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**ENSURING AVAILABILITY AND SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT  
OF WATER AND SANITATION FOR ALL**

**Increasing local participation in monitoring and learning to  
improve WASH services in schools**

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*Implemented by Catholic Relief Services (CRS) and financed by The Leona M. and Harry B. Helmsley Charitable Trust, the Kom-Yilma (happy, healthy child) project promotes improved hygiene practices throughout 108 “WASH-friendly” schools in the provinces of Bam and Sanmatenga in Burkina Faso. In order to effectively involve local stakeholders, including teachers, students and parents, CRS has incorporated innovative participatory practices into the Kom-Yilma project’s Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL) system. The local communities and government stakeholders play a central role in assessing the school’s progress towards project goals (through community self-assessments and joint monitoring visits), which not only increases local ownership of the project, but also contributes to sustainable behaviour change.*

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## **Introduction**

A well-designed MEAL system allows for the readjustment of project activities and approaches throughout the project cycle by providing quantitative and qualitative data that reflects the view of multiple project stakeholders. Using participatory monitoring techniques can also contribute to the success of project activities and the sustainability of the results. As with many development projects, the success of the Kom-Yilma project (“*Happy, Healthy Child*”) is directly linked to the active participation of local stakeholders and partners. For this reason, CRS designed and put in place a MEAL system with a strong participatory approach, which also includes technical support and supervision provided by the project’s MEAL team and local education authorities.

## **Project overview**

The Kom-Yilma project promotes the three key hygiene practices (handwashing with soap at critical times; safe disposal and management of excreta; and safe drinking water storage, handling and treatment) through the WASH-friendly schools approach developed by the USAID’s Hygiene Improvement Project (HIP). In Kom-Yilma’s WASH-friendly schools, the following five core activities are being promoted:

- Development of sustainable school WASH services through stakeholder participation at all phases
- Adoption of key hygiene behaviours in schools and in the community
- Installation, use and maintenance of hand washing facilities
- Supply, preservation and consumption of potable water
- Use and maintenance of sanitation facilities adapted for girls and boys

The Kom-Yilma project contributes to WASH service sustainability by ensuring school communities (i.e., school staff, students and parent representatives) understand the approach, are aware of the problems and are equipped and take action to provide solutions. A training was designed and conducted for the benefit of school teachers, parent representatives and students so that the participants were able to:

- implement baseline assessments of the school’s WASH conditions in order to identify shortcomings
- understand contamination pathways and barriers to disease
- use interactive tools (illustrated guides, guidebooks, posters) to conduct community awareness sessions

- develop a WASH action plan (including the mobilization of necessary funds) to address the shortcomings in the school environment and a management plan to keep facilities in good hygienic and operational conditions and sustain WASH services.

The Kom-Yilma project’s MEAL system allows school communities to self-assess and take corrective action, thereby reinforcing the local commitment to achieving sustainable and significant change. It also provides external input in terms of advice, support and encouragement. Two monitoring and evaluation components fit into this framework: community self-assessments and joint monitoring & support visits.

### Community self-assessments

Community self-assessments take place three times annually - at the beginning, middle, and end of each school year. The process consists of direct observations of the school’s water, sanitation and hygiene facilities by the WASH committee, and monitoring visits that include participatory exchanges between the different actors of the school community to review indicators for each target and determine the level of achievement and challenges. Rating of achievements and identification of appropriate follow-up actions is done in a consensual and objective manner.



**Photograph 1. CRS Burkina – Sanitary survey of a water point**

Source: CRS Burkina



**Photograph 2. CRS Burkina – Sanitary survey of school latrines**

Source: CRS Burkina

Following a community self-assessment, which lasts a minimum of 3.5 hours, a score is given for the level of achievement of each indicator. The objectives are composed of multiple indicators; therefore each indicator must be achieved in order to achieve the objectives. Self-assessments are carried out by school community members, each with a role to play.

