Smart Water for Green Schools

Photo: www.brunofert.com
First launched by Green Cross in 2010, this project:

- Provides safe drinking water to over 147,000 people in Ghana, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Senegal, Argentina, Bolivia, Mexico, Sri Lanka, China, Ukraine and Brazil.
- Empowers communities to secure their own water supply
- Reduces the risk of deadly waterborne diseases
- Promotes the sustainable use of water resources
- Increases school attendance, girls’ education and gender equality

Where we work

SWGS is now active in over 169 communities worldwide: in Ghana, Bolivia, Argentina, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Mexico, China (Yunnan Province), Ukraine, Senegal, Brazil and Sri Lanka. Green Cross is always working to deploy projects in new countries, or in different regions of the above countries.
The Global Water Crisis: Children on the front line

According to the WHO, about one in four people worldwide drink water contaminated with faeces. Four in 10 people live without adequate sanitation. Children are paying the highest price – they the most vulnerable to being robbed of their lives, health, education and prospects for a better future.

Every year, about 700,000 children die from diarrhoea caused by dirty water and poor sanitation – that is nearly 2,000 every day.

Schools can provide a lifeline for children in the world’s poorest communities, but in too many cases the absence of water and sanitation facilities in schools is one of the main barriers to education – especially for girls, one in four of whom still does not complete primary school. Of the 113 million children currently not in school, 60% are girls.

With water resources becoming even more stressed, unpredictable and unevenly distributed in many regions, it is increasingly vital for communities to take practical action to secure their water supplies, optimize their resources and educate young people in sustainable, responsible management.
What is Smart Water for Green Schools for?

Green Cross International launched the *Smart Water for Green Schools* (SWGS) project in February 2010, under the Green Cross *Water for Life and Peace* programme – first in the Volta River basin in Ghana, followed in 2011 with schools in the La Plata River basin in Bolivia.

SWGS puts water and sanitation at the heart of community development, helping enhance young people’s health, education and aspirations. The project supports the practical realization of the universal Human Rights to Safe Drinking Water and Sanitation through four main activities:

- Equipping schools with rainwater harvesting systems;
- Providing schools with ecological sanitation facilities;
- Installing other water systems, such as wells and boreholes, for the wider community; and
- Developing environmental, hygiene and health education programmes.

SWGS is stakeholder driven; training and employment of local people to build, maintain and repair the new facilities, as well as education and awareness-raising, are central components of the initiative. Green Cross teams work with local authorities, teachers and experts to promote the importance of sustainable water management and good hygiene amongst students at schools involved.

Providing water and sanitation services to schools engages children, their parents and other community members in improving water security and maintaining their role as guardians and agents of transformational change.

Water for Life and Peace: The Green Cross Vision

Water is a limited resource. It crosses borders and is shared between states and peoples. Some 40% of the world’s population live close to one of the 276 watercourses that cross between countries, and there are increasing tensions and disputes between many groups that share their water resources.

The Green Cross *Water for Life and Peace* programme has worked for many years to encourage shared water to be seen as a source of cooperation, opportunity and mutual benefit.

SWGS serves children and their local communities living around numerous important river basins. This gives Green Cross opportunities to encourage cooperation and exchanges between schools benefiting from projects in the same river basin, even across national or regional borders. SWGS allows children, who are typically from farming and fishing communities, to discuss their experiences gain understanding of their neighbours’ needs – promoting awareness, equity and respect.

Ultimately, the projects promote a better access to water and sanitation, as well as a shared vision of water conservation at local, national and international levels, making everyone involved better “water neighbours.”
Smart Water for Green Schools: Four areas of activity

*Smart Water for Green Schools* works with local partners to identify communities struggling with water poverty and, through simple and sustainable actions, transforms their schools into a source of pride and hope in the eyes of students, teachers, parents and the entire community. Children experience the life-changing value of water and hygiene first hand, and are encouraged to lift their educational ambitions.

1) Capturing the rain

Rainwater harvesting is a “smart” system for optimizing available water resources that can make a huge difference to both rural and urban communities, using relatively simple technology. SWGS builds reliable and long-lasting rainwater harvesting systems and ensures their maintenance by training local community members.

Children and teachers use the captured water for drinking and washing their hands. Regular hand washing can reduce the risk of diarrhea by up to 40%, and having a clean water supply keeps children safely in school throughout the day.

2) Providing privacy, dignity and security

SWGS builds ecological latrines in schools without such facilities, and community members are trained in their maintenance. The latrines keep human waste away from the immediate environment, and allow it to be collected and used for agricultural purposes. The project therefore promotes better public health, increased local agricultural productivity and reduced wastewater pollution.

Another important benefit of equipping schools with separate latrines for boys and girls is the increased enrolment of female students. In some schools, the enrolment of girls has increased by almost 50%.

3) Ensuring water security in the wider community

Villages selected for SWGS usually rely on poorly functioning wells, local streams and rivers if no manmade systems are available, or if water availability drops during the dry season.

To secure safe water supplies for school children and their communities, SWGS equips these villages with additional water supply systems, such as boreholes and wells.

4) Instilling a thirst for knowledge: water and hygiene awareness-raising

SWGS implements hygiene and sanitation education, and provides environmental awareness programmes in schools. This involves training school instructors and other community members, and providing materials and methods to teach children about hygiene, water use and the environment.

School children and other community members monitor and treat the harvested rainwater, stimulating their interest in managing the water resources and systems. Students learn and practice techniques for rainwater measurement and for monitoring both the system and local rivers. This data is shared with local authorities.
Looking Ahead

Green Cross International, its global network of local offices, and other partners, are looking to implement locally adapted Smart Water for Green Schools solutions in new locations around the world that, in turn, promote our vision for improved sharing of available water resources (in support of the universal Human Right to Safe Drinking Water and Sanitation).

About Green Cross International

GCI is an independent non-profit and nongovernmental organisation founded in 1993 by Nobel Peace Laureate Mikhail Gorbachev. It addresses the inter-connected global challenges of security, poverty and environmental degradation through global advocacy and local projects. GCI is headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland, and has a network of national organisations in 27 countries.

"With sustainable water systems being installed in town schools, children can both access water more easily and attend lessons."

Famke Janssen, Water for Life and Peace Ambassador, Green Cross