Lack of Sanitation and its Impact on Girls’ Educational Performance in Zambia

In early 2014, UNICEF conducted an analysis of Education Management Information System (EMIS) data from 9,000 schools throughout Zambia, with the support for its Regional Office of eastern and southern Africa. The outcome showed a high correlation between the provision of adequate sanitation facilities in schools and the improvements in education indicators for girls. Overall, it was observed that schools with toilets had much higher enrollment ratios, much lower repetition rates, and much lower dropout rates.

To perform the assessment, the sanitation status of schools was classified into four categories at baseline: schools with no toilets, schools with some toilets (number unspecified), schools with one toilet for every 100 pupils, and schools with one toilet for every 20 pupils. ¹

Enrollment Ratios

In Grade 8, the enrollment ratio of girls to boys for schools with the optimal latrine coverage (20 or fewer pupils per toilet) is 2.4 times that of schools with no toilet and twice that of schools with one toilet per 100 pupils. In other words, the presence of toilets increases the chances of more girls being enrolled in schools when compared to boys’ enrolment. Furthermore, the enrollment ratio for schools with one toilet per 20 pupils increases by 20 percent in Grade 8 compared to Grade 1, whereas the enrollment ratio in schools with no toilet drops by 13 percent in Grade 8 compared to Grade 1.

¹ Data used in the study: 2012 data extracted from the EMIS, Ministry of Education, Science, Vocation Training & Early Education, Zambia
Repetition Rates

Analysis of female repetition rates and access to sanitation in schools reaffirms the effect sanitation has on female pupils, in particular the older ones who are most likely to be experiencing puberty. Female repetition of Grade 1 in schools with sanitation facilities is less than 2 percent while in schools with no toilets, the rate is 6 percent—in other words, three times worse in schools with no access to adequate sanitation. The situation is worse in Grade 9 where the repetition rate is 17 percent in schools with no toilets, compared to 10 percent in schools with one toilet for 100 pupils, and 5 percent in schools with one toilet per 20 pupils. As girls in Grade 9 are three times more likely to repeat classes than girls in Grade 1 in schools with no toilets, the increase in repeaters might be associated with adolescent girls’ need for privacy because they are mensturating at this age. Finally, the largest repetition rates, for all levels of sanitation, occur at Grade 9.
Dropout Rates

The dropout rate between Grades 1 and 9 for girls increases exponentially from about 1 percent to 7.4 percent in schools with no toilets. At Grade 9, about 1 out of every 20 girls drops out of school partially due to lack of access to any sanitation at all. This is the highest recorded level of dropout rates for any grade. In schools with reported availability of toilets, the dropout rates ranged from 0.5 to 1.5 percent. Cumulatively, 32 percent of girls drop out from schools with no toilets between Grades 1 and 9, compared to only 8 percent in schools reported to have some access to any sanitation.

Conclusion

It is evident that the significant benefits of having access to a toilet in schools are completely missed out on in schools that do not provide this necessity to their pupils, in particular to girls, who greatly require access to adequate menstrual hygiene services in addition to toilet coverage. All stakeholders should be proactively engaged to ensure that the toilet-to-pupil ratio of 1:50 (a reasonable interim target for the School WASH Package) is achieved nationally and is delivered in vulnerable schools under the leadership of the Government of Zambia (GRZ). Based on these recommendations, UNICEF and USAID, the latter through its SPLASH (Schools Promoting Learning Achievement through Sanitation and Hygiene) project have joined forces to deliver such access to adequate toilets in primary schools in Eastern Province.

It is therefore of great importance for the (GRZ) and cooperating partners to mobilize additional resources and ensure that every school in Zambia has adequate toilets if Zambia is to achieve its educational goals for its current constituents and posterity.

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