Community Involvement for Impact
SWASH+ Phase II

Going Beyond Schools
SWASH+, a project aimed at improving the sustainability of WASH in Kenya’s public schools, stands for “School Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Plus Community Impact.” The project is taking the “plus” component very seriously.

In its second phase, SWASH+—a partnership between Kenya’s Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST) and Ministry of Health (MoH), CARE Kenya, CARE USA, Georgetown University and Emory University—is working not only with government officials and teachers but also with parents and students to increase the availability of clean water and toilets by focusing on governance. One core component of SWASH+ Phase II is research conducted to understand the best indicators of WASH sustainability in schools.

Many of the SWASH+ Phase II research interventions target community stakeholders like parents and school Board of Management (BOM) members directly. Calendars distributed to some households convey messages about the importance of sanitation and hygiene behaviors with the hope that they will increase knowledge among students and parents. Some BOM members also receive school WASH reminders and facts via messages to their mobile phones, and SWASH+ disseminates star ratings to both community and school stakeholders to explain the school’s level of water and sanitation services.

From Awareness to Action
It is safe to say that community members have responded positively to the SWASH+ project in their schools. At Kiarithaini Primary School in Nyeri, Kenya, the mobile phone messages have helped remind children and their parents that cleaning and maintaining WASH is a way of life, not a punishment. In some cases, messages inquiring about the school’s toilets have reminded the head teacher to maintain other school areas, such as the grass and landscape. BOM officials at Kiarithaini also explained that since SWASH+ Phase II began, some parents have consulted with the school about how to dig a borehole at home.

SMS messages from the SWASH+ Phase II project have helped remind officials at Kiarithaini School to maintain their latrines as well as other school areas, report community members.
Elsewhere in Kenya, parents of children at SWASH+ schools are using their own skills to contribute to the improvement of water and sanitation for all pupils. At Kijeneni in Nyeri, parents worked with the BOM to repair broken latrine doors and roofing in June 2014. At Rarieda Kaloo in Kisumu, parents—particularly those with carpentry experience—assisted in the construction of toilet blocks and have also helped investigate places to submit project proposals for further funding of water and sanitation at the school.

Parents say even the discussion at home about WASH has been revitalized following the SWASH+ interventions. Images on the calendars illustrate specific sanitation and hygiene activities a child should complete, and these have prompted further discussion about the roles of all family members.

“In December [2014] there was a picture of a mother and child, so my child asked if the calendar was supposed to be used for mothers also,” said Joanne, a parent of a student at Bungu Koraga in Kisumu, with a laugh.

John, another parent, has noticed children changing their behavior after receiving the calendars. “Students now go to the toilet with shoes instead of bare feet. They do not get sick as often,” he said.

**A Step Toward Sustainability**

Because few parents have the means to contribute much financially, this increased level of engagement is crucial to sustaining WASH in Kenya’s primary schools. Parents in both Nyeri and Kisumu—two of the three regions in the SWASH+ Phase II project—have responded favorably to receiving the interventions and have even expressed a desire to receive the mobile phone messages about WASH in their child’s school with greater frequency. While the focus of the second phase is research-based, preliminary discussions across schools show that parents within the communities are interested and engaged. For a project emphasizing community impact, this is a positive step forward toward increasing the sustainability of school water, sanitation and hygiene across Kenya.

**The Chairman of the Board of Management (BOM), comprised of community stakeholders, showcases the condition of the toilet blocks at Shaurimoyo Primary School in Kisumu, Kenya. The BOM has been engaged in writing proposals to non-profit organizations to request funding for WASH at Shaurimoyo.**

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For more information, please visit www.swashplus.org

Photos by Sue Gloor/CARE