Engaging Parents in School WASH
SWASH+ Phase II

SWASH+ Phase II Comes to Kiajeneni

Kiajeneni Primary School in Nyeri, Kenya is engaging students, their parents and teachers alike to help improve water, sanitation and hygiene. The school is part of a research trial implemented by SWASH+ (School Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Plus Community Impact) Phase II, a program aimed at improving the sustainability of WASH in Kenya’s public schools. In its second phase, SWASH+ is 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.

When SWASH+ Phase II came to Kiajeneni, parents admitted they were not particularly excited. Many are aware of the importance of good water and sanitation but feel powerless to improve the situation in their children’s school, since money and capacity are often huge barriers. But as time has passed, parents have become more active in the school’s water and sanitation services. Kiajeneni in particular receives two SWASH+ interventions: calendars with WASH messages help parents prioritize water and sanitation, while SMS-distributed performance ratings provide feedback about how Kiajeneni is faring relative to WASH in other Nyeri public schools.

A Healthy Competition

Parents are excited to receive the performance ratings, which come in the form of a star score between one and five, sent to their mobile phones. The ratings are one way to receive timely information about the quality of water and sanitation their children are receiving in school. At Kiajeneni, parents respond to questions sent via SMS message, all responses are aggregated and SWASH+ disseminates a school rating each month that rates Kiajeneni in relation to other schools. Some parents have liked these messages so much that they were disappointed to see them pause over the school holidays.

Parents have worked together to maintain Kiajeneni’s latrines.

Engaging parents to participate in school WASH has stimulated other action, too. Since SWASH+ Phase II came to Kiajeneni in June 2014, parents have rallied to repair the school’s latrine doors and roofs and have identified aspirations for future WASH work at the school. Among these new priorities are cement floors to
help improve cleanliness, doors and windows in the classrooms and water at the school site, which currently uses a borehole one kilometer away as its primary source.

**Making an Impact**

Students themselves have also become more engaged. The calendars distributed by SWASH+ have helped instill a spirit of competition amongst peers by encouraging monthly pledges to practice sanitation and hygiene behaviors. Parents say their children have demonstrated a more creative interest at home for sanitation as a result of the calendars; by improvising leaky tins for handwashing and washing toilets without prompting, students have been taking initiative with regard to WASH.

Leaky tins outside classrooms provide places for students and teachers to wash their hands. Teachers report that more leaky tins have been assembled at Kiajeneni since the introduction of SWASH+ Phase II.

The impact of these changes in behavior has been far-reaching. Teachers report that prior to SWASH+, no students in class seven were achieving scores above 300 on their end-of-term examinations. Now, students in all standards are achieving scores of 300 or more. This renewed focus on WASH at Kiajeneni has also increased students’ interest in other enriching activities, like Scouts.

As for the future, students, parents and teachers agree that more SWASH+ activity at the school is desired. They would be happy to see SMS messages tailored to the school’s particular WASH challenges, a greater frequency of messaging and specific guidance on how to improve water access given their school’s unique conditions. While SWASH+ Phase II is not yet complete, the community at Kiajeneni has expressed its engagement, interest and initiative with regard to school water, sanitation and hygiene. For a research project focused on sustainability, this is surely a great sign.

*SWASH+ Phase II is in operation from November 2012 to March 2016 and is funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF).*

*For more information, please visit [www.swashplus.org](http://www.swashplus.org)*

Photos by Sue Gloor/CARE