programs make child-friendly technology more widely available, yet more toilets in schools mean additional efforts and resources are required for cleaning. Poor design of school toilets exacerbates cleaning challenges and discourages use. Sustainability has been addressed within projects through O&M plans, allocating additional resources to O&M, and WASH champions and leadership in the school ensuring it is done. In addition, implementers adopt or systematise routine hygiene behaviour change into the curriculum so that behaviours are maintained over the long term.

O&M training for schools

WASH in Schools programs also train teachers, strengthen SMCs and create school hygiene clubs. Water for Women partners are directly training and mentoring school management and teachers, including in the Three Star schools approach, to improve their capacity in school WASH management, promotion, and education. The motivation of WASH groups for continued O&M of services varies. Strengthening the capacity of SMCs and teachers to identify and plan for WASH improvements is enabling local action, including fundraising and planning. Engaging teachers in WASH-related activities is hard if they are perceived as an additional burden, or if tasks cannot be accomplished without budget allocations from the ministry of education or the local authority. Partners are also providing construction and O&M training directly to community and school community members, particularly women and youth, embedding skills and building agency locally. In several projects, the SMC has a critical role in O&M.

> Strengthening the capacity of school management committees and teachers to identify and plan for WASH improvements is enabling local action, including fundraising and planning.

In several contexts, Water for Women partners are providing backstopping technical support to government stakeholders. World Vision supports Union Parishads in Bangladesh, and Plan International supports the Ministry of Health and Medical Services, MEHRD and the Guadalcanal Provincial Administration in Solomon Islands. Some programs have established specific measures to increase buy-in, such as involving schools and communities in construction activities/monitoring, identifying and mobilising leaders in schools, self-supplying hygiene kits, and organising school competitions. In Pakistan, IRC ensures that arrangements for cleaning and the purchase of supplies are in place as part of a school or madrassa WASH improvement plan before starting construction of sanitation facilities.

Behavioural aspects

Behaviour is a significant problem in some contexts where students' access is deliberately reduced by keeping the toilets locked, or because poor hygiene practices, flawed design or lack of cleaning arrangements mean they are dirty. Even after awareness-raising and capacity-building activities, the level of commitment to toilet cleaning in schools can remain low. IRC reported that schools lack funds for caretakers, and parents are deeply opposed to students cleaning the classrooms and toilets in Swat, Khyber Paktunkhwa province, Pakistan.

WASH-related careers

Partners have been developing school leavers' skills for inclusive and resilient WASH access, with support from Water for Women. In PNG, for example, Plan conducted basic construction and plumbing training targeted at unemployed youth in the villages. Also in PNG, under a Plan project, the Live & Learn team encouraged girls, particularly those who had completed secondary school and were unemployed, to participate in the training with their male counterparts. HfH have a stall at two university/school career days per year to promote a plumbing and water management training program and generate an interest in this type of training among young women.

Strengthening WASH in Schools systems

Lessons learnt

- Strengthening WinS systems can influence national practices and support the institutions responsible for WASH and education policy development.

- Activities have included developing WinS technical standards, school WASH guidelines, institutionalising WASH education for teachers and children. Others are advocating for resourcing/budgets for sustainable, inclusive WinS, and coordination platforms with/between the government and its development partners.

- Inspections and monitoring are major enablers of stronger WinS systems. Equity-lensed WinS monitoring and evaluation systems are intended to measure the results of interventions designed to reduce inequity.

- Partners reflecting and learning as part of regular programming has informed interventions and progress towards sustainable and equitable WinS services.

Along with the direct support Water for Women partners have provided to WinS service delivery (e.g. to construct basic WASH facilities in schools), partners have also provided support for systems strengthening in policy and strategy development, partnerships, coordination, advocacy, capacity development, financing, and strengthening monitoring and accountability. Partners have raised the profile of WinS within local government, bringing education, water and health ministries together to accelerate WinS programming. The next sub-section describes how projects are influencing WinS systems though the link with direct project delivery on the ground.

Sector policy and strategy

By embedding WinS in national policies, budgets, administrative procedures and the routine work of the education system, Water for Women initiatives have overcome systemic WinS problems. At the national level, partner advocacy and support contributed to major new national policies, strategies and plans. For instance, Plan International in Indonesia has supported Indonesia's Ministry of Health (MoH) to develop national guidance for STBM-MHH implementation in schools. In Solomon Islands, Plan is supporting the MEHRD-endorsed WinS guideline and strategy. Further, Plan Solomon Islands will assist the development of a provincial WASH strategy that aligns with national standards, and will develop guidance materials and evidence for effective WASH implementation at provincial and school level.

