

# CRS AND school health & hygiene



## THE BASICS

# 180k

# OF STUDENTS RECEIVING IRON & VITAMIN A IN BURKINA FASO

from 68.5%  
to 7%

PERCENTAGE OF GIRLS MISSING SCHOOL BECAUSE OF MENSTRUATION IN GHANA

Poor health and malnutrition are critical underlying factors for low school enrollment, absenteeism, poor classroom performance, and early school dropout. Recognizing the importance of achieving good health, hygiene, and nutrition for the promotion of basic education, WHO, UNESCO, UNICEF, and the World Bank launched the Focus Resources on Effective School Health (FRESH) framework. The framework proposes four basic components:

- **Provision of safe water and sanitation**, as the first step in creating a healthy school environment;
- **School-based health and nutrition services**: using the school a platform to provide health and nutrition services, such as screening for health problems, providing easy-to-administer medication and supplements, and referrals to other health services and facilities, among others;
- **Health-related school policies** to ensure a safe and secure physical environment and a positive psychosocial environment, which address issues such as abuse, sexual harassment, school violence, and bullying; and
- **Skills-based health and nutrition education**, which promotes the knowledge, attitudes, values, and life skills (e.g. self-awareness, critical thinking, decision-making, etc.) needed to avoid risky situations and adopt healthier lifestyles.

The FRESH framework has been guiding the concerted efforts by the national government, civil society organizations, and donors to make schools conducive for children to learn and achieve their full potential.

## THE CRS APPROACH

CRS' school health programs use the FRESH framework to integrate health, nutrition, and WASH interventions along with core education activities. In the schools where CRS works, our goal is to create a healthy learning



Hawa Ouedraogo, 9 years old, washes her hands using a 'tippy tap' hand washing system at the Bangrin primary school in the village of Pissila, Sanmatenga province, Burkina Faso on December 19, 2017. The school is participating in the McGovern Dole Food for Education program. *Photographer name/CRS*

environment, with an understanding that learning outcomes are affected by a child's holistic health.

Where the lack of water supply and sanitation facilities is an issue, CRS brings in WASH technical experts and establishes partnerships with government to construct or rehabilitate water and sanitation facilities in schools. Understanding that girls face an additional barrier to school attendance during menstruation, CRS promotes menstrual hygiene management for adolescent girls and fosters a supportive environment for them. In some countries, CRS provides health and nutrition services such as vision and hearing screening, micronutrient supplementation, and deworming. CRS trains teachers to assess children's basic health status, to facilitate referrals to health clinics when necessary, and to incorporate key topics around health, nutrition, and life skills in their lessons. Through our school health activities, CRS promotes partnerships among the health, education, and WASH sectors; between teachers and health workers; and among schools, health facilities, and community groups.

### BURKINA FASO

Over 180,000 students receive iron and vitamin A supplements and deworming drugs through CRS Burkina Faso's McGovern Dole (MGD) Food for Education project (2014-2018). Funded by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), the project aims to increase student literacy levels, while recognizing good health and nutrition as necessary precursors to students' learning achievements.

In MGD schools, teachers are equipped to identify common signs of illness in students and are well-versed in follow-up and referral procedures. Students engage in health clubs, where they learn about good nutrition, health hazards, and hygiene and sanitation. CRS distributes vitamin supplements and deworming drugs to school districts, and trains teachers to directly administer these to the students, with support from CRS staff and Ministry of Health and Ministry of Education officials. This is all made possible through CRS' collaboration with both ministries to use schools as platforms for behavior change in health and to fight against health-related absences in schools.

Since the project started, 99% of students (103,776 boys and 94,998 girls) have been regularly attending school.

### GHANA

Funded by The Leona M. and Harry B. Helmsley Charitable Trust (HCT), the ICOWASH project (2017-2020) builds upon the widely successful I-SHINE project, also funded by HCT. ICOWASH improves the health and wellbeing of 152,334 adults and children in Northern Ghana. Through behavior change communication and WASH service improvements in 80 schools – as well as 160 communities and 24 healthcare facilities – ICOWASH eliminates open defecation, increases safe water access, and improves hygiene practices for students and their families.

To ensure that students practice good hygiene in schools, 480 teachers and 2,000 school children are being trained on WASH practices and formed into School Health Clubs, in collaboration with the School Health Education Program unit of the Ghana Education Service (GES).

ICOWASH also engages girls age 8-18 in Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) awareness activities. After three years of I-SHINE implementation, the proportion of girls missing school due to menstruation decreased from 68.5% to 7%. Because low availability of comfortable, effective, and accessible MHM products is a barrier, ICOWASH researches and markets culturally acceptable and affordable reusable pads, and supports local dressmakers to produce these.

The ICOWASH project invests in key infrastructure installation, including 85 boreholes, to improve access to safe water sources. Additionally, the project conducts regular testing of water quality in schools; repairs and maintains nonfunctional boreholes, through empowering Water and Sanitation Management Teams, and through reinforcing local government management systems.

Following CRS' successful partnership with the GES during I-SHINE – where 140 schools were assessed as WASH-friendly with a 100% pass rate – the GES will also lead the process of certifying project schools as WASH-friendly in the ICOWASH project. Certifying schools is CRS' strategy to transition the responsibility of school WASH management to GES and the schools and ensure sustainability beyond the life of the project.

### BENIN

Through USDA support, CRS Benin is implementing an MGD Food for Education project (2014-2018) to improve literacy for 44,676 children in 144 primary schools in northeastern Benin. The project increases student attendance and attentiveness through school feeding, while ensuring students thrive in WASH-friendly schools.

WASH-friendly schools engage in and promote hand washing, safe-water management, and safe-excreta disposal in their communities. In these schools, teachers, boys, and girls have access to latrines, while specific health education needs of girls are considered. Discussion of feminine hygiene is taboo in Beninese society. Girls often miss school because of painful periods and the fear of stigma. To address this, the project trained four nurses who, in turn, trained 28 Community Health Workers (CHWs). These CHWs coach pubescent girls and boys through puberty and girls on Menstrual Hygiene Management. One-thousand forty-two girls receive coaching. In addition, CHWs organize sensitization sessions with parent-teacher associations to lessen the negative perception on menstrual hygiene discussions.

The MGD project has so far built 114 cabins of latrines, benefitting 3,383 students; 10,676 tippy taps in 144 schools; and seven boreholes, used by 1,728 students.

