



Governance of Water, Sanitation and Hygiene in Schools



Sustaining and Scaling School Water, Sanitation,
and Hygiene Plus Community Impact



Executive Summary

This brief presents an assessment of evidence on the governance of school water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) as well as experiences from a school WASH action-research program called the Sustaining and Scaling School Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene Plus Community Impact (SWASH+) project in western Kenya.

Governance is a key factor for school WASH sustainability, impact and cost-effectiveness. SWASH+ experience also reflects this and suggests that a focus on increasing accountability and support for front-line service providers through governance improvements such as effective monitoring could yield better outcomes.

Unfortunately, although the evidence for the impact of improved governance on school WASH is strong, proven strategies for better governance are still limited. Further operational research is needed to identify incentives and promote support and accountability for improved school WASH services.

Background

It is estimated that less than 50 percent of primary schools in developing countries have sufficient water and that only a third provide sanitation (WASH in Schools Network, 2010). In facing this challenge, the focus of school WASH has shifted from simply installing hardware to learning how services can be maintained on a day-to-day basis and delivered in ways that improve outcomes such as health and educational attainment.



It is increasingly recognized that the cost effectiveness and impact of investments in WASH services will greatly depend on how long these investments can be sustained and the extent to which they are used. For example, the hand pump, which supplies half of the protected water in sub-Saharan Africa, has an estimated non-functioning rate of 30 percent, representing perhaps \$1.2 to \$1.5 billion in lost investment (Baumann, 2009).

Along with establishing and monitoring budgets, policies, the social normative environment, and supply chains of goods and services, evidence from both community and school WASH and from other sectors suggests that governance and management of school WASH services—including associated issues of accountability—is a core component of sustainability and impact. A study by Emory University and CARE showed a significant relationship between good community water-point governance and water-point functionality, an association that increased with the age of the water point (Herjati & Tollefson, 2011). A study in health clinics in Uganda found that increasing the level of accountability of front-line health workers to community members resulted in improved infant health (Björkman & Svensson, 2009).

For school WASH, the current state of governance in resource-challenged settings is likely to be inadequate on a number of fronts. Notably teachers, who are on the front-line, are inconsistent providers of services and managers of school funding. Local government officials are likely the second most important group. They are often responsible for providing support to teachers and ensuring that school-level actors are held accountable for outcomes. At the moment in Kenya, and we suspect elsewhere, local government officials are over-stretched and under-resourced to fully play these roles.

SWASH+ conducted a number of studies that begin to explore some of these issues. The results broadly fall into the categories of school leadership, decentralized accountability and community participation to increase accountability.



Governance Defined

“Governance” is a complex concept that can be explained and understood in many ways, but in its broadest sense, governance is the exercise of power in the public arena—the “rules of the game.” It’s about who is able to influence public decisions and who isn’t. Who creates or enforces these rules? Governance is the sum of the many ways individuals and institutions, public and private, manage their common affairs. It is a dynamic, political process through which decisions are made, conflicts are resolved, diverse interests are negotiated, and collective action is undertaken. The process can be influenced by formal written codes, informal but broadly accepted cultural norms, the charismatic leadership of an individual or individuals, the use of force, coercion or patronage—or, often, a combination of these.¹

Definition

For CARE, good governance is the effective, participatory, transparent, equitable and accountable management of public affairs guided by agreed procedures and principles, to achieve the goals of sustainable poverty reduction and social justice.

Experience and Evidence from SWASH+

Over the past five years, CARE, the Center for Global Safe Water at Emory University, and Water.org, through the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation-funded SWASH+ project, have worked to achieve sustainable, national-scale school WASH services in Kenya through applied research and advocacy. The project conducted two evaluations to uncover barriers to long-term sustainability of WASH services in schools: a two-and-a-half-year follow-up on 55 schools where a hygiene program was piloted and a three-year sustainability follow-up from the SWASH+ cluster randomized trial of 185 schools.

Partners also modeled the government of Kenya’s current system for disbursing funds directly to school accounts to see how well the system worked. Kenya is in some ways a unique case. The central government provides yearly budgets and grants directly to school bank accounts nationwide. These grants are meant to be responsive to their school-level planning efforts but with oversight by district government. This model presents a variety of governance challenges and questions. SWASH+ chose to study the existing process, recreate it, and observe where the process was delayed and where it broke down.

Finally, partners conducted two studies exploring mechanisms for increasing the accountability of front-line service providers and alternative ways of distributing responsibilities within the school governance structure.

School Leadership and Management

Even though SWASH+ and the 55 schools pilot intervention included both hardware improvements and behavior change communications, sustainability was generally poor, particularly with regard to provision of soap for hand washing and use of water treatment products. The 55 schools pilot identified school leadership and management and accountability among the important

¹ Adapted from the Global Commission on Governance

factors for sustainable services (Saboori et al., 2011). The SWASH+ sustainability follow-up found that long-term health impacts were likely to be determined less by infrastructure provided than by the ability of schools to keep soap in place and consistently treat water (Rheingans, 2011). In a follow-up trial conducted by SWASH+, where the challenges of budgeting and procurement of soap for hand washing were removed, at least a fourth of schools still did not provide soap, suggesting that governance and incentive systems for school administrators have a role to play in ensuring that children wash their hands (Saboori, 2012).

