Bringing back hope through WASH in Schools
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**WASH in Schools**

In Pakistan, 1 in 3 schools lack sanitation facilities. As a result, the children are often exposed to unhygienic conditions that can make them sick and prevent them from attending school. Particularly, a large number of school-going girls either drop-out or are discouraged to go to school on reaching puberty.

WaterAid’s WASH services in Schools is a unique collaborative program that works with partners to implement:

- installation or rehabilitation of WASH services in schools,
- introduction of replicable models for hygiene education, Menstrual Hygiene Management among adolescent girls, and
- capacity building of teachers and government stakeholders.

WaterAid also works closely with the Ministry of Education to construct gender-friendly sanitation facilities and water supplies in schools, and helps to improve the sanitation and hygiene behaviour of school children.

This anthology captures stories and case studies of the WinS programme to highlight the silent revolution brought about in the lives of schoolchildren, particularly girls.
WASH in Schools aims to ensure the health and learning of school-aged children by establishing or rehabilitating WASH facilities and behaviours in schools.
More than half of the schools in Sindh have no drinking water*

*Alif Aliaan Regional Factsheet 2014 http://alifailaan.pk/fact_sheets
A life-changing experience to further education

Wearing a colourful traditional dress, Sawaira, a 7-year-old student of a government primary school in Tharparkar, was all jubilant while washing her hands in a newly installed handwashing facility in her school. Like many girls of her age, school is the only place where Sawaira learns and enjoys the company of friends.

She says, “If we don’t wash our hands, they smell bad and that attracts parasites, which create diseases. With clean water, we will be healthy, and stay clean.”

Most of the girls studying in Sawaira’s school are eager to learn and keen to go for further education but a lack of access to basic WASH facilities has had a profound impact when they hit puberty. For over a decade, children either go home or defecate in the open. Even in the school, water collection was the responsibility of the students. They used to fill the bucket of water for themselves to drink. As a result, children are often left thirsty during class, affecting their ability to concentrate. In addition, the school had become a place where children were exposed to infections.

It was only until hope arrived, particularly for girls through construction of a new toilet block with handwashing facility. Now, there is a consistent supply of clean, safe water for the pupils to drink and keep themselves and their school clean. For Sawaira, the results are simple, but life-changing.
Life has been precarious for Najma and her school fellows, who hail from a remote village in the district of Badin. The area covers 6,700 square kilometres of coastal belt towards south in the province of Sindh. It is home to natural disasters, including cyclone and floods. The weather remains moist and humid with temperatures often rising up to 49 degrees Celsius in summer. A large part of the land is water-logged, hence unfit for agriculture. Farmers make use of the residual land to earn a livelihood.

With scarcity of clean and potable water, most schools in this region lack basic WASH facilities. Having no toilet facility let alone not enough water to wash their hands with, Najma and her friends had no option but to walk back home or go elsewhere if they need to use washroom. Najma recalls, “We used to go far away and then come back to school.”

Until recently, things have begun to change for the likes of Najma and her friends. Fortunately, there is a washroom with water storage in the school. As a result, students do not have to walk all the way to their homes. Najma says, “It is better to go to the washroom in school rather than outside. Our time is saved now”.

The schools are also acting as hubs for promoting hygiene among the school children, inspiring them to become ‘hygiene advocates’ for the host communities. Access to WASH facilities in schools is also bringing a steady change in behaviours. Najma’s mother says, “It is Najma’s choice to study as much as she wants”

“Now the difference is [clear]... the kids wash their hands after playing, they use the washroom when they have to. This is a very good thing. Where there is water, there is life” says Muhammad Rizwan, who is a teacher in the government primary school, where Najma is enrolled.
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Of women in Pakistan have never been to school.*

WaterAid/Sibtain Haider

*Alif Ailaan Regional Factsheet 2014
http://alifaalaan.pk/fact_sheets
Half of all schools in Sindh do not have a toilet facility*

Toilet facility in schools

49%

*Alif Aliaan Regional Factsheet 2014 http://alifailaan.pk/fact_sheets
Urusa is a confident, vivacious and passionate girl, who loves going to school and dreams becoming a scientist one day. She says, “It is my dad’s wish that I study and progress.” She lives in a settlement in the district of Badin.

Her love for science is as astounding as her knowledge about WASH. “Because if we do not wash our hands, our hands will get germs, and then if we have food we will get stomach aches. And if our stomach aches, we will not be able to go to school. If we do not go to school, we will not be able to study”, says Urusa.

Urusa is an example of how well the growing minds learn new behaviours such as importance of good hygiene practices if they are sensitized properly. However, her knowledge of WASH is far superior than her fellow students. She is aware that she can only make progress in life if she has a good health, and for that she makes sure she stays clean. She says, “I know how to wash hands properly. We should wash our hands after going to washroom, before having food and before doing any work.”