> By embedding WASH in Schools in national policies, budgets, administrative procedures and the routine work of the education system, Water for Women initiatives have overcome systemic problems.

Advocacy and mainstreaming

Advocacy efforts generated support for WinS funding, policies, standards and guidelines that aimed to increase WinS coverage, scale up implementation approaches and broadcast lessons. Schoolchildren participated in celebrations of WASH awareness campaigns and days, including Menstrual Hygiene Day (28 May), Global Handwashing Day (15 October) and World Toilet Day (19 November). These large-scale celebrations are organised jointly with partners and stakeholders (such as SMCs). Alongside the yearly Global Handwashing Day and Menstrual Hygiene Day celebrations, which draw great attention to WASH in schools, hygiene behaviours have been embedded in the curriculum and day-to-day activities in the school to reinforce priority behaviours. Activities typically include displaying posters and singing songs promoting good hand hygiene, dramatic performances promoting good hygiene, and official openings of new handwashing facilities. There is no clear advocacy strategy or plan for monitoring the effectiveness of such initiatives.

Institutional arrangements

WASH in Schools interventions strengthen the institutions mandated to provide and maintain WASH in schools. If WinS is already reflected in national policies and strategies, governments' planning and management of WinS programs (and removal of blockages to scaling up WinS) can be improved through institutional strengthening (including support, coordination and investment in human resources). Water for Women partners have engaged with all levels of government and institutional hierarchy, in school and community WASH and within the political and administrative systems of provincial and national governments. Strong engagement with government stakeholders aims to ensure WASH behaviour change approaches are aligned with government strategies and national development plans. In some cases, partners have established memoranda of understanding with ministries of education.

Working with local government

Promoting WASH in the routine work of the education system, and establishing inclusive education, health and child support teams, can accelerate the adoption of good school WASH practices and interventions. Projects are building local government and school management capacity to budget for WinS, using tools and guidelines for policy implementation (e.g. bottleneck analysis, Arts for Advocacy). Local government is also important in ensuring the provision, cleaning and maintenance of WinS facilities, but the education sector must allocate sufficient budget to take WinS to scale.

School management committees

School management committees include groups mandated by government or elected at school level. World Vision's SHOMOTA project strengthens leadership opportunities for women and excluded groups, student cabinets and student councils to mobilise them for inclusive WASH and leadership roles on SMCs in Bangladesh. Similarly, in PNG, World Vision, Plan International and WaterAid have activated school health clubs and student WASH clubs. Peer-driven approaches across schools that encourage knowledge sharing between teachers can also contribute to improvements in WinS.

Work with school, teacher or children's groups

Engaging with school groups at various levels can raise awareness and improve understanding of the need for effective and inclusive school WASH services. Hygiene promotion activities (training, monitoring and reflection) focus on building institutional capacity in schools to continuously promote behaviour change through curriculum changes and complementary internal/external school activities. Engaging the community is intended to build strong ownership, leading to improved maintenance and cost-effectiveness. Projects include examples of working with private sector or social entrepreneurs for the provision of soap, menstrual pads or other products and services, and through emerging private educational providers to achieve WinS gains.

Funding

Building up-to-standard water points and sufficient toilets for all schoolchildren and teachers, as well as ensuring quality, and inclusiveness, can be costly. Funds are also needed to repair broken toilets, taps and hand pumps and purchase soap and cleaning materials/agents. Schools often report insufficient resources and dependence on donor funds for most interventions (World Vision PNG).

At the national level

Water for Women partners are advocating for WinS allocations in national budgets to sustain services or cover their O&M costs. WinS stakeholders have tried to influence budget allocations, using demonstration models or good practice in a small number of schools, to convince the education sector to allocate more budget to WinS. To date, globally, this strategy has swayed few governments and few within the education sector to allocate more domestic resources to WinS construction or O&M. Reliance on the ministry of education to invest in WinS is unlikely to lead to an acceleration in the provision of WinS services.

At the local government level

In some instances, funds allocated for WASH programs by provincial governments have resulted in new investments for WASH in schools. WaterAid PNG reported local governments lack funds to carry out sectoral support work (e.g. monitoring, routine supervision, school supervision visits, or health patrol support).

At the school level

In Bangladesh, World Vision and their partners advocated for increases in WASH budget allocation at Union Parishad and school level. World Vision's Citizen Voice and Action working groups lobbied schoolteachers, SMCs and the Education Department, which resulted in the allocation of funds to support MHH in schools. In Pakistan, IRC facilitated school administrations to allocate budget for improvement of WASH services.

