WASH IN SCHOOLS

Teaching today’s children.
Reaching tomorrow’s possibilities.
Far too many schools in the developing world have appalling sanitary conditions, contributing to sickness and disease among students. Schools are often hazardous to children’s health. Quality education can not effectively reach sick children.

UNICEF and WSSCC launched the WASH in Schools campaign on 18 March 2003 at the Third World Water Forum in Kyoto, Japan. UNICEF is the lead agency for implementing the campaign and will work closely with the WSSCC and its national and regional coordinators in developing countries. This initiative ensures safe water and clean, separate sanitation facilities for boys and girls in primary schools. Empowering young people through hygiene promotion and education will make schools safer and healthier for all children and will provide entryways for hygienic change in families. Young people’s involvement in programme design will be a key commitment and innovative approach to the campaign.

Why WASH in Schools?

Why WASH?

Because over 200 million school-age children are infected with parasites and flukes. Water and sanitation related diseases cause physical and mental development lags, thwarting a child’s ability to learn. Poor or non-existent sanitation keeps girls out of the classroom.

Why WASH? Because 1.1 billion people lack access to safe water and 2.4 billion have inadequate sanitation. Bringing water, sanitation and hygiene to the world’s poorest is the first step towards human dignity and a giant leap towards breaking the cycle of poverty.

The United Nations Millennium Development Goals call for halving the proportion of people living without sustainable access to safe drinking water by 2015. WSSCC and its partners lobbied for the inclusion of a sanitation target. At the 2002 World Summit for Sustainable Development, the global community rectified its oversight by adding the halving of the proportion of people living without adequate sanitation by 2015 to the Goals. WASH works to keep these promises front and centre in international, national and regional policies.

UNICEF and WSSCC launched WASH in Bonn, Germany in December 2001 at the International Conference on Fresh Water. Since then, several national campaigns have been launched in developing countries. UNICEF, an original member of the Council, actively supports this campaign as it strives to make safe water, adequate sanitation and hygiene a reality for all.

Why WASH?

Water, Sanitation and Hygiene for All—WASH—is a global advocacy campaign to put water, sanitation and hygiene services on the political map. The Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council (WSSCC) launched WASH in Bonn, Germany in December 2001 at the International Conference on Fresh Water. Since then, several national campaigns have been launched in developing countries. UNICEF, an original member of the Council, actively supports this campaign as it strives to make safe water, adequate sanitation and hygiene a reality for all.

Water, sanitation and hygiene are fundamental human rights and are essential for human dignity. Where there are schools with clean facilities, there are children who are able to learn, live more healthy, productive lives and can become agents of change.”

Gourisankar Ghosh, Executive Director, Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council
Why is WASH in Schools Linked to a Better Education for Girls?

Water, sanitation and hygiene are directly linked to another UN Millennium Development Goal—eliminating gender disparity in primary and secondary education. Far too many schools are woefully lacking hygienic conditions with broken, dirty and unsafe water supplies and toilets or latrines not adapted to children, especially girls. Some have no water or sanitation facilities at all. Without these basic necessities, girls will continue to be absent from many classrooms.

In order to jump-start the march towards gender parity in education, UNICEF has initiated ‘25 in 2005’ in 25 countries with large gender gaps, over a million girls not in school or where enrollment and gender equity are under threat by HIV/AIDS, civil conflict, disasters or emergencies. This initiative concentrates expertise and resources to reach girls who are not in school and works towards removing the barriers to their being in the classroom. Frequently, girls have to walk long distances to fetch water which also prevents them from attending school. Many also suffer from sanitation related diseases that severely hinder their ability to learn.

Why is WASH in Schools linked to ‘25 in 2005’? Because UNICEF and the WSSCC know that providing safe water, clean, separate sanitation facilities and hygiene education will keep girls in school. Educated girls are future mothers and leaders who will move their families and communities to greater heights.

United Nations Millennium Development Goals related to WASH in Schools:

- Reduce by half the proportion of people without sustainable access to drinking water by 2015.
- Reduce by half the proportion of people without access to adequate sanitation by 2015.
- Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005, and at all levels by 2015.

“Every primary school in the world should be equipped with separate sanitary facilities for boys and girls and have a source of clean and safe drinking water.”

Carol Bellamy, Executive Director, UNICEF
ASH in Schools builds on the success of earlier UNICEF school water, sanitation and hygiene education programmes. The School Sanitation and Hygiene Education (SSHE) project, a joint UNICEF/International Resource Centre initiative with funding from the Netherlands, began in February 2000 in Burkina Faso, Colombia, Nepal, Nicaragua, Viet Nam and Zambia. At the global, regional and national levels, the project advocates for school hygiene education and enabling environments to put skills into practice. With an emphasis on local participation, SSHE provides low-cost teaching aids, inexpensive, community developed technology and life-skills hygiene education to primary schools. UNICEF is now supporting water, sanitation and hygiene education at schools in more than 50 countries.

Like SSHE, WASH in Schools presses for rights-based, child-friendly schools with safe, hygienic environments. School water, sanitation and hygiene programmes improve the well being of children and their families, help keep girls in the classroom and pave a healthy way for future generations.

Children in Malawi are benefiting from school water, sanitation and hygiene education projects.

UNICEF works closely with the Malawi Ministry of Education, Science and Technology and the Basic Education Programme, constructing gender-friendly sanitation facilities and water supplies in schools.

The National Steering Committee for School Sanitation and Hygiene Promotion, established in 2002, advocates for girls’ education and improved sanitation conditions in schools. With community support, six latrines in six school projects were constructed. More schools received new water systems, providing safe water to almost 6,000 students and teachers.

Some 45 primary education advisors and nearly 500 teachers from five districts have been trained in child-centred, gender-sensitive educational methods, teaching students about the importance of good hygiene through hands-on life skills training.

UNICEF builds alliances regionally, nationally and locally, bringing water, sanitation and hygiene education to primary schools. In Malawi, hygienic learning environments have reduced child illnesses and opened school doors for both boys and girls.

“I make door to door visits every two weeks to see that the households are keeping their backyards clean, using their latrines well…eliminating pools of water where mosquitoes might breed.”

María Dolores Ocón, 16, Drinking Water and Sanitation Committee member in Nicaragua
WASH in Schools

- Working to change hygienic behaviours in families
- Active participation of children
- Synergy of clean water, sanitation and hygiene promotion
- Halving the proportion of people living without safe water and sanitation

Economic Benefits of WASH in Schools

- Reduces the health burden from waterborne diseases.
- Keeps girls in school.
- Improves children’s learning capacities.
- Influences families’ hygienic practices.
- Bolsters the health of future generations.
- Helps break the cycle of poverty.

Experience has shown that clean water alone leads only to minor health improvements. The essential factor is sound hygiene behaviour i.e. personal hygiene recognised as a core issue in its own right, with adequate sanitation and clean water as supporting components. While each of the three components alone has some health benefits, it is their combined effect which is far greater. Hygiene behaviour is virtually impossible without a source of safe water and safe means of disposal of human and other wastes.
