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## **1 Water for Health: Access to WASH, including the Human Rights to Safe Drinking Water and Sanitation.**

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Although it has been acknowledged that investing in school health and nutrition has a significant positive effect on children's academic achievement as students learn best in safe and healthy schools, according to a 2023 report from UNICEF, UNESCO and WFP, too many educational institutions lack the means to assure good health and well-being, including essential drinking water and sanitation facilities. More attention must be paid to the access to safe water, sanitation and hand washing facilities in the school environment for children- particularly girls as it is critical to health and learning.

Why? Access to safe water, sanitation and handwashing facilities in school is essential for learners to practice hygienic behaviours, to prevent illness, to enable girls to participate in school during menstruation, and to ensure that schools remain safe during disease outbreaks.

COVID-19 further has highlighted WASH's importance in prevention of disease transmission. In addition, WASH in schools has proved to be essential for healthy hygienic behaviours and, specifically, for menstrual health for female students and staff.

Existing policies inadequately provide for WASH facilities or other menstrual health-related improvements in the school in order to enable female students and teachers to be able to manage menstruation safely, hygienically, and with dignity.

However, while it is agreed that one of the key aspects for a safe school environment is the access to water, sanitation and WASH services, many challenges still exist:

Globally, the availability of basic hygiene services in schools are still low. Only 57% had basic hygiene services (defined as the availability of handwashing facilities with water and soap) in 2019, and this had only increased by 5% since 2015 (UNICEF and WHO, 2020a). Of the estimated 818 million children who do not have access to basic hygiene at school, 2 in 3 live in sub-Saharan Africa and Asia, with serious implications for combatting pandemics such as COVID, the general health of students and the wider school community, as well as for safe preparation and

consumption of food and safe delivery of school health services and menstrual health.

There are still significant differences in WASH coverage both between countries within regions and within countries. Coverage is generally higher in high- and upper-middle-income countries than in lower-middle- and low-income countries. Nearly half of all children have no water service at their school and a quarter whose school has no sanitation service live in least developed countries. Rural and primary schools also have lower coverage of basic WASH services e.g. it is estimated that in rural areas, 61% of schools have a basic water service, 44% have a basic sanitation service and 34% have a basic hygiene service. There are also still big differences between the proportion of schools with access to one of these services and the proportion with access to all three.

SI joins UNESCO and its partners in calling on the international community to support countries in their investments in safe drinking water and WASH services at school – because children deserve an environment where they can reach their full potential.

Submitted by:



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