In some cases, funds for WASH O&M may exist, but schools do not access them in a timely manner or are unaware that they can be used for WASH infrastructure. Plan International in Solomon Islands is collaborating with the PEA to provide financial and planning workshops to strengthen school management teams' skills in budgeting and planning, understanding of MEHRD/PEA processes, and use of school grants for WASH improvements and maintenance. The project's WinS approach and engagement with SMCs has enabled three schools to develop financial proposals for WASH support, with funds being secured from private donors (e.g. the Bank of South Pacific), private donors and community members.

Plan International Solomon Islands and the Live & Learn team engage school boards to help secure funding for ongoing WASH needs, particularly soap and menstrual hygiene products. In PNG, Plan International has supported schools to create bank accounts for ongoing maintenance of WASH facilities. In PNG's New Ireland Province, assessments and action plans have enabled schools to plan and budget for maintenance and WASH upgrades (i.e. with a budget line in the standard School Learning Improvement Plan). In several projects, voluntary contributions from community members (including community savings and loan groups) have been used to provide the school with hygiene supplies.

Other funding sources

There is scarce private sector funding (e.g. concessional financing/loans, public-private partnerships, development impact bonds) or other innovative financing mechanisms available for rural WinS in Water for Women projects, perhaps due to remote rural locations of projects, high cost of WinS, logistical challenges, and poverty of the population.

Students at a community-run school in Myanmar access handwashing facilities and water drinking stations installed by WaterAid as part of the Myanmar Humanitarian WASH project
Credit: WaterAid / Aung Htay Hlaing

Planning

WASH in Schools must be planned to satisfy the needs of the entire school population, to avoid overuse and breakage of hand pumps, taps and structures. WHO sets global standards, recommending a ratio of girls and boys per toilet/water point in all WinS programs. A standard ratio may also be set in national policies or guidelines. Local government, school administrations, SMCs, parent–teacher associations and student bodies have been engaged in planning improvements to school WASH access. Existing bottom-up planning processes in PNG include ward development committees, ward/village profiling and ward development planning, local governments, district and provincial planning, and School Learning and Improvement Plans (SLIPs), which WaterAid utilised in their projects. World Vision has been working to strengthen the inclusion of WASH budget allocation within SLIPs.

Bottleneck analysis

Partners have undertaken bottleneck analysis with school leaders, SMCs, teachers and students. In Solomon Islands, the process involves surveys with students, school principals, focus group discussions with SMCs and Parent–Teacher Associations, and the PEA. In Fiji, bottleneck analysis has enabled school leaders to secure funds from a variety of sources – including the Bank of South Pacific, community fundraising and school contributions – to improve school WASH access.

School WASH action plans

Bottleneck analysis has enabled the development of school WASH action plans by SMCs in Fiji and a district capacity development plan in PNG. In PNG, schools have WASH plans, and in Solomon Islands, WASH action plans have been developed in primary schools using the WASH in Schools: Implementation Guidelines.[7] The action plans are complemented by teacher WASH trainings. HfH has developed school WASH action plans, which have then been endorsed by the Fiji Ministry of Education. As discussed above, in several countries, including PNG, bottleneck assessments and school WASH action plans have been leveraged to secure funding for WinS projects. In Timor-Leste, WaterAid is supporting the development of a Municipality WASH Strategic Plan in collaboration with municipality WASH monitoring teams to analyse rural WASH data, including schools. Planning for maintenance should be embedded in annual school planning to avoid a separate planning process for WinS.

Monitoring

Water for Women partners are undertaking various efforts to strengthen evidence-based decision-making about WinS. Projects track use of as well as access to WASH facilities (according to JMP definitions), particularly by girls, together with changes occurring in handwashing and other WASH behaviours at schools.

Baseline survey

Project baseline data enabled community and school identification for WASH purposes, and baselining of schools (demographics, WASH facilities, lesson plans). In Fiji, HfH's school baseline survey informed the design of school engagement activities and WASH infrastructure design, and findings of the survey have been disseminated to government stakeholders. A school baseline survey by SNV Lao PDR provides a detailed picture of school WASH status, and includes data on the toilet ratios for boys and girls. The WASH consortium PNG and the Live & Learn team conducted an MHH baseline survey and analysed the data using mWater. Some projects did not establish a baseline for JMP service levels in schools against which they could report their progress, a gap that should be filled in future activities. Some partners, such as those in Indonesia, are working towards the SDG standards.

What is monitored?