<b>Table 1. Relevant stakeholder roles within community self-assessments</b>	
<b>Stakeholder</b>	<b>Role</b>
School director	Organize the meeting, participate in the evaluation with other stakeholders and facilitate discussions without imposing their point of view.
School WASH committee (Parents Association, Mothers Association, Mentors, School Management Committee, Water Users Association, Village Development Committee members, Community Health Agents), School clubs (students, supervising teachers), and other school teachers	Participate in the evaluation, assessing progress towards WASH-Friendly School status. Contribute to collaborative design of objectives and each indicator.
Village Development Advisor (not part of the school WASH Committee)	Serve as external observer to ensure impartiality in WASH assessment
Potential external facilitator: field agent, project representative, decentralized authorities representative, education district representative	A neutral facilitator who encourages exchanges among stakeholders by facilitating discussions and sharing analysis of performance

**Tools and materials used**

A community scoreboard, a self-assessment guide developed by the Kom-Yilma project and a community logbook are provided to schools to enable them to properly conduct and record self-assessments. The training provided to the stakeholders involved in the conduct of self-assessments includes some practice on the use of these tools.

**The community scoreboard** (pictured below) is an interactive billboard on which community members present the results of the self-assessment and scores for each of the five objectives set out in the project. Community scoreboards are placed in a central, visible and public location within the schoolyard.



**Photograph 3. Sirgui School community scoreboard (Sanmatenga province)**

Source: CRS Burkina

A **community logbook** is used to record summaries of group discussions during assessments and record and track corrective actions for future reference and use.

**The self-assessment guide** explains in detail how to conduct the self-assessment and how to present ratings/scores.

As the majority of the target audience can neither read nor write in French, the various goals and scores are presented pictorially. Additionally, this enables younger generations to participate.

As with objectives, indicators are ranked on three levels: achieved, in progress or no progress. These three levels are represented as emoticons that are easily understood by community members (see Table 2).

Emoticons	Meaning	Significance
	Weak level of achievement.	The community expresses complete dissatisfaction with current progress or lack thereof. Much work remains to be done on the part of the community.
	Medium level of achievement.	Actions have been taken, but more work remains in order to fully achieve the indicator.
	High level of achievement.	The community is pleased with the level of progress and actions should be taken to ensure sustainability.

### **Capacity building for self-assessments**

An introductory training in the WASH-friendly schools method provides an understanding of the concept, requirements and the fundamentals to conduct a self-assessment. This is complimented by a practical, hands-on training for school directors and teaching supervisors on how to implement a self-assessment, collect the indicators for each objective and evaluate progress towards objectives. These leaders then train the other people involved in the self-assessment implementation.

In order to support and strengthen this internal evaluation process, an external evaluation, in the form of joint monitoring visits, is organized for each school twice a year.

### **The impact of self-assessments on project achievements**

The self-assessments help to mobilise the school community as a coherent group and maintain their interest in achieving the objectives and becoming a 'WASH-friendly school'. Students, parents and school staff take greater ownership of the process, and develop a personal stake in achieving the set objectives. In other words, the project participants become both beneficiaries and contributors, taking ownership for the sustainable management of their school WASH services.

This in turn facilitates the development or adjustment of responsive action plans, which are led by the local community. Centrally placed community scoreboards serve as daily reminders and motivators to improve or maintain good WASH conditions. The self-assessment in turn helps to sustain changes in behaviour, while improving the durability of WASH services.

Participation in self-assessments also increases participant and community knowledge of WASH-related issues and best practices. Participants increasingly understand the importance of proper latrine design and construction, what makes a latrine user-friendly, routes of contamination and barriers, key hygiene behaviours, cleaning and maintenance requirements, etc.

### **Joint visits**

Joint monitoring and support visits are unannounced external evaluations that are conducted by a team consisting of representatives from the government (mobile educational consultants), health sector (nurses) and CRS. These assessments cover all five project objectives and are conducted in three stages: an assessment of the WASH situation of the school, debrief, presentation of recommendations and dissemination of knowledge to the school community. The evaluation of school WASH status consists in surveying:

- the conditions and operation of the water supply chain, latrines and hand washing devices
- students' knowledge about key hygiene behaviours
- consumption of potable drinking water, latrine use, hand washing at critical times, and waste management
- hygiene education in the classroom, including mentoring of teenage girls in managing menstrual hygiene
- the existence and use of monitoring tools including a WASH action and management plan

After evaluating the WASH conditions, external evaluators prepare recommendations to share with the school community (teachers, school WASH committee, and WASH club). The external evaluators meet with community members for a progress update and to present a summary of current recommendations and address concerns. During this session, information is shared and solutions are discussed on doable actions to improve school WASH conditions based on survey findings and lessons learned from achievements in other schools in the district. These joint visits are, importantly, not just for evaluation, but also a form of support to strengthen stakeholder participation towards achieving the objective to become a WASH friendly school.