Rahim Dad has been teaching in Urusa’s school since last 10 years. He reminisces the time when there was no proper building for the school with a suitable washroom. He tells, “The school building was built in 2013. The washrooms were also built then. Before that students used to bring water for their usage in a temporary washroom made of sticks and wood.”

Urusa is also happy about the new WASH block in her school. She says, “The new washroom is only used by girls. Boys go to the other two washrooms. Washrooms should be separate for boys and girls as they are in our school.”

The headmaster, Ghulam Yasin says, “The new washroom is dedicated to girls. It has certainly brought ease for girls.”
WASH in Schools aims to ensure access to girl-friendly toilet facilities in schools to improve overall health, hygiene and attendance of girls.
Breaking the silence in menstrual hygiene matters

Ramsha is a 13-year old girl, who is growing up fast and learning how to manage personal hygiene. She walks almost 1km daily to get to her school located in a village in the district of Muzaffargarh. She says, “When I started my period at the age of 11, my grandmother told me that I shouldn’t eat meat, eggs and milk. According to her, these were harmful for me. We are so secretive about periods, so I was reluctant to ask anyone about it.” She continues, “Even my own best friend, Ayza, was not comfortable to share this with me. When I asked whether she is also having periods, she denied as she is too shy”.

As a member of WASH club, Ramsha is quite articulate and says, “Now we know how to safely and hygienically manage periods. We also have a pink latrine in the school that has all the facilities available while we are menstruating,” She points further, “Before the sessions, I was not aware that we can use sanitary pads or even take a bath during menstruation.”

In Pakistan, the topic of menstruation is shrouded in secrecy and negativity due to cultural and religious taboos. It is not considered right to discuss anything about menstruation with people, other than mothers. Most girls feel shy talking about it even with their friends and teachers. Breaking the silence around the stigma associated with menstruation, managing it hygienically and safely disposing sanitary materials are three important issues WaterAid is working on with rural communities.

The dedication and enthusiasm of WASH club members has triggered a chain of communication, resulting in wider awareness among students. The discussion on the tabooed topic is contributing to transform the student’s behaviours, sustaining a positive change for a healthier future.
In Pakistan, the topic of menstruation is shrouded in secrecy and negativity due to cultural taboos.
In Punjab more women stay out of school than men*

Out of school girls: 44%
Out of school boys: 26%

*Alif Aliaan Regional Factsheet 2014 http://alifailaan.pk/fact_sheets
A 15-year-old Kishwar is enrolled at one of the high schools in the district of Muzaffargarh that has acquired new toilets and access to water. Kishwar tells what this has meant for her: “Before, I'd often miss school when I was having my periods because there wasn't a toilet at school. “

Today, it is a model school in not only the provision, management and maintenance of sanitation facilities but also the confidence that these girls demonstrate in personal hygiene at all levels. The cultural taboos around menstruation are crumbling as school girls adopt hygienic practices for a well-informed and healthier reproductive life in future.

Kishwar admits, “Now the girls are much more self-confident. Nowadays no one has to know when we’re having our periods, not even my mum does.”

As a young WASH advocate, she adds, “I tell the women in the village about what I've learnt in school about hygiene. Some women use no sanitary items at all when menstruating. Many are shy and don’t want to talk about things like this, but I feel quite self-assured and think that it’s natural to talk, even with the older women”.

“We chose the colour of the washroom ourselves. We wanted it to be pink.”.  
Kishwar
A 16 years old lively girl with a beautiful smile, Shabana studies in grade 9 in a government high school in the district of Rajanpur. Unlike other girls of her age, Shabana has an aspiration of studying even after grade 10. Since early childhood, the frailty in her left leg makes it difficult for Shabana to bend. While she can still walk on her own, it is quite difficult to use a washroom with a usual toilet bowl on the floor.

The district of Rajanpur, as most parts of the Punjab province, remains hot during most of the year with temperature rising up to 48 degrees Celsius. In the villages, open defecation is a common practice and having washrooms at home is considered a luxury. There are either public washrooms for the villagers or none at all.

The trend has been changing over the last 5 years with gradual building of washrooms in homes and schools. Shabana’s school has also made a raised commode, which is also called English toilet. This has been a relief for Shabana, who says, “It was difficult when I used to go to the old washroom. Using the English toilet is easier for me.”
“It was difficult when I used to go to the old washroom. The new washroom has English toilet. Using the English toilet is easier for me.”

Shabana
WASH in Schools aims to empower girls by establishing menstrual hygiene facilities and behaviours in schools.
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Kanwal lives in a peri-urban area in the district of Thatta. Like many other remote areas, the schools in Thatta lack access to WASH facilities, making it tedious, particularly for girls to go out for defecation. Lack of water also translates into lack of awareness of WASH practices such as hand washing and personal hygiene. Most of the people in Thatta collect water from the nearby streams or from boreholes dug for sweet water. The area is open and vast with low number of trees. Ever since floods, agriculture is drastically effected as a source of livelihoods.

