Inclusive Water Resilience Accelerator Fund

Dakar, Senegal

The C40 Inclusive Water Resilience Accelerator Fund (IWRAF) has supported Dakar to address the existing limitations in water, sanitation, and health (WASH) facilities and practices within secondary schools.

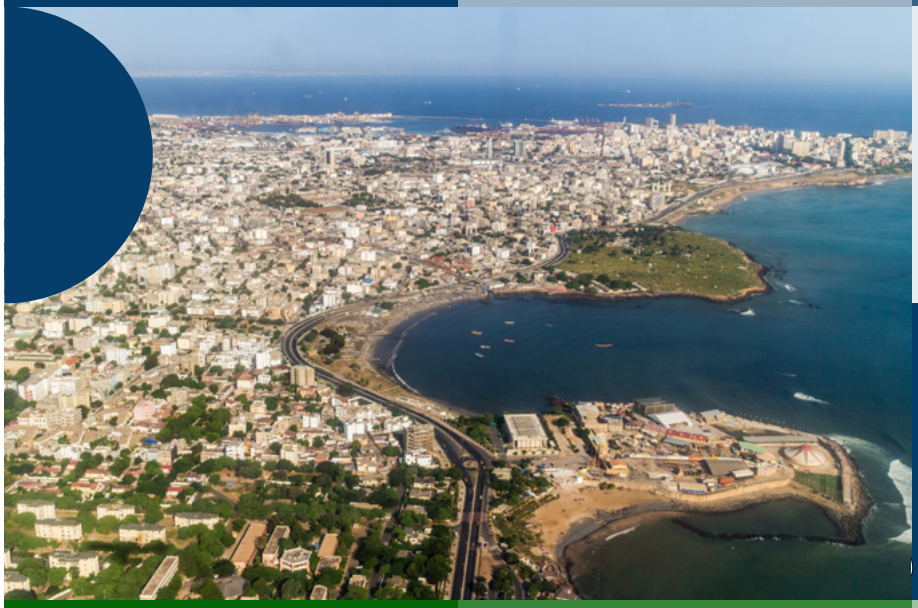
The project analysed opportunities to enhance infrastructure and access to safe drinking water and to foster positive behavioural changes among students, teachers, school management, and parents. Through its comprehensive approach, the initiative aims to create a safer, healthier, and more resilient environment for students and the wider community.

What challenge did the project address?

Dakar is actively strengthening its water management infrastructure to meet the demands of rapid urbanisation, with a focus on ensuring vulnerable communities – especially schools – have access to improved water-related resources. Currently, only 10% of schools in the city meet the World Health Organization (WHO)'s recommended ratio of one toilet per 25 students.

The existing facilities are poorly maintained and 26% are not functional at all; as a result, the majority of students report that they use school toilets only exceptionally (95% of girls; 67% of boys). Accessibility and inclusion is another major challenge, with only 5% of school sanitary blocks being fully accessible to people with reduced mobility.

Meanwhile, only 5% of school toilets adequately address menstrual hygiene, exacerbating girls' reluctance to use these facilities. This leads to poor health and increased school absences, with girls feeling unable to attend during their periods.



Credit: Derejeb, Getty

Addressing the existing limitations in water, sanitation and health facilities and practices within secondary schools

What did the city achieve?

The city engaged school children aged between 12 and 17, alongside various other stakeholders – including school inspectorates, teachers, parents' associations, and communes – to assess the existing WASH infrastructure in all 55 public schools in Dakar.

Through focus groups and interviews, stakeholders identified specific gaps and needs, including those around accessibility and gender inclusion, such as taking girls' menstrual health needs into account. These insights informed the development of comprehensive technical and organisational solutions for improving WASH infrastructures, as well as for their ongoing management.

The proposed solutions, which were designed to be implemented according to the specific needs of each school, included:

- construction of new and improved sanitation units, including pilots using locally sourced sustainable construction materials;
- provision of menstrual health kits (including washable/reusable menstrual pads) to all female students;
- rehabilitation and/or extension of existing facilities (including improvements to accessibility, lighting, aeration, safety, and handwashing equipment);
- connection to potable water and sewage networks where needed;
- construction of fencing/walls to increase privacy and improve safety; and
- improving upkeep through the delivery of training and purchase of maintenance supplies, extending the life of new and refurbished facilities.

The project assessed the feasibility of these solutions, looking at their potential to build climate resilience and taking into consideration environmental and financial constraints. The most appropriate options were then put forward for the city to consider implementing over the short, medium and long term. The project also identified recommendations for innovative funding mechanisms.

In parallel, the city surveyed teachers and students to assess current WASH practices in schools, gaining an in-depth understanding of behavioural barriers and gaps in knowledge and practice. A workshop was also held with teachers and school inspectors. These engagements directly informed the development of a training and awareness-raising programme focusing on good practice in the management of water and sanitation facilities, with an emphasis on gender equality, safety, and accessibility. The training was provided to fifteen academic inspectors in mid-October 2025, and will continue to be rolled out to key local stakeholders across the city.

Credit: GRET

How did the Fund advance equitable water resilience?

- Participatory engagement across all 55 schools in Dakar helped identify the precise gaps and needs related to WASH infrastructure. The city now has a roadmap to address these gaps, including the construction of 1,270 new toilet stalls and the rehabilitation of 879 existing stalls. The proposed approach supports climate resilience by incorporating diversion or infiltration infrastructure in flood-prone schools, and providing continuous access to safe drinking water. It also takes into account thermal comfort for extreme heat conditions, recommending the use of local materials such as typha and laterite.
- City needs were transformed into innovative solutions, which have been budgeted and structured into a detailed implementation plan. The plan is divided into an Emergency Phase (2026) followed by short-, medium-, and long-term phases; this structure enables the city to inform its funding decisions by providing a clear prioritisation of investments towards closing the WHO toilet–student ratio gap. The city aims to reach one toilet per 50 students by 2032.
- The training and awareness-building programme strengthened water management and sanitation practices in target schools, with a focus on gender equity. This is a successful model that Dakar can now replicate and expand across the city.
- The Fund supported Dakar in ensuring that school students have access to safe and inclusive sanitation infrastructure, and a continuous supply of piped drinking water, reducing the use of unsanitary plastic bags and bottles

Credit: Adobe

Visit C40's website for more information about the Inclusive Climate Action (ICA) Cities Fund.