

3RD NATIONAL WASH IN SCHOOLS SYMPOSIUM 6-8 OCTOBER 2025 REPORT



1.0. INTRODUCTION

The 3rd annual WASH in Schools (WinS) Symposium was held from 6-8 October 2025 under the theme, “**Accelerating Access to Safe Sanitation and Hygiene for Every Learner**”. The pre- event was hosted in Kamuli, where a Learner’s Parliament was held on 6 October 2025, and the main symposium took place in Jinja from 7 to 8 October 2025. This is a report of the two events.

2.0. The Learners’ WASH Parliament in Kamuli District.

The Learner’s Parliament was held at Kamuli Township Primary School and brought together seven (8) participating schools, from the districts of Kamuli, Buyende, Luuka and Namutumba. The participating schools are shown in the table below;

District	Schools	Partner
Kamuli	Kamuli Township (host), Kidiki, & Balawooli	IRC
Buyende	Mirengeizo & Kakooge	IRC
Luuka	Nabitaama & Kyanvuuma	IRC
Namutumba	Irwaniro	Food for the Hungry Association

The legislative forum blended formal parliamentary

procedure with participatory and creative learner-led dialogue. The debate, chaired by Balawoli Primary school (as Speaker and Clerk to Parliament), showcased learner-led ideas and challenges around sanitation, hygiene, menstrual hygiene, management of sanitation and water infrastructure in schools, and the role of parents in supporting WASH in schools in general; and their children in particular. The Learner’s Parliament was attended by official from Kamuli, Luuka & Buyende Local Governments, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education & Sports, and Partners (IRC & Food for the Hungry Association). IRC rewarded the participating schools with gifts.

Figure 1: Pupils of Nabitaama, Luuka receiving their gift



- ✓ 40 copies of the photovoice booklets were distributed to the 03 participating SHF schools, district officials and a few participants.

2.1. Key Takeaways from the Learners’ Parliament

- The session demonstrated that when provided with the right platform and guidance, learners are capable of articulating informed perspectives on issues that affect their daily lives. Their active engagement reflected a growing sense of ownership and responsibility towards improving sanitation and hygiene conditions in their schools.

- b) The combination of formal parliamentary procedures with interactive, learner-led dialogue created an engaging environment for civic learning.
- c) Learners presented clear and context-specific challenges related to sanitation facilities, menstrual hygiene management, hygiene behavior, and the maintenance of water and sanitation infrastructure. They also proposed practical ideas to improve access and sustainability, emphasizing the importance of inclusive facilities for all learners.
- d) The critical role of parents in supporting school WASH initiatives was highlighted as learners recognized that parents contribute not only through financial or material support but also by promoting good hygiene practices at home, which reinforce lessons learned at school.

Figure 2: DIS KAmuli receiving gifts on behalf of the participating schools



2.2. Radio talk show at Baba FM in Jinja

Mr. Birungi Musa (MoES), Mr. Valence (MoH) and Ms. Ayoreka Mary (IRC) participated in the talk show to create awareness on the significance of improved WASH in schools and called upon duty bearers to accelerate access to safe sanitation and hygiene in schools across Uganda. IRC reaffirmed commitment to working with government and all stakeholders to achieve SDG 6.1 & 6.2. Listeners were invited to join the WASH in Schools symposium to continue with the discussions.

3.0. Main Symposium- Jinja Source of the Nile Hotel

3.1. Keynote address: Investing in climate resilient WASH services for every learner

Day two of the symposium opened with a keynote address titled “***Investing in climate resilient WASH services for every learner***”. Dr. Hamis Mugendawala, of the National Planning Authority, delivered the keynote address. He highlighted that schools are safe spaces for learning, health, and growth, and climate change threatens water sources, sanitation infrastructure, and hygiene behaviour. Also, that children bear the greatest burden of water and sanitation insecurity and noted that investing in resilient WASH equates to investing in education continuity.

3.1.1. Key Highlights from the Keynote Address

- A call to embrace a synergy-based way of working and unite strengths across sectors and line ministries, and move beyond mandate-based silos
- A shift from counting infrastructure to tracking functionality.
- Targeted financing should incorporate performance-based incentives.

- Ensure that Ministries, departments and agencies (MDAs) develop budget compliance to WASH.
- Integrate WASH indicators in education data systems
- Mainstream climate-resilient WASH in school plans
- Strengthen coordination, accountability, and data-driven decision-making.

3.2. Participation in Panel Discussions

3.2.1. Measuring what matters: Strengthening WASH in schools Indicators for SDG 6.1 & 6.2.

IRC participated in a high-level panel discussion entitled “Measuring what matters: Strengthening WASH in schools Indicators for SDG 6.1 & 6.2”. The panel recognized that achieving universal access to safe water, sanitation, and hygiene in schools is more than infrastructure. It requires the ability to measure what matters. Without reliable indicators, progress toward safe drinking water and adequate sanitation and hygiene risks being uneven, under-reported, or poorly understood. The discussion focused on:

- How data can be better collected, harmonized, and used to inform policy, resource allocation, and accountability frameworks.
- Practical innovations in monitoring, the importance of aligning national indicators with global SDG benchmarks.
- Strategies to ensure that data reflects the realities of children in both
- urban and rural schools.
- Charting a pathway for more robust, actionable and equity-focused WASH indicators.
- Measurement leads to meaningful change for safe water, sanitation, and hygiene for every child, everywhere.

IRC particularly focused on innovations in data collection, citizen-led monitoring and digital tools that can improve the timeliness, accuracy, and usability of WASH in schools indicators to drive decision-making.

