

## Boosting Girls' Confidence

*Parents team up with teachers to provide girls' washrooms to keep girls in school.*



**Figure 1: Nyirasafari Agathe places a towel in the girls washroom at Gihinga School (Photo/Donna A.A., Concern Rwanda)**

Rwanda has made great strides in expanding access to education. Enrollment is up, repetition and drop out are down, and more children are finishing primary school thanks to Rwanda's award-winning Nine Year Basic Education program, which makes six years of primary and three years of secondary education free and compulsory for all Rwandans. In January, UNESCO placed Rwanda in the top three countries for reducing out-of-school youth.

Despite this accomplishment, absenteeism for girls remains a challenge.

"On average, a girl would come to school for two weeks in a month," said Mbonigaba Xavier, the head teacher of Gihinga School in Rwanda's Bugesera district. "This was greatly affecting their performance."

According to schools, girls' menstrual periods are a main cause. "[They] dropped out of school because they lacked sanitary pads and more so privacy," said Twagiramariya Agnes, a Gihinga School parent and Vice President of the school's Parent Teacher Committee (PTC).

After attending training by USAID, 283 PTCs made action plans including initiatives to help girls stay in school.

Gihinga's PTC assigned female teachers to be in charge of girls' welfare and planned for the construction of a separate girls' washroom and the provision of sanitary pads and other items.

Teachers Nyirabaruma Leonice and Nyirasafari Agathe also hold regular "girls' evenings"—a time to discuss reproductive health and other pressing issues that affect girls.

"[Girls] are now aware of what they can do in times of trouble and whom to talk to without being afraid," said Leonice. "Girls are now confident at school."

At Rugando Primary School, parents volunteered to construct a washroom for girls, while the school organized for the provision of items such as sanitary pads, water, soap, basins, and towels.

"The number of girls regularly attending school has increased," said Joseph Sibomana, in charge of academics at the school.

As trainings for PTCs rollout across the country, more girls will benefit from initiatives like these.

Support for PTCs is part of USAID's five-year Literacy, Language, and Learning (L3) Initiative. L3 consortium member Concern Worldwide Rwanda trains PTCs as part of L3's overall effort to improve early-grade literacy and numeracy skills of Rwandan children.