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**DELIVERING WATER, SANITATION AND HYGIENE SERVICES
IN AN UNCERTAIN ENVIRONMENT**

**Making a SPLASH for WASH in schools
in Zambia**

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Zambia has a burgeoning primary school population, but its schools do not provide safe drinking water or adequate sanitation facilities that address the special needs of disabled children and girls entering puberty. USAID/Zambia has a long commitment to Zambia's education sector. In 2011, it invested in a five-year program called SPLASH (Schools Promoting Learning Achievement through Sanitation and Hygiene) to address the critical WASH needs in schools in four districts of Eastern Province. The comprehensive approach includes construction or rehabilitation of water points and toilets; hygiene education for pupils and training for teachers; sustainability through Ministry of Education (MOE) systems strengthening including EMIS and budget line items; and steady advocacy for institutionalizing WASH within the MOE. In spite of challenges related to geography and bureaucracy, SPLASH has advanced the visibility of school WASH through installations, advocacy, and partnering events that enlist everyone's contribution to making WASH in schools a reality.

Introduction: Why school WASH is needed in the Zambia context

In Zambia, water and sanitation facilities in schools fall well below accepted standards. According to the MOE, approximately 16 percent of the 8,600 basic schools do not have water systems in place while over 400 schools do not have any toilets (2008 EMIS data). Only 37 percent of schools have permanent toilet facilities, while 7 percent have none at all. Only one in five schools meet the accepted pupil to latrine ratio of 40 male learners to one toilet, and less than one in 10 schools meet the required 25:1 female ratio (2008 EMIS data). On average the number of pupils using an improved toilet stands at 70:1 while the ratio per pupil for inadequate sanitation is 35:1, which is beyond the standard ratio of 20:1. While Zambia has increased access to schooling for learners in line with Millennium Development Goals, school quality cannot be improved until adequate water and sanitation facilities are constructed to accommodate the large influx of new learners. Thus, more than 1 million young learners in Zambia, out of nearly 3.5 million, are affected by this deficit in water and sanitation facilities.

SPLASH overview

SPLASH (Schools Promoting Learning Achievement through Sanitation and Hygiene) is a five-year (2011–2016) project funded by USAID/Zambia that aims to reach more than 600 primary schools serving 211,200 pupils in four districts of Eastern Province, Zambia. SPLASH is implemented by WASHplus, a USAID global environmental health project. SPLASH works within the Ministry of Education, Science, Vocational Training and Early Education (MESVTEE) and other line ministries such as the Ministry of Local Government and Housing (MLGH) and Ministry of Health (MOH).

SPLASH's overall objective is to improve health, learning, and educational performance of school children and their teachers by improving sustainable access to safe water and adequate sanitation, and by adopting better hygiene and health practices in targeted schools and communities.

The recently completed SPLASH baseline survey of 564 schools in Eastern Province revealed that while 70 percent of schools have access to water supply, only 13 percent treat their drinking water. The

average ratio of pupil to toilet for girls is 207:1, and only 28 percent of toilets had hand washing facilities—virtually all without soap.

SPLASH operates on the principle that the provision of infrastructure (hardware) will only be effective if the software (training, governance, advocacy, hygiene behavior improvement and change) is fully functional and has equal if not greater weight than hardware. This principle is visible in the SPLASH five key task areas:

1. Install and rehabilitate improved WASH infrastructure in schools
2. Improve hygiene behaviors and health of learners, teachers, and their communities
3. Strengthen local governance and coordination of WASH in schools through the involvement of multiple stakeholders
4. Engage those who set policies at the national, provincial, and district levels to support WASH in schools
5. Strengthen the capacity of small-scale service providers and the private sector to deliver WASH goods and services on a sustainable basis

SPLASH is a program bridging the education and WASH sectors and thus must speak both “languages.” Decision makers in the education sector must be convinced that WASH is essential to its core business, therefore, SPLASH focuses on advocacy for institutionalizing school WASH within the ministry.

On the ground SPLASH carries out a program within the MOE of creating “WASH-friendly” schools—schools where the PTAs, teachers, and pupils participate in a school-led total sanitation process that culminates in the development of a schoolwide action plan for improving facilities and practices such as hand washing and open defecation. Each district establishes its own criteria for WASH friendliness and assesses schools. WASH-friendly schools receive recognition, certification, and an award. SPLASH provides support to improve WASH infrastructure and build capacity at all levels.

