

STORIES FROM THE FIELD: EASTERN PROVINCE, ZAMBIA

Three head teachers describe the changes they have witnessed at their schools and surrounding communities since SPLASH installed new latrines, water points, and changed attitudes about hygiene.

SPLASH is a USAID/ Zambia-supported WASHplus activity, working in 370 government and community schools in Zambia's Eastern Province promoting learner achievement through sanitation and hygiene.

School Leaders Witness Increased Attendance and Enrollment at Schools with Improved Sanitation Infrastructure

Throughout the SPLASH districts, head teachers repeat the observation that attendance improves and enrollment increases when SPLASH installs new water points, toilets, and washrooms. Many have the figures on their office walls showing enrollment jumps, others have taken note and share their stories, some of which are below. While these so far are anecdotes, the repetition makes the story very compelling. The SPLASH School Outcome Study will soon quantify these jumps.

Dreams Do Come True!

"When I came to Mkanda Mateyo Primary School in Chipata District as head teacher, there were 175 students (105 boys and 70 girls) and no latrines or running water," noted Patrick Phiri. But that changed quickly when the Schools Promoting Learning Achievement through Sanitation and Hygiene activity, better known as SPLASH, began constructing ventilated improved latrines and drilled a borehole. The entire community—parents, students, and teachers—were excited. Funded by USAID, the SPLASH activity supports the provision of improved drinking water and sanitation facilities in rural and peri-urban schools, promotes good hygiene practices, and strengthens local capacity for maintenance of school WASH facilities.

Not long after the construction of the latrines and installation of a water tank, enrollment at the Mkanda Mateyo Primary School increased to 382 students (185 girls and 197 boys) with a substantial increase in the number of girls (more than 2.5 times). "It is obvious to me—water and sanitation facilities are necessary to support children going to school, because now the students and the teachers have clean drinking water as well as clean toilets," said Mr. Phiri.

Mkanda Mateyo is proof that running water and sanitation facilities increase overall enrollment. Further, it is evidence of the importance of latrines for sustaining the attendance of girls, who many times have no choice but to stay away from school during their menstrual periods because of inadequate basic sanitation facilities at school.

"No more collecting water from shallow wells and no more compromised water quality. SPLASH has made a huge difference in our lives," Mr. Phiri continued. "Indeed, I overheard pupils saying that they would rather learn in the newly constructed latrines than in the classrooms, which have no proper floors!"



Adamson Sakala stands next to a pupil washing his hands at a tap installed by the USAID/ SPLASH activity at Chiparamba Primary School.

Chiparamba Gets a Sanitation and Hygiene Facelift

Adamson Sakala has been head teacher at Chiparamba Primary School in Zambia's Chipata District in Eastern Province for the last three years. During this time, USAID's SPLASH activity began installing sanitation and hygiene facilities in the school—toilets, washrooms for girls, boreholes, and drinking water stations—with the goal of improving pupils' academic performance.

Mr. Sakala points out that when he arrived, the school had only makeshift toilets with no doors. Not surprisingly, students resorted to using the bush or staying away from school altogether. And during the rainy season, the school had many cases of diarrheal disease related to open defecation.

When SPLASH built toilets and washrooms and drilled boreholes that brought water to the school, reported absenteeism due to diarrheal diseases reduced drastically. In addition to ensuring access to hardware (i.e., toilets, boreholes, latrines, etc.), SPLASH also promoted the benefits of practicing good hygiene at school and at home (using behavior change communication, community participation, and social mobilization) with the goal of improving the health of families across the greater community.

Mr. Sakala noted, "Enrollment has increased and pupils now have proper sanitation facilities. They enjoy being at school."

SPLASH activities have extended to the surrounding villages through the school's WASH (water, sanitation, and hygiene) Committee and to the students themselves when they bring home the lessons learned at school. The community has built toilets and put tippy taps in their homes. The training of teachers in WASH practices is ensuring that other schools, students, and communities will benefit as some teachers move on and spread WASH information and activities to those schools.

Equally important, the SPLASH activity has instilled an accepted routine for requests by the WASH Committee for toilet tissue contributions from parents. That was not the case before this WASH sensitization was done. "There is now a culture of ownership of the SPLASH facilities by the school and community," said Mr. Sakala.

Working Toward Hygiene and Change

Deputy Head Teacher of Chisitu Primary School, Chongo Mwale, is emphatic, "I have noticed a tremendous improvement in sanitation and hygiene within the school, which has reduced absenteeism and improved the enrollment levels, when compared to before the SPLASH activity came to the school." The school is in Chipata District in Zambia's Eastern Province. Enrollment before SPLASH was 1,000, but after SPLASH interventions, enrollment increased to 1,152, which Mr. Mwale said was a direct result of the SPLASH improvements.

"Before SPLASH, the school and the surrounding villages had bad hygiene practices," said Mr. Mwale. To begin to address this problem, USAID/SPLASH initiated sensitization meetings between the school and the village headmen of 22 surrounding villages, requesting that each village appoint an individual as a focal point for issues concerning hygiene and sanitation.

Following meetings with SPLASH on the link between the lack of support for school-based menstrual hygiene management (MHM) and girls' class attendance, the school also developed an MHM strategy to provide the necessary facilities and products for girls to safely manage their periods while at school. In addition to washrooms constructed by SPLASH, the school appointed a committee of 12 women and five female students to sew reusable menstrual pads. The school eventually hired a permanent tailor to produce the reusable pads at a faster rate, helping both the school and a local entrepreneur.

SPLASH also helped to familiarize students with how to use the new toilets and the water taps they had installed. These sensitization lessons supported the students in adapting their behaviors and forming new habits around the new technologies. Also critical was a well thought out implementation plan to ensure that handwashing with soap and clean water became the norm for the pupils at the school. Students are required to bring toilet tissue and soap to the school; meanwhile the school buys the supplies and equipment for cleaning the toilets.

"We appreciate the project for coming to Chisitu and making a difference at our school" said Mr. Mwale.

About WASHplus

The WASHplus project supports healthy households and communities by creating and delivering interventions that lead to improvements in water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) and household air pollution (HAP). This multi-year project (2010-2016) was made possible with support from the American people delivered through the U.S. Agency for International Development's (USAID) Bureau for Global Health and led by FHI 360 in partnership with CARE and Winrock International. The project uses at-scale programming approaches to reduce diarrheal diseases and acute respiratory infections, the two top killers of children under age 5 globally.

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