

Ending the water, sanitation and hygiene crisis together

Policy priorities for accelerating progress



Executive summary

March 2023



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▼ The 'What about me?' workshop was run to raise the awareness on the importance of accessible toilets. Kampot Province, Cambodia. September 2019.

In this paper, we make policy recommendations to countries working to accelerate progress towards sustainable and safe water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services for all. It is for developing country government ministers, policy makers and decision makers at national or sub-national level, and is relevant for development partners.

WASH services, including safe hygiene behaviours, are vital for everyone. WASH is indispensable to economic development, as well as health, tackling gender inequality and building resilience to climate change. Investment in universal basic drinking water can yield up to US \$32 billion annually and investment in basic hygiene can yield US \$45 billion annually. Increasing investment in safely managed sanitation can yield US \$86 billion annually.¹

Over the past 20 years, we have seen that real progress is possible when WASH is prioritised in national development. For example, in India, basic sanitation coverage rose from 15% in 2000 to 71% in 2020, and in Nigeria, basic drinking water coverage rose from 43% in 2000 to 73% in 2020. Yet, we are mid-way through the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and progress is still unacceptably slow and uneven, especially among the poorest and most vulnerable populations in the least developed countries (LDCs). For example, at current rates of progress, only 37% of people in sub-Saharan Africa will have safely managed water by 2030.²

1. WaterAid/Vivid Economics (2021). *Mission-critical: Invest in water, sanitation and hygiene for a healthy and green economic recovery*. London: WaterAid. Available at: washmatters.wateraid.org/sites/g/files/jkxoof256/files/misin-crtica-invertiren-agua-saneamiento-e-higiene-para-una-recuperacion-economica-saludable-y-ecologica.pdf. (accessed 7 Feb 2023).

2. WHO/UNICEF. *Joint Monitoring Programme*. Available at: washdata.org/ (accessed 7 Feb 2023).



WaterAid/You Sokmeng

- Investment in universal basic drinking water can yield up to US \$32 billion annually.¹
- Investment in basic hygiene can yield US \$45 billion annually.¹
- Investment in safely managed sanitation can yield US \$86 billion annually.¹

The next decade will see a continued rise in population and rural-urban migration. Climate change, political instability, disease outbreaks and economic downturns pose additional threats to health, water security, food security, the economy, gender equality and social development. Ensuring sustainable and safe WASH will become even more critical to build people's resilience.

Those countries that have made rapid progress, such as India, had the full leadership of the Head of Government. The launch of the Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) in 2014 by the Indian Prime Minister, backed by US \$20 billion in funding and human resources at all levels, were key ingredients to reducing the number of people who defecate in the open. The SBM reportedly resulted in the construction of 100 million toilets and over 500,000 villages where people are no longer forced to defecate in the open.³

▼ Drishti and Rajeev, Youth Leaders, check the quality of water with operation and maintenance members at an anganwadi centre in New Delhi, India. March 2020.

Why is progress slow?

- Government leadership and political prioritisation are lacking.
- Institutional arrangements and capacity are inadequate.
- Financial resources are insufficient, and spending is inefficient.
- Gender equality and social inclusion are not adequately considered and funded in WASH and health policies.
- Public health policy neglects the fundamental aspects of WASH for safe living environments.
- WASH is not articulated as a service that needs sustaining.
- WASH, water resources management and climate change are poorly integrated.
- Accountability and regulation are weak.

Priority policy recommendations to governments to accelerate progress

WaterAid is making a series of policy recommendations for governments to follow to address the key barriers to accelerating access to sustainable and safe WASH.

The recommendations should be adapted to suit the country context. However, the top three recommendations are particularly important for laying the foundation for accelerated progress.

3. Ministry of Jal Shakti (2022). *Toilets Built Under Swachh Bharat Mission*. Available at: <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=1797158> (accessed 7 Feb 2023).



Figure 1: Policy recommendations and illustrative examples of immediate actions



The roles of development partners in supporting government

Governments are the key drivers of progress towards universal access to WASH. But development partners, private sector and civil society organisations also have an important role to play to support the implementation of the recommendations in this paper.

Development partners should enhance coordination, reduce fragmentation of official development assistance (ODA) and loan support for WASH, and help ensure equitable distribution.

Bilateral donors including Group of Seven (G7), Group of Twenty (G20) and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) member states should substantially increase their ODA to WASH as grant finance, prioritising LDCs and poorer quintiles of populations, rural areas, informal urban areas, gender-responsive WASH, and sustainability.

They should align their WASH ODA with government visions and plans and participate in blended financing opportunities to augment sector financing.ⁱ

United Nations agencies and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) should coordinate in-country to align with government policies and priorities, and ensure harmonised influencing and support efforts; focus on working with governments to strengthen the WASH systems that underpin service delivery; signal the importance of accelerating progress, prioritising vulnerable groups; frame WASH as a service; increase attention to hygiene and sanitation in particular; and increase focus on climate-resilient and gender-responsive WASH.

Multilateral banks including international finance institutions (IFIs) should recognise all components of WASH as central to climate resilience and adaptation, and reform climate financing accordingly; increase the proportions of financing for climate adaptation; increase the quantity of grants and reduce interest on loans for WASH to help improve and sustain public health.

Private sector organisations should increase investment in WASH to secure a healthy and sustainable workforce and market; support the government efforts in offering innovative solutions to expand WASH services and improve their quality; subscribe to public utility services to support their viability; support water security efforts by ensuring that industrial wastewater is treated to standard before discharging.



◀ **Muluken Wondirad, Debre Tabor Water Utility Manager, assesses the water pipe network map. Muluken's vision is for everyone to have access to clean water 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Amhara, Ethiopia. August 2018.**

i. Blended finance is the strategic use of development finance for the mobilisation of additional finance towards sustainable development in developing countries. See more at: oecd.org/dac/financing-sustainable-development/blended-finance-principles/



◀ Ladislaus Stephano, site employee, and Julius Chisengo, Group Operator for the Decentralised Wastewater Treatment Systems (DEWATS), a system that recycles faecal waste into bio-gas and recycles water used for irrigation. Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania. March 2021.

Front cover main image: Fatimata Coulibaly, a member of the Benkadi women's group, is in charge of water monitoring and management. Segou Region, Mali. February 2019.

Front cover small image: Chea and his colleagues working to unclog a sewer in the Battambang province, Cambodia. March 2022.

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WaterAid is an international not-for-profit, determined to make clean water, decent toilets and good hygiene normal for everyone, everywhere within a generation. Only by tackling these three essentials in ways that last can people change their lives for good.

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