

TAGS: WASH, EDUCATION

Clean water and safe facilities keep girls in school in Freetown

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https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Yrnf304EywA8TmFfZenwMjO_Vu5o7Sb8/view?usp=sharing *Zainab enjoying the safe and clean water now available in her school.*

Refreshed, satisfied, excited and confident. These are the words 17-year-old Zainab uses to describe her feelings when she turns on the tap at her school and gets clean water. Several years ago, she would not have said that.

“We did not have access to safe and clean water,” she reveals. For many girls, the lack of proper toilets and water can be a dealbreaker, especially as they reach puberty, leading to absenteeism during menstruation. Over time, this absenteeism can accumulate, leading to lower academic performance and increased likelihood of dropping out.

Schools without proper sanitation facilities often lack secure, private spaces for girls. This lack of privacy can make girls feel unsafe and reluctant to attend school. For some, the absence of gender-segregated facilities can lead to harassment or discomfort, further discouraging regular attendance.

A Game-Changer for Girls' Education

But this is changing. Through the [“Increasing Access to Secondary Education for Out-of-School Girls” project](#), Zainab’s school now has a new three-classroom block equipped with essential water, sanitation, and hygiene facilities.

The project, which aligns with [Sierra Leone's Radical Inclusion Policy](#) and the UN's Sustainable Development Goal 4, aims to promote inclusive and equitable quality education while ensuring a safe learning environment for out-of-school girls.

With the new facilities, Zainab and her peers no longer face the challenge of water not being available, and students absent for lessons. Now we have uninterrupted access to water any day, any time, as much as we want it,” Zainab shares. “Our school environment is really a good place for girls now.” Recent epidemics have highlighted the importance of handwashing, but without water, good hygiene practices are impossible.

Since gaining uninterrupted water access, Zainab’s handwashing habits have significantly increased. “I have gotten used to washing my hands very frequently,” she says, reflecting on the impact of this project on her daily life and well-being.

Tackling Stigma Around Menstruation

In many communities, the stigma surrounding menstruation can be exacerbated by inadequate facilities. Girls may face additional pressure and discrimination if they cannot manage their menstrual hygiene effectively, leading to increased dropout rates.

At Services Secondary School, one of 6 schools constructed, Georgiana Bangura, Principal, said this about the WASH facilities at the schools: “This is a historic moment for our school. For the first time in 20 years, our students have uninterrupted access to safe and clean water. This means more than just good health. It means our girls can manage their menstruation with dignity and confidence, stay in school, and focus on learning without fear or shame. Clean water and proper sanitation are essential for ensuring equal education and protecting every child’s well-being.”

By addressing the practical barriers to menstrual hygiene management, schools like Zainab’s have become more inclusive and girl-friendly. A new borehole at her school now serves over 500 students, ensuring constant access to water for drinking, cleaning, and handwashing.

So far, the project has constructed six new 3-classroom blocks in six schools. Each block is fully equipped with desks, chairs, whiteboards, gender-separated toilets, and boreholes, creating safe, and dignified learning spaces.

