

STORIES FROM THE FIELD: COTONOU, BENIN

WASHplus opened the eyes of a peri-urban school's PTA about the poor state of the school's latrines. When government help was too slow to solve the urgent problem, the PTA came through with funds and action.

ABOUT WASHplus

The WASHplus project supports healthy households and communities by creating and delivering interventions that lead to improvements in water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) and household air pollution (HAP). This multi-year project (2010-2016) was made possible with support from the American people delivered through the U.S. Agency for International Development's (USAID) Bureau for Global Health and led by FHI 360 in partnership with CARE and Winrock International. The project uses at-scale programming approaches to reduce diarrheal diseases and acute respiratory infections, the two top killers of children under age 5 globally.

CONTACT

Go to: www.washplus.org
for more information on the
WASHplus program in Benin.

Advocacy in Cotonou's Neighborhoods Galvanizes the PTA to Take Action

WASHplus, through its implementing partner ABMS/PSI, works to reduce household vulnerability to cholera and other diarrheal diseases in Cotonou, Benin, by promoting good hygiene behaviors such as handwashing with soap, treating drinking water, and using latrines. Even in precarious peri-urban zones, households are part of a system, and therefore we take a systems approach to our work, identifying key local players and institutions that household members are likely to interact with or belong to. We carry out handwashing and tippy tap demonstrations and other hygiene communications with health centers, churches, local authorities, cooperatives and associations, and of course, schools.



PTA members and school directors negotiate with a pit emptying company to tackle the full pits at Enagnon Primary School.

Since the later half of 2015, the team has stepped up advocacy for latrine improvement in several public schools in its two target neighborhoods, Agbato and Enagnon. One school, with a student population of 1,500, has four latrine blocks that are unusable because they are full. WASHplus/ABMS accompanied school officials to make the case for pit emptying to the local Ministry of Education authorities. Eventually they agreed to put a \$200 line item in this year's budget. When this was announced at the school during a joint meeting with the PTA, everyone realized that the money would not be available for some time. The PTA immediately pledged to front the money for emptying the pits.

A group of PTA members surprised the WASHplus team during a recent visit to the neighborhood; they had just paid for the pit emptying of the school latrines and showed the team the receipt for \$500, all paid for by the PTA. The galvanizing factor had been joint meetings called by WASHplus/ABMS field staff to bring the group of teachers, the school director, and PTA members to the actual site of the latrine blocks—a source of extreme contamination for the school population and surrounding houses due to open defecation on the school grounds around the full latrines. The head of the PTA said to the team, "You woke us up!" The WASHplus team will now work with the school and PTA to develop a sustainable usage and maintenance plan, handwashing facilities, and possibly additional latrine construction to meet the hygiene and sanitation needs of this large group of learners.



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