WASH in Schools is enshrined in SDG4a, and project partners are monitoring the functionality, reliability, quality and quantity of water points, toilets and handwashing facilities. Some Water for Women partners (i.e. Plan International PNG, World Vision Bangladesh and IRC Pakistan) are measuring the number of people benefiting from improved school WASH facilities, as well as enrolment and attendance. Roll calls make routine monitoring of enrolment and attendance in schools more

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[7] M Abel, WASH in Schools: Implementation Guidelines, Live & Learn Environmental Education, 2020

straightforward than in other institutions. In India, the Centre for Advocacy and Research (CFAR) Single Window Forums[8] and WASH Hub teams track impact through a management information system (MIS) to enable partners to measure the effect of improved WASH services on school attendance. Disaggregated WASH data (e.g. by sex, disability and/or age), highlights access and equality. Partner surveys use the Washington Group questions to identify people with disabilities. Plan Solomon Islands undertook a GEDSI baseline survey and school bottleneck analysis that included pupils such as girls and children with disabilities who are often marginalised within rural communities.

Government monitoring systems

Partners have supported national monitoring efforts – for instance, by contributing to national monitoring systems. Incorporating WinS monitoring guidelines, questions and indicators into an EMIS is a key way to support sustainability. Plan International in Indonesia supported Dapodik, the MoEC web-based monitoring system, for WinS and MHH. In Timor-Leste, WaterAid supported uptake and use of school WASH monitoring data for national government engagement and municipal decision-making. In Solomon Islands, Plan International and partners advocated to the PEA and MEHRD to improve planning and monitoring of school WASH status via the inclusion of WASH indicators in school inspection plans. In PNG, WaterAid is strengthening systems by supporting Town Authority School inspectors in their regular inspections.

Monitoring tools

Partners have used a variety of monitoring tools. SNV Lao PDR applied a rapid mobile assessment tool incorporating a simplified set of indicators from the WASH-FIT. SNV supported district departments of education to conduct WASH-FIT assessments in several schools, which will then be used to develop WASH improvement plans. Partners also used online monitoring platforms, including for schools; for example, Plan International Solomon Islands used the mWater online mobile application platform to reduce the burden of data entry and support collation and analysis of information. Water for Women partners have also built online monitoring capabilities in stakeholders. In PNG, the WASH management information system is based on mWater. Plan International PNG, at the request of the Department of Health and Department of Education, provided mWater training to support the Autonomous Region of Bougainville Government to access and contribute to the national WASH EMIS.

Participatory monitoring

Joint monitoring with project stakeholders can support downward accountability. In Solomon Islands, the Plan and Live & Learn team use a participatory monitoring approach that engages community members, school staff and community to collect and analyse project data in an assess–plan–act–monitor cycle. World Vision Bangladesh has developed pictorial monitoring tools that schools use to monitor handwashing, toilet and classroom cleanliness, waste management, hygiene corners and MHH facilities. In PNG, the Live & Learn team attended school teaching sessions and participated in student club activities during routine field monitoring visits in targeted schools. The SHOMOTA project conducts quarterly joint monitoring exercises that include teachers, students, children and SMC representatives. Most partners have used school visits to monitor the activities of school clubs and WASH committees.

> Joint monitoring with project stakeholders can support downward accountability.

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[8] Single Window Forums are a consultative mechanism used by CFAR to strengthen collaboration between community, civil society networks, local authorities, service providers and stakeholders to support the delivery of inclusive WASH services for the most vulnerable and marginalised communities in urban settlements of Bhubaneswar and Jaipur.

Evidence and learning

Evidence can be used to raise the profile of WinS, strengthen accountability and advocate for WinS provision to marginalised and under-served populations. Water for Women partners have generated and used evidence and learning from applied or policy research to influence and support efforts to strengthen WASH systems. Research has focused on implementation (action research), and innovating new and adapted service models and technical solutions. Partners are ensuring they are learning from projects and improving practice, contributing to new knowledge and innovation, and sharing these learnings widely by providing evidence for the WASH sector. Thus, Water for Women projects are contributing to the evidence base related to WinS, both within the education and WASH sectors, in the following ways.

Research

A variety of research has been performed under Water for Women and the findings used to review progress, strengthen programming and move in new directions, in collaboration with governments and other sector partners. For example, in Vietnam, Thrive Networks/East Meets West reviewed their pandemic response, in which they provided handwashing devices and water tanks to schools in five provinces, to understand the impact on hygiene practices, and generate evidence-based recommendations for future interventions.

Knowledge and learning products

Water for Women partners have developed multiple project-based knowledge and learning products to support improvement of community and school WASH outcomes. Publications include reports and advocacy documents, evaluations and journal articles; an example is Live & Learn and Plan International's WASH in Schools Implementation Guide. Water for Women partners have supported documentation, learning and knowledge sharing, resulting in country-specific publications and videos. In many countries, partners have worked with the education ministry on the development or refinement of WinS guidelines.