3.2.1.1. Key Takeaways from the discussion

- Sustainable access to safe water, sanitation, and hygiene in schools requires behavioral change, effective management, and continuous monitoring beyond the mere presence of facilities.
- Reliable, disaggregated, and timely data is essential to understand real progress toward SDG 6.1 and 6.2. Weak or inconsistent data can mask inequalities and hinder targeted interventions.
- Alignment of WASH in schools indicators across ministries, development partners, and monitoring frameworks ensures comparability and coherence in reporting and accountability.



Figure3; Mary IRC with the team of panelists from MoES, MoH, MWE & UWASNET

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- Indicators should capture disparities related to gender, disability, and geography to ensure that “no child is left behind” in achieving universal WASH access.
- Leveraging innovations such as geo-tagging and photo verification, data collection using tablets or android supported phones, and real-time WASH dash portals improve data quality, accuracy, transparency, and responsiveness.
- WASH data should directly inform policy decisions, resource allocation, and performance improvement at district and national levels

3.3. Moderating side sessions

3.3.1. Menstrual Hygiene Management and Gender inclusion in WASH in Schools in Uganda: Why the persistent stigma

IRC chaired a session under the theme “Menstrual Hygiene Management and Gender inclusion in WASH in Schools in Uganda: Why the persistent stigma?” Ayoreka Mary- RWO facilitated discussions around ongoing stigma surrounding menstruation to identify practical solutions for advancing gender inclusion in WASH in schools. The discussions also focused on the intersection of infrastructure, education, cultural norms, and policy while highlighting promising practices in teacher training and student-led initiatives.

3.3.1.1. Key takeaways from the session

- Persistent stigma around menstruation continues to hinder girls’ participation in school and requires sustained community engagement to address underlying misconceptions.
- Effective Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) in schools demands an integrated approach that combines appropriate WASH infrastructure, education, and behavioral change interventions.
- Teacher training and student-led initiatives emerged as promising practices for fostering open dialogue and reducing stigma within school environments.
- Stronger collaboration with cultural leaders, parents, and policymakers is essential to align cultural norms and policies in support of gender-inclusive WASH programs.
- Continued investment in MHM-friendly infrastructure—such as private washrooms, disposal facilities, and access to sanitary materials—is critical to promoting dignity and consistent school attendance among girls

3.3.2 Climate Resilient WASH manual (CRW) Manual Development and preliminary findings

IRC was given the opportunity to present the preliminary findings from the process to develop the CRW manual for schools. Jacinta Nekesa, a consultant, delivered the presentation. In addition, IRC chaired/moderated the session on Climate change and child-friendly WASH: Preparing schools for an uncertain future. The key highlights from the session are below.

- Schools are increasingly affected by floods, droughts, and water scarcity. Building resilience means designing WASH systems that can withstand and adapt to climate shocks.
- Engaging learners in water conservation, hygiene promotion, and environmental stewardship empowers them as change agents and helps sustain WASH behaviors over time.
- School WASH programs should incorporate climate risk assessments, water safety planning, and contingency measures to ensure continuous access to safe water and sanitation during climate-related disruptions.
- The session highlighted innovations such as rainwater harvesting, solar-powered water pumping, ecological sanitation, and water reuse as climate-smart solutions for schools.

3.3.3. Session: How can CSOs strengthen advocacy for long-term financing?

IRC participated in the above session. Key highlights from the session included the following,

- Use reliable data, cost analyses, and impact stories to demonstrate the economic and social returns of investing in sustainable WASH services. Evidence-driven advocacy is more persuasive to policymakers and funders.
- Monitor public expenditure on WASH to identify funding gaps, inefficiencies, and missed commitments.
- Build alliances among CSOs, private sector actors, media, academia, and local governments to present a united voice and sustain pressure for long-term financing commitments.
- Advocate for financing models that prioritize vulnerable and underserved schools and communities, ensuring no one is left behind in achieving SDG 6.

✓ **80 copies of the photovoice booklets were distributed to the participants in the symposium.**

4. Conclusion & Preliminary Outcomes

- Strengthened collaboration among district officials, WASH organizations, schools, and communities.
- Increased awareness of sustainable financing and climate-resilient WASH infrastructure.

- Recognition of menstrual hygiene as a key component of school health programs.
- Commitment to improve accountability and monitoring mechanisms in the WASH sector.
- Tracking the progress of the last symposiums.

The three-day event was closed by the PS, Ministry of Education & Sports-Ms Kedrace Turyagyenda. She commended all participants for their dedication to advancing WASH in schools and emphasized the critical role of collaboration between government, CSOs, and communities. She highlighted the importance of sustained investment, data-driven planning, and behavioral change alongside infrastructure development. She encouraged stakeholders to translate the symposium's discussions into concrete actions, ensuring that every child has access to safe water, sanitation, and hygiene, and urged continued advocacy for policy coherence and long-term financing to achieve sustainable impact.



Figure 4; implementing partners pose for a photo with the PS

5. Activity Photo gallery



Jacinta Nekesa presenting the draft CRW in schools manual for IRC



Mary during the learner's parliament session in Kamuli



Betty during the learner's parliament session.



MWE-ATC staff giving remarks as chief guest on day1 of the symposium in Kamuli district.



Learners from Buyende, Luuka & Kamuli pose for a photo after the learners parliament session in Kamuli



A learner from Balawoli P/s during the learner's parliament participating in discussions.



Mr. Birungi MoES addressing participants during the Learner's Parliament at Kamuli Township school.



The DIS Luuka receiving gifts for the two schools that participated in the learner's parliament.



Day2 of the symposium in Jinja



Day2 of the symposium in Jinja



Mary facilitating the side event session on MHH & gender inclusion on WinS in Uganda, Why the persistent stigma?



Rita during one of the side events in the symposium