

STORIES FROM THE FIELD: EASTERN PROVINCE, ZAMBIA

What a village headman and a school teacher learn about sanitation and menstrual hygiene, respectively, during SPLASH education sessions calls into question old beliefs and has a lasting and profound impact on the individuals and their communities.

SPLASH is a USAID/ Zambia-supported WASHplus activity, working in 370 government and community schools in Zambia's Eastern Province promoting learner achievement through sanitation and hygiene.



Shifting Social Norms Pave the Way for Sustainability

It is not enough to provide a school with new toilets and washrooms to ensure that improved sanitation and hygiene practices are adopted. Educational efforts for behavior change must be a component. In some cases long-held beliefs in a community—such as the acceptability of open defecation or the taboo associated with menstruation—need to be replaced, just as dilapidated latrines and dirty water sources need to be improved to create a healthier school environment. USAID's SPLASH (Schools Promoting Learning Achievement through Sanitation and Hygiene) project applies a number of approaches—such as school-led total sanitation triggering and menstrual hygiene management education—to inform and galvanize a community to shift to a new normal.

A Teacher Observes a Transformation in School Attitudes about Menstruation

In 2014, SPLASH organized a menstrual hygiene management (MHM) training for parents, teachers, and pupils at Mchereka Primary School in Lundazi District. SPLASH offers this training to its intervention schools in four districts to sensitize communities and schools on good hygiene and MHM practices that help keep girls in school. Osward Sintambo, a teacher at the school, was among the participants.

Prior to the training parents and other community members expressed a negative attitude about menstruation.

"Menstruation has for many years never been openly discussed. It is seen as sacred or hidden, and no one was to know when a girl was having her periods. The girl child is not allowed to cook or add salt to food. A girl was never allowed to go to school as she was considered to be unclean during her periods; the cloth she used for her menses was not supposed to be seen by anyone," explains Mr. Sintambo.

SPLASH trainers involved parents and community members in role plays and discussions about MHM. These techniques helped change perspectives as participants acquired more knowledge of menstruation as a normal biological process that every girl goes through once they reach puberty. Another important message conveyed at the training was that menstruation is not a reason for a girl to miss school. At the end of the training all participants—mothers and fathers, boys and girls—made reusable pads with the help of a facilitator.



Teacher Osward Sintambo participated in the MHM training at Mchereka Primary School.



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"Once the menstrual hygiene management training was done and positively received, the school bought pads for the girls and sensitized them on how to use them," says Mr. Sintambo. Demand was so high that the supply of pads was depleted within a month. "I have seen a change in attitude from the girls who are now free and open to talk about menstrual hygiene management. The girls' attendance since the training and after the sensitization was done has improved, and I am happy about the girls' performance in my class. Each week a girl would miss class and this bothered me a lot, but this is no longer the case as menstruation is no longer a reason to miss school," adds Mr. Sintambo.

SPLASH continues to educate other communities and schools on the importance of MHM and to construct girls' washrooms to facilitate its practice in various SPLASH intervention schools.

Village Headman Describes Impact of School to Community WASH Program

"My name is Mulenga Nyirenda. I am the headman for Vimbuza Village in Lundazi District. Twenty-five of our children attend Mbatata Primary School next to our village. There are fifteen households in my village and none of them has a toilet. We all go to answer the call of nature in the nearby bushes, a practice that seemed normal and becoming.

From as far as I can remember my village has experienced outbreaks of diseases related to diarrhea. Almost everyone in the village was affected, including the school-going children. A good number of people received treatment from the hospital, but the problem kept reoccurring. People started pointing fingers at an old woman in the village as the cause of the diarrhea being experienced.

In September 2013, my son came back from school with a letter inviting me and my subjects to a SPLASH meeting at Mbatata Primary School. My son informed me that the

purpose of the meeting was to discuss water, sanitation, and hygiene issues. I informed all my subjects and encouraged them to attend the meeting.

The meeting was an eye opener for me and my subjects because it brought attention to one key issue that my entire village was guilty of doing—open defecation. The team from SPLASH talked about the dangers of open defecation and then made the entire village walk in the nearby bushes looking for and pointing out human waste. I was extremely furious when I was asked to carry some of the waste on a shovel for further learning at the meeting place. It was so embarrassing, never before have I ever been humbled as I was on that day. What really upset me the most was the idea of carrying the waste on a shovel in front of my wife and pupils. The whole experience was worsened by the pupils mockingly shouting, "Kwenkwe! Kwenkwe! A headman anyamula matuvi," [a headman is carrying human waste].

When we finally got to the meeting place, the SPLASH team demonstrated how flies carry germs from the human waste to our food causing us to have endless bouts of diarrhea. They took some of the waste and rubbed it on food and asked for a volunteer to taste. Obviously, no one volunteered. Their explanation was so clear and really made sense.

The SPLASH team encouraged everyone to construct and use pit latrines for fecal disposal. Everyone saw the logic and promised to construct a latrine at his or her house.

One month later every household in my village owns and uses a latrine. Diarrhea is now a thing of the past. Everyone in the community is enjoying good health, and children are attending classes regularly. Additionally, surrounding villages have learned the importance of having and using a latrine. SPLASH has even vindicated the old woman as not being the cause of the diarrhea cases in the village.

I am so grateful to SPLASH for showing my entire village the wonder of a latrine and for building five double latrines at the primary school."

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.

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