Process-level documentation, which contributes to the continuous improvement of project quality, has also been important. Plan International Solomon Islands invited UNICEF to participate in a learning exchange visit to see a handwashing facility the project had constructed in a primary school. Plan International in Indonesia developed three key WinS resources to train UKS (Indonesian school health program) members: a facilitator's implementation guide, an operations and management resource for school WASH committees, and a teacher's toolkit for educating students about water safety and security. More recently, as part of the COVID-19 WASH response, Plan International in Indonesia developed a set of technical guidelines (including books and videos) to trigger HWS in schools and madrassas. Plan International PNG produced guides to WinS and the O&M of facilities. SNV Nepal has developed a standard operating procedure for WinS. The extent to which these resources are supporting government-led initiatives, or are effective in convincing the education sector to allocate more budget to WinS, has not been tracked.

Learning and knowledge sharing opportunities

Evidence from the WinS experience on the ground has been shared to advocate for greater prioritisation, investment and coordination. Training and events have improved the skills of WASH professionals in subjects including hand hygiene, MHH, disability inclusion and climate-resilient services.

In all countries, Water for Women partners have helped governments to implement learning activities aimed at limiting the spread of COVID-19. For instance, HfH promoted learning within the WASH sector through several mechanisms, including a national learning workshop, annual lessons learnt workshop, WASH Cluster contributions, Water for Women learning events, and international forums.

Community-level learning has been promoted through open days, school programs and university information stalls. Plan International Solomon Islands facilitated a study visit for several schools to share their experiences related to WASH planning and improvements. The event inspired continued collaboration and is motivating further school-led action to improve WASH facilities and behaviours in schools.

Capacity and multi-sector coordination

Capacity

Partners have used in-house staff, experience and knowledge resources to develop a comprehensive set of WinS guidance materials for field staff and partners, including on COVID-19. Fund partners produced various other guidance packages and held training sessions in a variety of areas, including on MHH monitoring, disability and all aspects of pandemic response programming. Partners report that teacher training is occurring, but the extent to which partners are creating the capacity within education departments to train and support teachers to deliver WASH content, or are doing the training directly (e.g. HfH Fiji and WaterAid Timor-Leste), is unclear. Similarly, whether partners are creating the capacity for duty-bearers to establish and support these committees and clubs or doing that directly (i.e. implementing rather than systems strengthening, as is the case with World Vision PNG), is uncertain.

Coordination

Coordination activities focused on national mechanisms as well as global and regional meetings, bring the WASH and education sectors together to share learnings and advocate for targeted and coordinated action. The education sector obviously plays a very important role in strengthening WinS collaboration and synergies. The multi-sectoral nature of WASH requires collaboration and integration across sectors such as education, health, finance and environment. It also requires effective mechanisms for maintaining WASH infrastructure with training and repair coordination, decision-making coordination and knowledge sharing across government departments and civil society, and prioritisation of WASH in district budget allocations and policy.

> The education sector plays a very important role in strengthening WASH in Schools collaboration and synergies.

At a primary school in Satkhira district, Bangladesh, students access drinking water from a hand pump installed by World Vision
Credit: World Vision Bangladesh / Proshanto Roy

Cross-cutting strategies

Lessons learnt

- GEDSI considerations have been mainstreamed into WinS programs during the design, implementation and monitoring stages, with a focus on girls and children with disabilities.

- Menstrual health and hygiene for children and teachers has been mainstreamed into all projects through trainings, as well as specific features in the hardware package (infrastructure and supplies).

- Teachers and caregivers have received skills training to support children with disabilities to use WASH facilities in school safely and comfortably.

- Climate-resilient WASH services are an emerging priority for programming for WinS.

- Successful WinS programs require significant and long-term program presence in communities, and are highly dependent on the support of donors and implementing partners.

- The sustainability of directly supporting the construction of WASH facilities through more pilots and demonstration projects in schools, without attention to life cycle costing, is questionable.

Gender equality, disability and social inclusion

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development not only seeks to achieve universal access to WASH services in schools but aims to reduce inequalities and to leave no one behind. National governments are expected to establish mechanisms to identify the most relevant dimensions of inequality and monitor the situation of disadvantaged groups. This section describes the changes reported with respect to universally accessible WinS facilities and other aspects of GEDSI.

Girls

The specific needs of girls have been addressed in most WinS projects, given that girls face many safety, dignity and health challenges related to the availability, separation or privacy of school toilets. Girls tend to be discouraged from using toilets when they are not gender segregated, and to miss class during menstruation when school toilets are unavailable or do not ensure privacy. When no water point exists at school, girls are usually responsible for bringing water from outside. Partners have improved 'girl friendliness' in toilet designs, including toilets that are sex-separated with specific siting standards for girls, minimum distance between boys' and girls' toilets, elevated walls to ensure privacy, and features for menstruating girls.

