

water + = Girls in School



What is water +

Water+ is about linking water to other interventions so that we can make the biggest impact possible. It is about sanitation and hygiene, but also about water for agriculture, for livelihoods, for nutrition, for keeping girls in schools, for helping women to be leaders and more. Water+ helps us achieve more with less and respond to the complex, inter-related needs of the people we work with.

There are many factors to getting girls to attend, stay in and succeed in school, such as the cost and quality of the education and whether cultural norms support educating girls rather than forcing them to marry young. But an often overlooked factor is the status of water, sanitation and hygiene services in the school. In fact, a randomized controlled trial conducted by CARE, Emory University and other partners through the SWASH+ Project (Freeman et al., 2012) showed an up to 58 percent decrease in girls' absenteeism (controlling for age and grade) when treated drinking water, soap and hygiene promotion activities were introduced.

This reduction translates into six fewer days of absence per girl each year—a number that can conceivably have important educational impacts. No corresponding effect on absenteeism was found on boys, though SWASH+ and other studies have documented other school WASH benefits for pupils of both genders, including reductions in diarrheal disease and intestinal worm infections.

Qualitative research findings from the same project, and from several other studies, also point to the psycho-social stress endured by menstruating girls when there are nonexistent or substandard sanitary facilities to change, wash and dispose of sanitary towels and products (McMahon et al., 2011). This can lead many girls to skip school during menstruation or drop out altogether.

The message is clear—keeping girls in school and thriving involves paying attention to school WASH—for the good of both girls and boys. Thankfully, school WASH is relatively cost effective. For example, a life cycle cost study conducted in Kenya tallied a comprehensive cost of 2.24 USD (228 KSH) per child per year to maintain existing school WASH services where there was existing infrastructure and 7.85 USD (798 KSH) when upfront infrastructure costs needed to be included (Alexander et al., 2015).

Water+ therefore helps keep girls in school so that they can reach their full potential and build successful lives.