It was not until in June 2014, that girls like Kanwal can dream of continuing their schools. Kanwal has also recently moved to a new government higher secondary school in grade 6. The school has been refurbished with WASH facilities. Out of many things, one aspect that strikes her the most are standards of cleanliness in the school premises. She did not like the washrooms in her previous school since they were not as clean, and hence she and her friends avoided to use them.

There is a new WASH block with two washrooms and a handwashing facility in the school. Now, there are a total of 5 washrooms for almost 250 girls. The washrooms are kept clean and hygienic due to which students feel comfortable using them.

Wearing her yellow sash, Kanwal beams with happiness to admit, “I like this school better than the previous one. There are bigger classes here. Washrooms in this school are clean. They were dirty in my previous school. So, we did not go to the washroom at all.”

Madiha also studies in the same school and says, “We now have soap and a good handwashing area. We practice good hygiene.”
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Madiha

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Kanwal
Mir Jahan is a 16-year-old student and studies in grade 8 with her friend Kulsoom in a local school in the district of Thatta. Noor Jahan is her mother, aged 35 who is knowledgeable and therefore consulted widely on various matters by the women in her village. However, Mir Jahan comes from a disadvantaged community where open defecation is a normal practice.

Myths and lack of awareness around menstruation had long prevented women in this area to lead normal lives. Mir Jahan tells that women in her village are not allowed to bathe, touch food and pickle or perform normal chores due to the associated taboos related to menstruation. However, things are changing as people open up to the outside world and become more self-aware and informed.

It was also until Mir Jahan and Kulsoom started participating in hygiene promotion sessions in their school that they became aware of personal and menstrual hygiene matters, including importance of using a latrine, washing hands and how to stay clean and sanitised during menstruation. They learnt that menstruation is a natural body cycle and not something to feel shy or ashamed about. She says, “Now I know when we are using cloth, we need to wash it and dry it in the sun, not inside. We also learnt that it caused germs and hence needs to be disposed-off properly. We feel sick when we keep it in for long time. It’s not good for health and we may get urinary tract infections.”

“I also learnt that it is normal to continue with the daily routines.” This gave her a lot of confidence to talk about it openly, sensitising other women in her village too. She says, “For me it is a natural thing to share it with the elders. The women here don’t know much about menstrual hygiene matters. Now, they are slowly accepting the use of sanitary pads.”

Mir Jahan’s school has a girl-friendly toilet, which is exclusively meant for girls who attend the school. It is locked and a key is handed over to a girl student whenever she needs to use it.
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She also recalls the earlier days when there wasn’t a girl-friendly toilet in her school and says,

“I often missed school because there was no toilet. My mother made me stay at home. It was a boys’ school first so there was a boys’ toilet and the teachers were all male. Now we are much more confident. Even, my mother doesn’t know when I have periods.”

“I don’t feel fresh when I don’t take showers or clean myself. In school, I am able to use the bathroom, which has a hand-washing facility. There is also a place to throw away used up sanitary materials.”

Mir Jahan
Households with no toilet*

Rural Sindh: 16%
Rural Punjab: 24%
A darling smile with big shining eyes, Bilal is an active and carefree boy. He is 11 years old and loves to have his life packed with excitement. He is now eagerly looking forward to going back to school after a long spell of summer vacations in the district of Badin.

Bilal is one of the happiest students in his school since the WASH situation has changed and they have a functional washroom with water for more than a year now. He tells, “We do have a washroom in our school. Before that, we used to go somewhere outside the school. Now it is good that we have water in our washroom.”

When the washroom was not functional in Bilal’s school, sometimes he used to go to his house to go to the toilet. And many times, his father used to ask him to stay back and help him in his work. This used to make it difficult for Bilal to keep up with his studies at school.

But now, he gets to stay in school till the last class. He recalls, “When I went outside or back home, sometimes my father would ask me to stay back and take care of the livestock.”

Along with a swing, Bilal also has a water tap at home for his daily use.

“Unlike the past, students at our school rarely get sick now. I also got sick once and suffered from fever and vomiting, due to drinking impure water.”

Bilal takes pride in his school uniform and loves to have his clothes clean. He says, “I don’t like to go to school if my clothes are dirty. My teacher also doesn’t allow us to wear unclean clothes in class.”

“I don’t like to go to school if my clothes are dirty. My teacher also doesn’t allow us to wear unclean clothes in class.” Bilal
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WASH in school brings learning, fun and joys of living

“Our school does have a washroom. If there were no washrooms it would have been difficult for students. They would get sick and the environment would become unhygienic.”

In Sindh, more of the out of school children are girls*

“We have a water pump in our home too. We wash our clothes at the stream. I wash my clothes by myself and I wash them very well.”

*Alif Aliaan Regional Factsheet 2014 http://alifailaan.pk/fact_sheets
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