WASH in Schools interventions were also successful in increasing the participation of girls in health/hygiene clubs. As members of these clubs, girls had opportunities to be involved in WASH-related decisions. Whether more balanced boy:girl ratios in hygiene clubs have been achieved, and whether they resulted in girls speaking up, influencing decisions, and ultimately improving the management of WASH facilities, is unknown. Similarly, whether girls' participation in hygiene clubs increased their empowerment remains uncertain without intentional strategies.

Children with disabilities

Many countries monitor the availability of toilets that are accessible for students with disabilities. At the programmatic level, partners (including WaterAid, SNV Bhutan and World Vision PNG) have demonstrated models for accessible WinS; that is, to ensure WASH infrastructure and the immediate surroundings are adapted to meet the needs of children with disabilities. In Timor-Leste, WaterAid conducted accessibility audits, gender and MHH sessions, and design consultations with students. These activities were designed to reach and benefit students with disabilities, and to raise awareness about their rights with teachers and students. Similarly, in Bangladesh, World Vision's SHOMOTA project performed inclusive assessment of WinS with tools for accessibility audits, assisted schools to develop GEDSI-focused WASH action plans, and allocated budget for implementing WASH activities, including MHH.

Information was provided in various forms for children with different abilities, and those with visual and hearing impairments, in partnership with organisations for persons with disabilities (OPDs). As part of the 2020 Global Handwashing Day, with a focus on COVID-19, SNV Bhutan released HWS posters using tactile braille for people with visual impairment that were developed and distributed in partnership with government and OPDs. In the LIFE project in Pakistan, IRC staff developed a separate MHH Participatory Learning and Action module for women and girls with disabilities. WatSan Cell, UNICEF, IRC and the Department of Education worked to bring about training of trainers sessions on MHH. The support of schoolteachers who were willing to receive training and in turn train others was critical in dissemination of the learnings.

Focus on caregivers

In Pakistan, IRC has ensured that teachers and the caregivers of people with disabilities are trained on WASH and develop skills to support children with disabilities to use WASH facilities.

Out-of-school children

Across the regions, partners report that children with a disability are significantly less likely than other children to attend school. Marginalised groups are similarly less likely to attend school and so have lower literacy rates. CFAR India found that only one household of transgender people (of the 24 households selected) had a member with high school education or above. Project partners in PNG found that women may be illiterate due to cultural norms, which dictate that boys go to school and girls support the family in household duties (e.g. caring for siblings, fetching food and water). Such groups have also been reached with accessible information on WASH.

Children participate in a handwashing with soap demonstration with support from a sanitarian from Puskesmas and a teacher at their school for children with disabilities in Manggarai, Indonesia
Credit: Yayasan Plan International Indonesia

A range of schools

There are also often disparities in access to WASH services between types of school (i.e. public or private/religious schools). In Indonesia, prior to WASH infrastructure construction, Plan International and OPDs undertook school accessibility checks. Results were presented to government to advocate for budget investment to support 20 schools, including two special needs schools. IRC Pakistan helped the government-run School for the Blind to meet the WASH needs of day scholars and residential students. The project also ran capacity-building sessions for female schoolteachers to build their skills in supporting children with disabilities at school. Sessions on MHH and WASH were held with adolescent girls with disabilities. In Fiji, HfH has engaged with religious institutions in rural communities; using Sunday School manuals as a guide, the project connects youth with inclusive WASH messaging and moral and faith teachings. In Indonesia, hygiene sessions have been held in madrassas, while WASH training programs have been delivered in monasteries and nunneries in Bhutan in collaboration with MoH, UNICEF and SNV. In Bhutan, handwashing stations have been installed in 14 monastic institutions (including three nunneries).

Menstrual health and hygiene

Water for Women partners have worked with schools to consider a wider range of issues with relation to MHH, including social support, knowledge and skills, facilities and services, and materials. School WASH committees and students' club members have been trained in MHH. Resources have been distributed to schools and MHH activities run in schools through students' clubs. Menstrual Hygiene Day has also been celebrated in targeted schools. In PNG's New Ireland province, Live & Learn delivers MHH messaging from a local radio station; school communities have reported tuning in and listening to the programs. Community health workers have been trained on MHH issues to help embed MHH capacity into the relevant local government body. Disability inclusion has been reflected in MHH services for girls with low literacy or vision impairment.

