PUBLIC FINANCE for WASH

FINANCE BRIEF
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07

# EVIDENCE INTO POLICY: HOW RESEARCH HAS INFLUENCED KENYAN GOVERNMENT BUDGETS FOR SCHOOL WASH

**The SWASH+ research-and-advocacy project started in 2006, and has aimed to provide evidence to the Kenyan government around WASH for schools. With a strong research-into-policy focus, and with deep government commitment from the start, this project has mobilised substantial increases in central government finance for WASH in schools. How did they do it?**

## BACKGROUND

The Government of Kenya (GoK) is deeply committed to health in schools, with a National School Health Strategy developed and very actively implemented by the Ministry of Education, Science & Technology and the Ministry of Public Health & Sanitation. Ten years ago GoK technical specialists were aware that WASH services in public schools were substandard or lacking altogether, but given other urgent needs they did not see WASH as a priority. SWASH+ was set up in response to this. The project was funded mainly by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and implementation was led by Emory University as lead research partner, CARE as supporting NGO, and GoK as active partner.[a]

## THE SWASH+ PROJECT: AIMS

SWASH+ (Phase I 2006–2012, Phase II 2012–2015) is a research-and-advocacy project focused on increasing the scale, impact and sustainability of school WASH interventions in Kenya. In Phase I, the project conducted WASH impact evaluations in 185 rural primary schools in Kisumu District, along with several sub-studies on topics such as menstrual hygiene management, anal cleansing, and life-cycle costs.[1] In Phase II the project is implementing new studies in three counties (Nyeri, Kisumu and Kilifi), along with Nairobi City, to develop solutions for school WASH related to governance, costs, data management and private sector service provision. From the outset, providing evidence to support Kenyan government policy, and advocating for increased government finance commitments, were key aims.

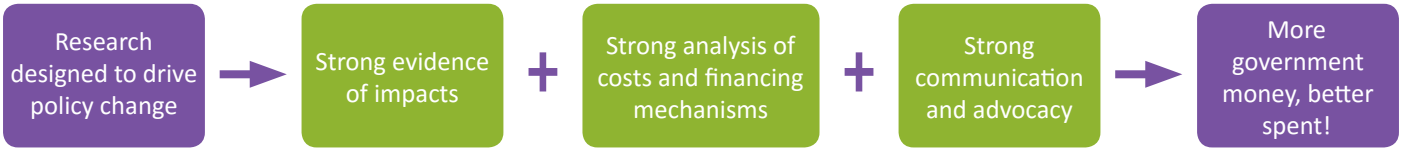
## THE SWASH+ PROJECT: KEY COMPONENTS

Initial studies during Phase I collated information on the WASH needs of rural primary schools. It was immediately apparent that schools tended not to maintain existing infrastructure, and that money was often not available and/or not allocated to important consumables (like soap, cleaning materials, water treatment chemicals, and sanitary pads). Central government annual grants to schools ("capitation grants") were grossly inadequate to cover schools' needs.

Responding to this, SWASH+ has carried out life-cycle cost (LCC) research, starting in Phase I and undertaken more robustly in Phase II. Detailed LCC analyses in 89 schools involved identifying and categorising the investments needed over a 10-year period, under-scoring the importance of funding for recurrent costs including O&M and consumables.

The project also carried out impact evaluations, using randomised controlled trial (RCT) designs, showing diverse benefits of improved WASH, including reduced diarrhoea prevalence, reduced helminth infection, and a 58% reduction in girls' absenteeism: see the SWASH+ website for more details.[2]

This research has provided the basis for reporting to the government around benefits of an increase in the WASH component of the capitation grant, including detailed recommendations around how this money might be most effectively spent.