While they are convinced that WASH is necessary for improved learning outcomes, SPLASH and its Government of the Republic of Zambia (GRZ) partners recognize that no project or ministry can achieve a full blown school WASH program on its own. Therefore, SPLASH is committed to promoting and fostering partnerships with the private sector, NGOs, other donors, and international organizations that will achieve the vision of children going to school to learn in safe and hygienic environments.

Achievements

Although relatively young, SPLASH with its partners is already registering a number of achievements. Among these:

In SPLASH’s first year, more than 70,000 pupils and teachers gained access to improved sanitation facilities and more than 50,000 gained access to improved water supply, both through rehabilitation of existing but dilapidated facilities or through new construction.

SPLASH hosted a provincewide school WASH Indaba—a multi-stakeholder strategic planning meeting that yielded a plan to achieve GRZ targets by 2015. One result of this Indaba was the creation of an advisory group of private sector partners to assist SPLASH and the MOE in the creation of public-private partnerships to support school WASH efforts. Following the provincewide event, each district hosted mini-Indabas to deepen and adjust the plans of action and bring in more local partners.

SPLASH carried out a paperless baseline survey using Samsung tablets. These tablets and the software system will be used for district and school-based routine monitoring of progress toward WASH targets, for connecting local data to the ministry’s education management information system (EMIS), and for local and national decision making and annual planning for school WASH improvements.

SPLASH introduced the WASH-Friendly Schools program, which had been developed and tried in neighboring countries, and adapted the materials and activities to meet local standards and priorities.

As part of its advocacy strategy, SPLASH has partnered with WaterAid for the development of a school WASH equity and inclusion policy, strategy, and program support activity aimed at girls and children with disabilities. In keeping with the gender focus of its activities, SPLASH and key partners such as UNICEF and the MOE are carrying out formative research for the development of a strong menstrual hygiene component. The baseline revealed that only 4 percent of surveyed schools provided any kind of materials for menstrual hygiene management.

Challenges

Working across two distinct sectors is challenge number one. This includes the challenge of needing to respond to outcome indicators for both sectors, namely: improved access to WASH facilities and services

and improved learning among pupils. SPLASH measures proxy indicators to learning improvement such as teacher/pupil contact time and teacher/pupil absenteeism rates.

WASH is not (yet) the priority of the MOE, and responsibility shifts among different agencies because it lacks a clear institutional home. SPLASH engages in a steady multilevel advocacy strategy to make the case for WASH and its link to success in school and in keeping girls from dropping out. SPLASH and its partners also create opportunities for government agencies with competing or overlapping spheres of influence to meet and sort out roles and responsibilities.

Tension exists between the construction/infrastructure side and the “software” capacity building, hygiene promotion, operations and maintenance systems strengthening. The immediate visibility of facilities leads to a natural preference to focus on the construction; the pressure to report numbers of installations pushes the logistically complicated construction agenda. The same people who manage this in the MOE are also responsible for the correct use and sustainability of the facilities. It is a challenge to accord as much time and effort to software as hardware.

Another challenge of including WASH in the education sector is that personnel all tend to be teachers or ex-teachers, including the buildings officers, and therefore the MESVTEE is short of engineer skill sets. Additionally, contract management skills are lacking in the MOE, and the focus is only on the procurement process. Changing the way government does business is a challenge.

Implementation challenges include huge distances that people must travel to reach outlying schools with drill rigs and hygiene education programs for PTAs, teachers, and pupils.

Emerging lessons

Lessons from the first year are starting to emerge and sharpen. They will be addressed head-on as SPLASH implementation moves forward.

1. It is easier to build GRZ partner capacity and foster the process of institutionalizing when the SPLASH teams are embedded in the MESVTEE systems and offices. That way contact is frequent and informal, facilitating advocacy.
2. School attendance (especially for girls) improves in schools where SPLASH has provided improved sanitation facilities.
3. Building officers’—mostly seconded teachers—capacity is built as they work with district level SPLASH engineers.
4. SPLASH needs to participate in the Government of Zambia’s annual work planning and budgeting process in order for institutional and sustainability objectives to be realized.



Photograph 1. WEDC – SPLASH staff and school head teacher celebrate new latrines for girls



Photograph 2. WEDC – provincewide Indaba participants imagine a future where all schools are “WASH-friendly.”

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