

The Importance of Water Sanitation in Rural El Salvador: Mi Escuela Saludable SWASH+



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Background:

The program, *Mi Escuela Saludable SWASH+* is a program funded by IDB, the Coca-Cola Foundation, Global Water Challenge, UNICEF, and ITT. (IDB, 2013) It is implemented by CARE, an NGO, in El Salvador and its partners with the families in the community, and the Ministries of Education, Health, Water, Families, and Rural Development of El Salvador. The program has been implemented since 2008 and will end in 2015. It targets rural schools in El Salvador to teach the children basic hygiene skills and help improve their latrines and hand washing skills. Children are trained by their teachers and the teachers are trained by parents from the Health Ministry and the CARE staff. The training consists of teaching the teachers the basics of hand washing, appropriate times for washing (before preparing food, after changing diapers, after using the bathroom, before eating, and after touching livestock/animals). Some participants are trained to do basic maintenance on the latrines. As of December 2011, the program had targeted 40 schools, mostly in the Chalatenango Department. The program's main goal is to improve the quality of life in families in Central America by advocating and direct interventions for improvement of sanitary conditions in schools.



NGOs that are implementing the program in Central America.

Methods:

A standard questionnaire was provided by the manager of the World Water Corps (WWC) for both the baseline and monitoring assignments for all *Mi Escuela Saludable SWASH+* programs. WWC teams, accompanied by a local staff member (in El Salvador's case, CARE) administered the questionnaires, which included observation of the water and sanitation installations and interviews with the school staff. The data contained during the 2011 mission, along with the baseline and monitoring data collected in 2008, 2009, and 2010, was used to evaluate the *SWASH+* program. Due to the large number of schools in the program (more than 300), it was not possible to visit all schools. Schools visited were selected randomly by the WWC logistics coordinator.

Monitoring was based on the following four core indicators:

1. Hygiene Behavior
2. Sanitation
3. Water Supply
4. Sustainability



Results:

Hygiene Behavior:

All school surveyed had access to water for hand-washing and 67% of the schools had soap in their sinks. Supplies were kept in the classroom to prevent overuse and theft. Many schools have a hard time restocking due to budget cuts. Teachers put a strong emphasis on hygiene education mentioning it to their students on a daily basis. Of the students interviewed, all of them were able to name 3 of the 5 hand washing times in the *SWASH+* curriculum.

Water Supply:

Out of the 15 schools assessed, 3 did not have running water available on that day, 2 of the schools rainwater catchment systems were empty due to the lack of rain, and the rest of the schools met the government water quantity standards (40 ltr/day/student). It was noted that 8 professors/directors indicated that there was insufficient water supply throughout the year.



Sanitation:

All of the latrines appeared to be in good use and functional. Majority of the schools have ventilated latrines and flush toilets. Four of the schools reported clogging in their urinals, most likely due to vandalism and one school had a piece of roof missing from one of the latrines. 10 of the 15 schools met government standards of latrine/pupil ratio.



Sustainability:

Schools have funding for minor maintenance issues with the water system, as long as the cost is below \$500. If the repair exceeds the amount, the school must file a claim with the Ministry of Education, and the approval depends on them. Water system maintenance and operation costs are covered using government funds given semiannually. With school funding being cut 10% due to government cutbacks, when school supplies are low, they take precedent over buying toilet paper or soap. Students are usually asked to bring supplies from their house. According to the program, it is the duty of the school staff, parents, and Ministry of Health to continue the learning process of hygiene skills with the students.

Conclusion:

Mi Escuela Saludable SWASH+, implemented in El Salvador by CARE, is a program whose objective is to teach students in school hygienic skills and increase their access to clean sustainable water. The communities *SWASH+* is implemented in are communities that suffer from social determinants of health, like the lack of access to clean water and the lack of health education. *SWASH+* is implemented to help the community have better access to clean water but it also helps debunk false ideas about purifying methods and teaches correct purification methods. The program has the ability to impact many communities if brought to a national scale. However before that can happen, changes would have to be made to the program's curriculum. *SWASH+* can be scaled up if it changes its curriculum to include the officials of the Ministry of Health (government officials) and teach them about the policies that already exist to help with sanitation in school. For example, there already exist regulatory policies that require schools to have a sanitary license and allows government health officials to shut down schools who are not in compliance but many health officials are not aware of this policy. Developing more cost-efficient and reliable water systems so schools are not dependent on the government each time a water system breaks down would be a key factor in the programs expansion. In addition, the program could create stronger relationships with government ministries (health and education) to allow for greater acceptance and impact and to expand to all schools in the country.

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