

What is the WASH in Schools Initiative?

WASH in Schools is an international campaign to provide clean drinking water, basic sanitation facilities and hygiene education to schools in the developing world.

Launched in 2008 by a broad coalition of NGOs, foundations, corporations and schools, the campaign aims to assist the 50% of schools in the developing world that lack access to these essential services.

The driving force behind the WASH (water, sanitation, hygiene) initiative is the recognition that half of the world's schools lack safe water and even more cannot provide a sanitary latrine. These deficiencies limit overall student attendance by fostering unhealthy environments and high levels of infectious diseases. Because of a lack of privacy and gender-separate latrines, adolescent girls are especially reluctant to stay in school.

Three critical interventions make up the WASH in Schools approach. The first is the provision of safe drinking water, which may require some combination of water source



School children in Vista Hermosa, Guatemala. Photo: Kim Burgo

protection, water pumping, water delivery and storage systems, and water treatment. Projects may include either construction or rehabilitation of a well, borehole, protected spring or rooftop rainfall catchment.

The second intervention is the provision of adequate sanitation, which essentially means a clean, safe and culturally appropriate means of disposing of human wastes. In most countries, this entails providing a sanitary latrine and some facility for handwashing.

Lastly, school children are taught proper water handling and sanitation behaviors. Both knowledge of WASH principles and behavior change in using and caring for WASH facilities are major factors in this intervention.

What is the CRS program for WASH in Schools?

CRS currently is either implementing or actively planning programs for WASH services in schools in some 20 countries in sub-Saharan Africa, Asia and Latin America. As in the case of other development interventions, CRS promotes WASH services through community involvement, local decision-making, and partnering with national organizations, local government, communities and school councils.



CRS provided a well so that students would have clean water to drink at the Rosla Village School in Mané County, Burkina Faso. Photo: Peter Kaizer.

Ongoing WASH in Schools activities include CRS participation in Millennium Water Alliance (MWA) programs in Honduras and Guatemala. Over the 2010 fiscal year, CRS will implement WASH projects at 55 schools in Guatemala and Nicaragua. CRS is also preparing to undertake projects in up to 15 high priority countries funded by the U.S. Department of State.

The implementation of WASH activities at schools involves both new construction and rehabilitation of existing infrastructural facilities, such as water sources, connections to community water systems, and construction of storage tanks, drinking water taps, latrines and handwashing points. Moreover, all CRS school programs include educational and promotional components, such as hygiene education, proper use and maintenance of school systems, and encouragement of behavior change. Both students and teachers are targeted in CRS WASH in school projects.

CRS is also in the process of developing new strategies to help its country offices implement programs for the integration of the water and education sectors. One key activity is the roll-out of workshops that outline how to plan WASH in Schools programs. Related efforts include the planning of holistic approaches to school health involving school policies, skills-based education, and WASH improvements.



A girl in Emnitslem, Eritrea, gathers water from an open well. This time-consuming activity often prevents girls from attending school. Photo: David Snyder.

Because of its long tradition of working with local communities and its extensive experience in both the water and education sectors, CRS has much to contribute to the international campaign to promote, plan and implement a WASH-for-Schools Initiative. As part of its commitment to this campaign, CRS recently submitted proposals for WASH in Schools for South Africa, Ghana, Haiti and Kenya.

Looking ahead

Because of growing awareness of the need for WASH services, schools are being increasingly highlighted by the international community as a target for improved water and sanitation. CRS supports the international campaign of WASH for Schools and works with a diverse group of implementing and donor partners to promote it. Nevertheless, with a few notable exceptions, the campaign remains relatively unknown to the general public because of a lack of major commitment on the part of donors, NGOs and the U.S. Government.

CRS will continue to expand its WASH in Schools programs through integrated inputs of infrastructure construction, hygiene education and promotion activities. It is expected that a large part of these efforts will be carried out in cooperation with coalitions and partnerships. This will assist CRS to achieve greater outreach and enhance public awareness of the progress towards a world in which schools have safe drinking water, appropriate sanitation facilities and a healthy environment for all students.