Celebrating 13 years of working with national government for lasting water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) in schools in Kenya

Summary Points

- **School Water, Sanitation and Hygiene plus Community Impact (SWASH+)** is focused on finding sustainable and scalable solutions for school WASH in Kenya.

- Together, we have created change at a national level, by influencing increased budgetary allocations for schools through demonstrating the importance of WASH for students.

- SWASH+ is a model project demonstrating how integration, learning and advocacy enables change on a larger scale.

**SWASH+ Objectives:** Operating since September 2006, SWASH+ is an action-research and advocacy project focusing on increasing the scale, impact, and sustainability of school WASH interventions in Kenya. Funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the project is a partnership of CARE, Emory University and the Government of Kenya, with other partners involved at various stages. The objectives of SWASH+ included:

- **Identify, develop, and test innovative approaches** to school- and community-based WASH interventions that promote sustainability and scalability.

- **Provide and test an integrated WASH program** in schools and communities that maximizes impact, equity, sustainability, and cost-effectiveness.

- **Positively influence Kenyan government investments** in school WASH by leveraging learning on sustainable, scalable, and effective approaches.
What we did
The SWASH+ project arose from a need to find answers to persistent questions related to WASH in schools. Over the past 13 years, we have conducted a series of rigorous quantitative and qualitative studies in 650 schools across seven Kenyan counties.

Research topics on schools included:
- Anal cleansing practices
- Diffusion of behaviours to homes
- Impact on students (absenteeism and health)
- Innovations (soapy water, girls’ urinals, washrooms)
- Menstrual management needs
- Monitoring by parents, pupils, school leadership
- Private sector partnerships
- Rainwater harvesting
- Sustainability of school WASH (hardware, software)
- WASH financing and life cycle costing
- WASH knowledge, attitudes and practices in schools and communities

What we found
SWASH+ research revealed that school WASH is very important and more complex than generally understood. SWASH+ partners identified a variety of gaps in typical interventions including menstrual management, latrine maintenance, budgeting, monitoring and in the overall enabling environment for school WASH. Over 20 publications from SWASH+ have help demonstrate the tremendous importance of school WASH.

What we achieved
This lasting partnership has helped improve the quality of life and learning environment for school children across Kenya. We’ve learned that evidence-based advocacy works! Together we have increased school WASH funding, enabled the adoption of WASH curriculum and materials, developed a school WASH sustainability charter, increased attention for menstrual hygiene and developed tools for school stakeholders to use in procuring private sector sanitation services, and in budgeting for WASH.

SWASH+ demonstrates how learning and advocacy enables change on a larger scale.