

PRIORITISING SANITATION AND HYGIENE IN SCHOOLS

Improved sanitation can significantly reduce the rampant spread of diarrhoeal diseases and lessen the adverse health impact of other ailments responsible for deaths among millions of children.

The deteriorated sanitation and hygiene facilities at Mateke Primary school located in remote Malicanco resettlement in Mwenezi district area, 460 kilometers from Harare posed critical risks to children.

With the school's serious water and hygiene crisis, pupils had to walk for more than 4km to fetch water in an unprotected well only to return and use the unhygienic old-cracked Blair Ventilated Improved pit-latrines (BVIP).



One of the toilet blocks constructed

As if that was not enough, the young boys and girls rambled in the messy toilets barefooted, increasing their risk of contracting diseases.

“We had no choice, children had to walk on the infesting maggots to access the toilets,” said Augustine Muregi the school’s headmaster.

Girls felt the pinch of this crisis among the 220 pupils enrolled at this school.



Children enjoying safe drinking water

“Lack of water and the dirty toilets made it difficult especially during menstruation,” complained 12 year old Chipu Ruge. “The mere thought of using those toilets was unbearable, we ended up absconding lessons,” she coyly added.

Responding to this appalling state of affairs, Plan International Zimbabwe in partnership with UNICEF and Australian NATCOM built two blocks of BVIPs and a hand washing facility as well as drilling a borehole under the Water Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) project. In addition to the above the project had component of strengthening positive hygiene behaviour through revitalization

and establishment of school health clubs.

“We are very grateful for the construction of these toilets as we can now enjoy our privacy as girls,” quipped enthusiastic Chipu.

Track Murauzi the Program Unit Manager for Chiredzi said the organizations in this partnership saw it safe to ensure that children's health is a top priority, hence the construction of the toilets and drilling of borehole.

“Access to a toilet can help children succeed in education...”

“With the available resources, the project scope resorted to building proper toilets for the pupils as well as ensuring that they have access to safe drinking water. Ensuring the health and hygiene of children is a priority in an effort to attaining child friendly schools,” Murauzi said.

Reiterating the need for proper sanitation and hygiene enabling infrastructure to ensure proper development of children, Murauzi hinted that the lack of infrastructure infringed on the children's rights to education and reduced their chances of leading a quality and dignified life.

“Access to a sanitation facilities can help children succeed in education. Basic sanitation and hygiene will reduce the number of episodes of diarrhoea and worm infections making sure children don't miss class due to illness,” he added.

However, while Mateke Primary school has improved on sanitation and hygiene issues, there is yet another hurdle to overcome. Pupils are using appalling classrooms which poses hazards to school children

The children endure uncomfortable tree logs while some sit on bare dusty floors during lessons. The strong spring winds blew away the thatched roofs only leaving thin patches that exposes the children to the adverse weather conditions such as scorching sun, cold and rain.

We are however encouraged by the children's desire to learn. Now that they have constructed safe and adequate sanitation, resources permitting and with the community's mobilization, the classrooms are now an immediate priority, “Murauzi emphasized.

Plan International is promoting the development of safe schools models for communities at risk in Zimbabwe thereby contributing to the comprehensive school safety framework and national strategy on Child Friendly Schools where safety of schools and child protection are priority issues.



One of the school's classrooms