

Safe access to water, sanitation and health for women and girls in schools

Programme name	"Customer and Performance Oriented Drinking Water and Sanitation Services" (CPWS)
Commissioned by	Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)
Project region	Albania
Lead executing agency	Ministry of Infrastructure and Energy
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In Albania, women play a key role in the provision, management and conservation of water. The key role of women as providers and users of water as well as environmental protection has not often been reflected in institutional arrangements for the development and management of water resources. Accepting and applying these principles requires developing positive policies to meet the specific needs of women, as well as empowering them to participate in all levels of water resources programs, including decision-making and implementation. The decision-making bodies, various Boards and committees are composed mostly on men, leaving the women and girls underrepresented or not represented at all. Therefore, their gender specific needs, both internally (among employees) and externally (in the community) are neither fully identified and discussed nor implemented effectively to achieve gender equality standards.

During COVID-19 the sub-standard quality of water and sanitation services and facilities adversely affected in particular the quality of life in public schools for women and girls, which in turn impacted the entire community. Recognizing and responding to this problem, Water programme "Customer and Performance Oriented Drinking Water and Sanitation Services (CPWS) on behalf of German Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) rehabilitated two school toilet facilities as an essential element of a safe and healthy school environment.



Women and men are likely to be affected in different ways by inadequate water, sanitation and hygiene conditions in schools and this can contribute to health vulnerability leading to unequal learning opportunities. As examples of the adverse impact of this problem on women and girls there is evidence of the following consequences:

- Lack of adequate facilities for menstrual hygiene contributes to women and girls dropping out of school completely at puberty.
- Lack of adequate, private and safe toilets and washing facilities has discouraged parents from sending women and girls to school. Toilets provide privacy and security, to minimize the risk of violence, including sexual violence.

Based on gender statistics from the Municipality of Elbasan two schools with evidence of those consequences were selected for priority rehabilitation of toilets. Within in the scope of this project a total of 11 toilet facilities in a month have been rehabilitated to acceptable health and safety standards. This project was successfully achieved by cooperation and collaboration working with local entrepreneurs, community / women organizations, students, parents, and school principals and staff. Together they worked to define the problem, identify the specific needs of women and girls, to work with Ministry and GIZ to formulate an assist project, then to implement a project to provide affordable water, safe and sanitary facilities for their school communities.

In an effort to further raise awareness of the importance of hygiene and safety practices, in particular during pandemic periods, special classes were offered on a volunteer basis to discuss best practices and lessons learned. Again, this effort focused on the unique requirements of gender. Development and implementation of this step was broad based and had the cooperation and collaboration of school management, the Elbasan Water Utility provider, and Albanian Water Association.



Added value of internal cooperation was achieved through engagement with the GIZ Sustainable Rural Development project working to support 45 women producing hand soaps with renewable materials for the school toilets. With this collaboration we have linked and strengthened both internal programs and, in both cases, provided opportunities to further empower women in the social and political environment of the country.

The school projects goal was to address the practical needs of women and girls for safe sanitation and hygiene. The following results were achieved with the rehabilitation:

- Almost 750 students in both schools, 7 students with disabilities and 91 students from the Roma minority community have better hydro sanitary conditions
- Ensuring that gender sensitive topics were/are addressed by providing better toilet facilities for 392 women and girls, so that they do not miss school during menstruation days and feel safe in using them.
- Enabled women to participate in the policy-making process and monitor the water service provisions at community level.
- Provided example of how local, national, and international partners can effectively cooperate and collaborate to achieve practical successes that support gender equality, and an improved standard of health and sanitation.
- Implementation of Gender Agenda and Action Plan for Water Supply and Wastewater sector in Albanian 2019-2030 at local level.

Albanian Government has expressed the clear commitment to incorporate water and especially sanitation projects explicitly into the national development or poverty reduction strategies and into the budgets. It is also important to incorporate gender perspectives into all policies and projects aimed at sustainable development. Such project will be more sustainable and more equitable if women are involved in their planning and implementation. We would like to share this experience with our colleagues since during the COVID-19 pandemic, the importance of functioning water services in School is of utmost importance and because lack of hygienic conditions, very adversely impact women and girls.

For Water Team Albania.

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