**Background**

Water, sanitation and hygiene in schools – WASH in Schools – provides safe drinking water, improves sanitation facilities and promotes lifelong health. WASH in Schools enhances the well-being of children and their families, and paves the way for new generations of healthy children.

Thanks to those working to advance WASH in Schools around the globe, significant progress is being made. Globally, coverage of both water and sanitation in schools increased by six per cent between 2008 and 2013. Coverage is improving more rapidly in least-developed countries, with nine per cent increases over the same five-year period.

Estimated global proportion of schools with an adequate water supply

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2013</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Global</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Least-developed countries</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing countries</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Advancing WASH in Schools Monitoring, UNICEF, 2015. Estimates are not weighted by population or number of schools in each country.

However, with global school water coverage at 71 per cent and sanitation coverage at 69 per cent, much work remains to be done to fulfill every child’s right to a healthy learning environment. School hygiene is a particular challenge; based on the limited data available, only 21 per cent of schools in developing countries have hand-washing facilities.

Estimated global proportion of schools with adequate sanitation

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<th>2000</th>
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<td>Global</td>
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<td>61</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


**Benefits of WASH in Schools**

- **Improves children’s health**
  
  Studies have shown that when children and staff in day-care centres and primary schools wash their hands properly, diarrhoea cases can be reduced by more than 30 per cent. Good hand-washing practices can also reduce the frequency of respiratory infections among school children.

- **Boosts school attendance and achievement**
  
  A study for the World Health Organization (WHO) found that children could gain an estimated 443 million school days every year through improved water and sanitation facilities and reduced diarrhoeal illness.

- **Promotes equity**
  
  Adolescent girls and children with disabilities are often prevented from fully participating in school due to inadequate WASH facilities. When schools have accessible, gender-separated facilities, an obstacle to attendance is removed.

- **Reaches families and communities**
  
  After learning about and experiencing improved WASH at school, children often question existing practices at home and choose to demonstrate good hygiene, changing the behaviour of their parents and siblings.

**A Call to Action: Raising clean hands**

In support of national and international efforts to improve WASH in Schools, a Call to Action: Raising Clean Hands, was published in 2010 and updated in 2012 (Raising Even More Clean Hands) as a collaborative effort of the more than 70 organizations that make up the WASH in Schools Global Network. The organizations have collectively called for renewed commitments to:

1. **Set minimum standards for WASH in Schools**
   
   Adopt national, regional and local standards based on UNICEF/WHO guidelines. The minimum standards for WASH in Schools should be specific to each context.

2. **Monitor WASH in Schools coverage through Education Management Information Systems (EMIS)**
   
   Advocate for the inclusion of WASH in Schools indicators in EMIS. Analyse data annually and use the findings for advocacy and better resource allocation.

3. **Engage with at scale WASH in Schools programmes**
   
   Contribute to the bigger picture by bringing individual or small-scale projects into cooperative initiatives that effectively reach more schools. Gradual improvements to facilities and hygiene practices require less investment in operation and maintenance and can be sustained with local resources.

4. **Involve multiple stakeholders to support WASH in Schools programmes**
   
   Community members, civil society advocates, members of the media, students, school staff, local and regional authorities, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), faith-based groups, public-private partnerships, and ministries of education, water, health and finance, as well as donors, can all support planning and action for WASH in Schools.

5. **Contribute evidence on the impact of WASH in Schools programmes**
   
   Local and global academic communities have expertise that can support the design of WASH in Schools programmes and chart their impact. Generating and sharing evidence will provide WASH in Schools advocates with a powerful tool to attract attention and funding to the sector.

6. **Raise the profile of WASH in Schools programmes**
   
   Adapt global and regional publications, advocacy materials and knowledge for the local context and disseminate them widely. Encourage members of the community to participate in customizing global WASH in Schools materials to local settings.

The global network includes more than 70 organizations that meet monthly to share their research, programming, best practices and events.

In early 2015, the WASH in Schools Community of Practice site was established to serve as the sector’s knowledge exchange platform. The online community has more than 250 members – a number that grows daily. Interested partners are encouraged to join the community of practice site at: https://www.yammer.com/washinschoolsnetwork.