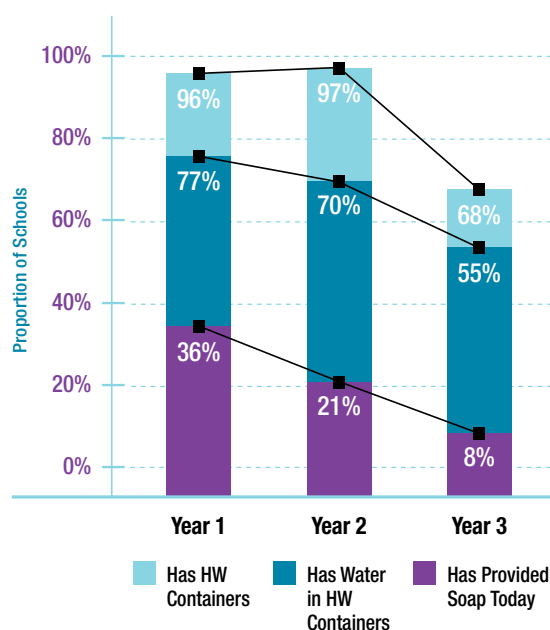
Lack of financial skills was also a major barrier for teachers trying to manage school WASH improvements while keeping up with other duties. Many were noted to be keeping inadequate or nonexistent financial records (Greene, 2011).

Decentralized Accountability

When examining the existing process of distributing funds to schools in Kenya, key findings were that, although the district government² has a large role to play in both supporting schools and in keeping them accountable for results, they are generally too overstretched to provide adequate support, have unclear and inadequate budgets for monitoring, do not tend to collaborate well across key line ministries and tend to play more of a policing than a supportive role.

Recognizing the limitations of district-centered monitoring, SWASH+ attempted to model a more decentralized approach where line ministries at the locational or zonal level would take responsibility for oversight and support. This approach yielded both promising and discouraging results. Although further decentralizing the system yielded greater follow-up and more frequent visits to schools to supervise infrastructure construction, officials did not provide meaningful guidance or constructive criticism for school planning efforts. They tended to approve whatever schools submitted. Given the lack of quality oversight, schools varied greatly in the amount of attention they gave to issues such as ensuring that operations and maintenance funds would be available. Absent much guidance and in the presence of a variety of needs, schools prioritized different aspects of WASH, with some choosing to construct new latrines while others purchased menstrual pads. While this is potentially positive in that the system allows responsiveness to individual needs, it is also likely that head teachers lack clear guidance in terms of what investments are the most crucial. Overall, the experience suggests that decentralizing accountability and support could be viable, but more effort is needed to build the capacity of decentralized decision makers.

Fig 1. Hand Washing



² Adapted 1 At the time of writing, the Kenyan government is in a constitutional transition. District governments will cease to exist while a new county system is established. It is unclear in the case of Kenya, where these support and accountability functions will reside in the future.

Community Participation for Increased Accountability

Qualitative research conducted by SWASH+ in Kenyan primary schools in 2011 suggested that a governance intervention focused on empowering parents from the community to monitor school WASH shows promise in increasing accountability, although sustaining community participation may be a challenge (Trinies & Dreibelbis, 2012). SWASH+ also conducted a trial comparing levels of service provision where schools were randomly assigned to receive various combinations of financing for operations costs and monitoring interventions including nominating parents to report to school committees and introducing pupil monitoring. The study found that not just schools receiving interventions but the control schools showed significant improvements in the level of service delivery (for example in soap provision, water treatment, menstrual pad purchase and latrine cleanliness). It is possible that even the periodic assessment of school facilities—in this case conducted in all schools as part of routine data collection by SWASH+—may result in improved school WASH outcomes (Alexander & Dreibelbis, 2012).



Conclusions and Recommendations

There is robust evidence from the Kenya case and elsewhere that governance and associated issues of management and accountability will be crucial to achieve effective and sustainable school WASH services. Without addressing governance, a key factor for sustainability, the result will be both lower impact and less cost-effective investments in school WASH.

Although SWASH+ studies have suggested some mechanisms to improve outcomes such as increased community participation, periodic facilities assessments, and decentralization of roles and responsibilities, governance solutions and the toolkit available to teachers, governments and other service providers is spotty and inadequate. A greater effort is needed to determine adjustments at the school- and local-government level to ensure that WASH services are available over the long term.

There remains a great need to test governance improvements in robust ways that form compelling evidence for future improvements. The need to develop solutions for good governance of school WASH services should push non-profits, funders and governments to think very differently about school WASH services, recognizing that infrastructure provision, even if paired with behavior change communications, will be inadequate to achieve strong and lasting results.

One area for specific exploration is the potential for further decentralization of the role of local government, particularly in ways that could empower parent-teacher associations or village officials to hold teachers more accountable and provide further budgetary support. In a more decentralized system like Kenya, such an approach shows promise, and it may have even greater utility in geographic regions like Central America where schools are more directly dependent on local communities for funding. However, these shifts will inevitably come with difficulty. While decentralization has the potential to overcome challenges in terms of overstretched government staff, policymakers and development partners should be cognizant of the fact that capacity at more decentralized levels will need to be built over time.

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