## IMPACTS ON GOVERNMENT FINANCE

- In 2011, the Kenyan government doubled funding for school WASH, from around US$ 420,000 to around US$ 840,000 per year: this is for the country's 18,000 primary schools, so only about $50 per school per year, but nonetheless a substantial contribution to costs.
- The SWASH+ findings also helped bring national attention to the menstrual hygiene needs of school-aged girls, resulting in a government allocation of US$ 3.4 million for sanitary pads for school girls in 2012. One driver of this was an Op Ed piece in a national newspaper on menstrual hygiene and psychosocial stress.
- In 2014, school capitation grants increased by 33% from KShs 1,020 (about US$ 9.70) to KShs 1,356 (about US$ 12.80) per child per year. Within this, the WASH-related allocation increased by 64%, from KShs 137 to KShs 225: this covers 98% of life-cycle costs for existing school WASH systems and 28% of life-cycle costs for new systems. The new KShs 225 also includes specific allocations for environmental sanitation (KShs 50) and sanitary towels (KShs 15) that did not exist before. These changes appear to have been strongly influenced by the project's demonstration of the impacts of WASH on girls' school attendance, and possibly by its evidence-based advocacy for ring-fencing for O&M and consumables.

## WHAT CONTRIBUTED TO THIS SUCCESS?

- GoK was already committed to improving school WASH, and this research was in close liaison with GoK from the outset. Committed individuals were also key: for example, the Director of Basic Education was a strong champion.
- Research focused on creating evidence to support policy: particularly important was the RCT-based evidence around girls' school attendance, and the detailed analysis of life-cycle costs and how best to target funds to meet those costs. One of the project staff notes that "there is something galvanising about being able to quantify the problem and to provide concrete recommendations on how to address it over the long term".
- The project took advocacy and policy influence very seriously: achieving policy change was an integral aim, not an after-thought. In Phase I, for example, the CARE and Emory teams created regular communications packages to support quarterly meetings with government officials at national and provincial level. From 2009, a skilled Kenyan policy adviser was brought on board, with good understanding of policy and good access to ministries. Over time, the relationship with government has evolved, so that GoK is now less a traditional advocacy "target" and more a learning partner.
- There was a strong focus on translating research findings into useful guidance, both technical guidance to national and county governments on how best to allocate funds, and practical guidance on WASH for schools themselves.

## WIDER LESSONS FOR RESEARCH DESIGNED TO DRIVE PUBLIC FINANCE

1. **Research-into-policy work needs time!** SWASH+ has been running now for 9 years. A 3-year project would likely have achieved little.
2. **Advocacy is as important as research!** SWASH+ has treated policy influence as centrally important: this is a research-and-advocacy project, not merely a research project with a "dissemination" component.
3. **Existing institutional commitment is key!** SWASH+ built on strong government commitment and appetite for change.
4. **Decision-makers listen to good evidence!** SWASH+ not only generated strong scientific evidence of impacts, but also carried out very detailed analysis of costings and financing mechanisms.

We consider this to be an excellent example of how research can drive increased government expenditure on equitable WASH, and increased effectiveness of that expenditure. How can we learn from the experience of SWASH+, focused on a very specific context, to create research-and-advocacy projects that have wider impacts on government spending? Could research of this type help drive national investment in more challenging spheres like slum sanitation?

a Other key partners at different phases in the project have been Georgetown University, Great Lakes University (Kisumu), Water.org, and Global Water Challenge (co-funder), and of course Ministry officials and the schools themselves.

1 "About SWASH+" http://www.washinschools.info/page/1864

2 "SWASH+ Top 10 Research Findings" http://www.washinschools.info/page/1390

**PUBLIC FINANCE for WASH**

The Public Finance for WASH initiative is grounded on two principles: i) that sustainable universal provision of high-quality water and sanitation services is fundamentally dependent on progressive domestic taxation systems, and that consequently ii) WASH-sector donors, donor-funded NGOs and in-country actors need to pay greater attention to ensuring that ODA is delivered in ways which support the development of effective and equitable domestic public finance systems.

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WSUP Water & Sanitation for the Urban Poor
IRC Supporting water sanitation and hygiene services for life
trémolet consulting infrastructure | economics | policy