Facilities

Partners have constructed universally accessible WASH facilities, including provision for MHH in schools. In PNG, WaterAid, Plan International and World Vision designed a GEDSI-sensitive toilet that specifically incorporates MHH waste bins, and an incinerator for managing MHH waste. In Solomon Islands, female toilets are now equipped with sanitary bins where used pads can be disposed of safely. The water system has undergone maintenance to ensure water is available in toilet stalls, allowing for body washing as well as washing reusable cloth or stained clothes.

Behaviour change communication materials

In Timor-Leste, WaterAid and their partners developed and distributed BCC materials related to MHH. World Vision Vanuatu developed a facilitators handbook, flipchart resource and training of trainers curriculum for community champions to deliver MHH training, as well as a training module to educate men and boys about menstruation. In Bangladesh, MHH sessions were held with adolescent girls and boys, and men were included in MHH sessions at the community and school level. Involving religious leaders has been effective in raising women's participation in community trainings, meetings and discussion forums. In Indonesia, an STBM-MHH module for schools was developed (based on Plan International's Champion of Change module) and trialled in two targeted schools, including with children with disabilities. Plan International in Indonesia has conducted training for peer educators to prepare them for running STBM and MHH-related activities in their schools. Plan International has also supported 40 girls and 40 boys in 20 schools, including children with disabilities, as peer educators. During this training, children learnt about STBM and MHH, being a facilitator, and menstruation as a natural process.

Menstrual hygiene products

Several partners report pad-making activities. In PNG, World Vision has trained women to make pads. Institutions including the Provincial Health Authority and Department of Education have ordered large quantities of pads from these women's groups. Sanitary pads are now being stocked in the school canteen and emergency pads made available for students.

Partnerships

Plan International Solomon Islands has partnered with MJ Enterprise (now known as Kaleko Steifree) to develop a guide for raising awareness of, and breaking down barriers to, good menstrual health in communities and schools. During MJ Enterprise's pilot work in ten communities and two schools, people with a disability and their carers have been identified and engaged, ensuring they are also gaining awareness of menstrual health. This is supporting and informing both school MERHD planning and budgeting to strengthen MHH in school.

Do No Harm

World Vision PNG has identified MHH as an important Do No Harm issue in their Markham district school and community WASH programs. MHH is a sensitive matter in schools and communities and seldom discussed openly in schools and households, making it important not to increase stigmatisation through program activities. World Vision supported male and female teachers/community members to facilitate school clubs and community WASH committees, and engaged a GEDSI Officer to support MHH programming.

Challenges

Customs, beliefs, taboos and shame associated with menstruation remain key challenges. If schools lack separate toilets for girls or toilets have no locks, managing menstruation in schools is difficult (SNV Lao PDR). The cost of sanitary pads in rural areas, and sometimes in urban areas, complicates MHH (HfH Fiji). Shame is a key reason why women and girls prefer not to wash and dry reusable sanitary cloths in public places; girls often lack information on MHH (IRC, Pakistan), and female teachers are uncomfortable in teaching the topic (Pakistan, Bangladesh). World Vision in Vanuatu report that 29% of women with disabilities and 18% of women without disabilities in Sanma and Torba Provinces miss social activities when they menstruate.[9] In Fiji, teachers from Naviti Primary School collaborated with Sunday School teachers to deliver consistent and positive MHH messages. This seems an effective partnership and a great way to make progress on a sensitive topic.

The founder of MJ Enterprise - now known as Kaleko Steifree - presents one of their locally made menstrual pads, which can be reused for two to three years
Credit: Water for Women

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[9] World Vision, Water, Women and Disability Study, March 2020, p.48

Climate-resilient WASH in Schools

The Asia and Pacific regions are acutely vulnerable to extreme weather, which is becoming more frequent and intense as a result of climate change. Most countries experience periodic floods, typhoons and cyclones, posing a particular threat to low-lying islands and coastal delta areas. Children are among those that endure the greatest impacts of climate change, environmental degradation and disasters. Their schools are frequently used as evacuation centres during and after emergencies, and quarantine centres in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. WinS in emergency settings is an area of major concern. Water for Women partners have used climate change risk assessment tools to conduct water safety planning and identify ways to increase WASH services' resilience to extreme weather. For instance, in Fiji, which is affected by tropical cyclones, partners are actively engaged in response (to extensive flooding), recovery, preparedness and climate resilience activities.

School WASH action plans

Partners have made school WASH action plans more inclusive of climate and disaster risk reduction strategies. For instance, World Vision in Bangladesh has supported schools to implement climate-resilient, GEDSI-sensitive annual WASH action planning and budgeting. In PNG, Plan International has produced a water security guide for schools where a water source is shared between schoolchildren and community members as increasing the number of users per water point can threaten its viability.

