



Lessons Learned from SWASH+ Phase I

A Synthesis of Interviews from Four US-Based staff from Emory University and CARE¹

Introduction

The purpose of the School Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene Plus Community Impact (SWASH+) project was to answer the question “What is the impact of a school-based water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) intervention on pupil absence, helminth infection, and diarrhea?” However, this project also focused on how to sustain and scale school WASH interventions. Specifically, SWASH+ aimed to develop and test a scalable model for school WASH, and to influence the Kenyan government to adopt proven interventions.

Findings gathered over the course of the multi-year project show that lack of sustainability in school WASH interventions can strongly limit impact. Four SWASH+ staff reflected on their impressions of the project’s evolution with regard to sustainability in three areas: **research**, **advocacy**, and **management and coordination**.

Research Lessons

Since there has been little evidence in the past to link school WASH with proven impacts, SWASH+ included a research component in its initial phase as a way to “prove that school WASH could actually accomplish something.”

In the beginning, there was conflict between the high expectations of the research goals and service delivery in the field. The nature of the randomized control trial research design resulted in some tension and intervention infidelity.

However, in other aspects, SWASH+ research was adaptive and influential. The data collection process led to new sub-questions about governance, accountability, menstrual hygiene management, and anal cleansing, which the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the SWASH+ donor, was flexible in exploring. Collaboration with CARE Kenya staff was also key to understanding the meaning of collected data.

Advocacy Lessons

During the research phase, SWASH+ staff realized that advocacy, not research, was the most important aspect of the project and crucial to achieving policy goals. Still, significant advocacy challenges were encountered which also limited impact.

First, the project’s sequence—which focused primarily on research and implementation in the initial phases—did not allow enough time to achieve all desired advocacy goals, particularly the goal of prompting the Kenyan government to scale up pieces of the interventions.²

Staffing in the field was also a challenge, since the location of senior staff in western Kenya put them in isolation from some policy developments. Furthermore, it took time to develop a shared understanding of the goals for SWASH+ among all staff and institutions, as many wanted to focus on service delivery over advocacy.

In response to these challenges, there was a shift in attention from health impact research to **policy-driven research**. The project strengthened its focus on **policy analysis** and began **outcome mapping**, at Emory’s suggestion, to improve monitoring. Overall, the partnership between practitioner organization and research partner paid off with high credibility and potential influence at the national level.

Management and Coordination Lessons

Similar to the research and advocacy components, there was an evolution in management and coordination styles throughout the SWASH+ project.

Management shifted from Kenya to the United States based on new policies being implemented by CARE and the distance between the project sub-office and Nairobi. The arrangement of an executive committee and bi-annual face-to-face meetings was successful, but highly dependent on the quality of coordination from Kenya.

Adjustments to the partnership were necessary throughout the project, but also led to significant delays and financial issues. As a result of problems with one of the local implementing partners, one lesson learned was to carefully assess partner capabilities in the future.

Finally, initial poor results from the pilot sustainability assessment led to a restructuring of the project’s approach. The openness of the Gates Foundation to studying and addressing unexpected results was well-received and led to important advocacy and additional research.

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² It should be noted, however, that the project achieved significant advocacy goals, including influencing the Ministry of Education to double the per pupil financial allotment for WASH services.