At the end of the visit, a copy of the joint visit evaluation form is completed and signed by the evaluators and representatives of the school community, to be used by the school in order to help guide implementation of recommendations. A minimum of four hours is required to conduct a joint visit, including debrief session with the school community members.

### **The impact of joint visits on project achievements**

Joint visits reinforce continuous capacity building opportunities for self-assessments by identifying successes and shortcomings and highlighting the actions needed to improve results and achieve self-sustainability through maintaining WASH services and improving key hygiene behaviours. The presence of a high-level education representative (educational supervisors) during joint visits is an additional source of motivation for teachers, and can incite further change.

A major advantage of these joint visits is the real-time feedback and immediate decision-making which they provide. This approach prevents all the delays that a usual visit from a government official would imply: long feedback and review processes with little information getting back to the community. With the joint visit approach, all the stakeholders are together and feasible recommendations and decisions are made on the same day at end of the visit. The school community can immediately respond to recommendations and discuss constraints, etc. Thus, the likeliness of corrective measures and follow-up is more likely.

The joint visits along with the self-assessments allow the entire school community to better understand the requirements in service levels needed to attain WASH-friendly school status. These different aspects are discussed in order to permit the school community to understand the efforts to be undertaken and their value.

Self-assessments and joint visits have spurred school communities to take corrective actions in response to recommendations, including:

- Budgeting of operation and maintenance for water points and sanitation facilities in the school and implementation of 'doable' actions without external support, such as restocking of cleaning products and soap.
- Acquisition of drinking water stations for each classroom and cups for individual student water consumption.
- Regular cleaning of water storage containers.
- Equipping latrines with water kettles for anal cleansing.
- Creation of hand washing devices using local materials located at each sanitation facility and at various areas in the school yard.
- Increased enforcement of handwashing after using latrines and before eating.
- Establishment and enforcement of cleaning schedule for sanitation facilities.

### **Lessons learned**

- Joint visits require a full day to ensure proper participation and to assure an interactive debriefing.
- It is generally difficult to access teacher preparation books to assess how hygiene lessons are taught.
- The mobilization of community funds to support WASH-friendly school efforts (purchase of soap, equipment maintenance, etc.) is a major difficulty, although joint visits provide a framework for discussing needs and affordable solutions.
- The self-assessment approach developed ownership by education authorities and school communities who feel knowledgeable and responsible to manage their own WASH improvements.
- The use of participatory methods for monitoring and evaluation has contributed to enhancing the relation between the project and local stakeholders who feel that the approach established a more constructive relationship than in usual school WASH projects here collaboration is limited to building facilities and providing training.
- Increased involvement of local elected officials needed to strengthen local competencies and governance.

### **Conclusion**

Joint visits and self-assessments have been conducted in all 108 schools covered by the project. The approach of community self-assessments and joint visits serves as a powerful motivator to enable communities to identify and confront WASH improvement areas within their own community and act without waiting for donors or external stakeholders to lead interventions. This grassroots approach is enabling schools to quickly advance towards achieving and maintaining WASH-Friendly status.

Additionally joint visits and self-assessments support local stakeholder accountability through the identification of realistic indicators and development of their roles as sustainable contributors. These two activities incite an increased level of involvement, exchange and ownership from the school community, which improves accountability in terms of project implementation.

Furthermore, through the stakeholder-orientated MEAL approach of the Kom-Yilma project, stakeholders are empowered to take decisions and corrective actions presented in the results report summary of joint visits and self-assessment in order to guide actions to improve performance and advance towards certification of WASH-friendly schools.

By reviewing completed assessment forms, log books and observing actual changes in WASH conditions, the project plans to evaluate how self-assessments and the joint visit processes actually contribute to improving WASH services in schools.

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