Technologies

Water for Women partners have supported the implementation of climate-smart technologies (such as low water use sanitation options) in schools to mitigate climate change risks. School WASH infrastructure has been made more climate-resilient. For example, in Fiji, HfH installed EcoSan toilets in several schools with low water availability and educated schoolchildren and staff on low water use sanitation options. School administrations, SMCs and maintenance staff were trained in the maintenance and management of EcoSan solutions.

Sustainability

Generally, the higher the construction quality, the longer the infrastructure will last and can be used. In PNG and elsewhere, community members are mobilised to participate in WASH facility construction. This acts as capacity building, training community volunteers in infrastructure O&M. After construction, O&M trainings are conducted for groups including WASH committees, pump mechanics, teachers and staff, WASH clubs and school management boards to maximise local competence in managing WASH facilities in schools.

At institutional level, projects have facilitated the formation of school health clubs and are working with community structures to support sustainability. Teachers are also trained on how to facilitate these clubs (World Vision PNG). Partners have been collaborating with ministry and provincial authority staff to support SMCs, parents and teachers' associations, and teachers in the implementation of WinS activities.

Scalability

Scaling WinS requires a well-defined WASH package, cost-effective approaches, and advocacy, and must be accompanied by appropriate institutional arrangements and capacities, implementation guidelines and coordination platforms. National and sub-national authorities struggle to scale WinS for a range of reasons, including the high capital cost of facilities, which makes their construction highly dependent on external funding.

Plan International in Indonesia has developed a national approach to WinS programming, with a program monitoring system accompanied by government-endorsed guidelines and training materials. Elsewhere, Water for Women partners have been advocating for institutionalised uptake (i.e. mainstreaming in WinS policies and administrative procedures), sustained budgeting, as well as replication of approaches by other schools. In Solomon Islands, Live & Learn created synergies between schools, clinics and communities. Primary schools within the operational area were used as the basis for selecting three to four communities around each school, termed a 'cluster'. School activities commenced as a precursor to any significant community interaction, providing a platform for engagement of the broader school community.

Conclusion

This brief outlines the work of Water for Women partners on scaling up WinS, as well strategic shifts to make WinS systems more inclusive and climate-resilient in order to meet the SDGs. Partners have worked with governmental education authorities and individual schools on the design and construction of WinS facilities and on developing WASH/hand hygiene curricula and behaviour change programs for schoolchildren. Water for Women partners are working with experienced national and international organisations, implementing multiple proven WinS approaches (typically the nationally endorsed WinS approach/standards). In several countries, partners have advocated for WinS to be included in national education strategies and been successful in encouraging budget allocations for WinS O&M, although less so in driving budget allocations to take WinS programming to scale.

The value of working on WASH in Schools is twofold:

1. For area-wide approaches — working alongside local partners in a focused geographic area to deliver area-wide WASH for households and public institutions for all (such as schools and healthcare facilities), as well as to strengthen the WASH system to ensure universal access.

2. For modelling approaches — demonstrating approaches on MHH or climate resilience or sustainability for WASH in schools, so that governments can adopt the approach in order to take WinS programming to scale through national WinS policies, strategies and costed action plans.

Globally, WinS programming is often driven by the WASH sector and largely funded externally. While governments may request that WASH development partners deliver WinS projects, little progress has occurred in moving from pilot and demonstration projects to national scale. Many WinS programs require substantial long-term presence in communities and schools. The high cost of the construction of WinS facilities has been a major impediment. Further, some schools cannot sustain facilities and behaviour change themselves after projects end. Schools continue to rely on donors and implementing partners or parents' continuing support to O&M of school WASH facilities.

Accelerating WinS requires joint learning/advocacy campaigns, as well as feeding experience from successful Water for Women projects into existing WinS networks (e.g. the Global International Learning Exchange on WASH in Schools), in addition to directly supporting the construction of WASH facilities.

Water for Women partners continue to build on and learn from WinS practice, which has evolved over the life of the Fund. The highlights, achievements and lessons in this brief provide a snapshot of this important area of inclusive and sustainable WASH that in turn provides a critical foundation for equitable education, health, and wellbeing.

Students at an elementary school in Manggarai, Indonesia, explore posters that display five important steps in managing their WASH needs and waste management at school — part of a behaviour change campaign delivered by Plan International's Water for Women project, WASH and Beyond: Transforming Lives in Eastern Indonesia
Credit: Yayasan Plan International Indonesia

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Limitations: The review of secondary data sources informing this learning brief makes comparisons, detect trends and emerging patterns, and shows how projects within the Fund align with evidence on successful WinS practice. It was not possible to access primary data and program stakeholders to verify the accuracy of the analysis and judgement. In addition, projects vary in terms of size, maturity and location.

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