

Ending the water, sanitation and hygiene crisis together

Policy priorities for accelerating progress



March 2023



WaterAid

Executive summary

▼ 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



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.



WaterAid/Srishti Bhardwaj

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.

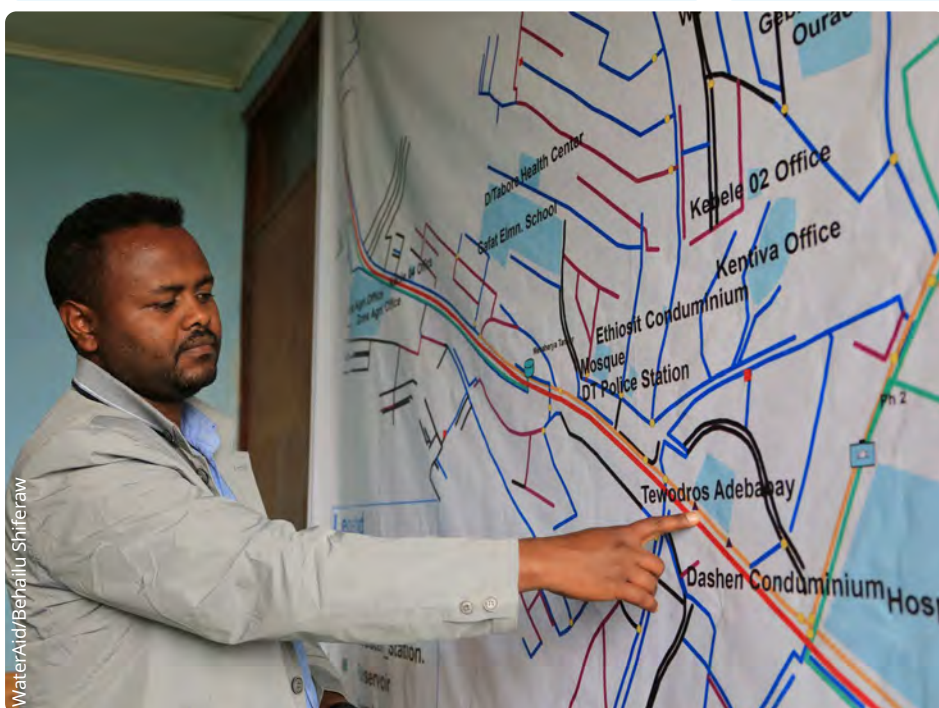
Bilateral donors including Group of Seven (G7), Group of Twenty (G20) and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) member states should substantially increase their ODA to WASH as grant finance, prioritising LDCs and poorer quintiles of populations, rural areas, informal urban areas,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

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Introduction

In this paper, we make policy recommendations to countries to accelerate progress towards sustainable and safe water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services and behaviours for all.

WASH services and behaviours are vital for everyone. WASH is indispensable to economic development, as well as health and dignity. They are crucial for pandemic preparedness and recovery, tackling gender inequality, building resilience to climate change and preventing poverty. Yet, billions of people still do not have these essential services and cannot practise key hygiene behaviours, such as handwashing with soap at critical times.

Who is this policy paper for?

If you are a government minister, a policy maker or decision maker at national or sub-national level, this paper is for you. You should also read this paper if you are a development partner with an interest in WASH or working with governments to provide sustainable and safe WASH services.



▲ Gita Roy formed a committee with 10 other women in the community to maintain the local Reverse Osmosis plant and developed business plans to sell the water to the local community at an affordable price. With thanks to funding from Severn Trent for this project. Khulna Division, Bangladesh. May 2021.

Figure 2: Sustainable Development Goal 6 definitions for household WASH access

Basic access

Water: Drinking water from an improved source, provided collection time is no more than 30 minutes for a round trip, including queuing.

Sanitation: Use of improved facilities which are not shared with other households.

Hygiene: Availability of a handwashing facility with soap and water on the premises.

Safely managed access

Water: Drinking water from an improved water source which is located on the premises, available when needed and free from faecal and priority chemical contamination.

Sanitation: Use of improved facilities which are not shared with other households and where excreta is safely disposed in situ or transported and treated off-site.

Source: WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene²

Between
2000 and 2020:

**2
billion**

people gained access
to safely managed
drinking water
services, increasing
from 62% of the
world's population in
2000 to 74% in 2020.⁴

**2.4
billion**

people gained
access to safely
managed sanitation
services in the same
time period.

**177
million**

fewer people without
basic handwashing
services in 2020
compared to 2015.

The state of WASH

Over the last 20 years, we have seen that real progress is possible when WASH is prioritised in national development.

But, we have also seen that many with the power to accelerate progress do not think that WASH is sufficiently important. This has led to progress being unacceptably slow, particularly among the poorest and more vulnerable groups, and in least developed countries (LDCs) and regions.

In 2015, United Nations Member States promised to end extreme poverty and achieve sustainable development by 2030 through 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). SDG 6 aims to ensure the availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all by 2030, including targets on ending the global WASH crisis, with a specific focus on ending open defecation and the needs of women, girls and those in vulnerable situations.

Sustainable and safe WASH services and behaviours are fundamental for achieving the 17 goals, particularly SDGs 1 (end poverty), 3 (health), 4 (education), 5 (gender equality), 11 (sustainable cities and communities) and 13 (climate action).⁵

Since 2015, important global progress has been made in access to WASH services and behaviour changes,⁶ **but we still have a long way to go.**

In 2020, over 230 million people in Central and Southern Asia and 196 million in sub-Saharan Africa were forced to defecate in the open because they did not have a toilet.

▼ Manisha Kumari, uses a handwashing facility inside her home. Tilakpur, India. With thanks to support from the Halma Water for Life project. May 2022.

Water

In 2020, over 2 billion people globally still did not use safely managed drinking water. The majority live in sub-Saharan Africa. At current rates of progress, only 37% of people in sub-Saharan Africa will have safely managed drinking water by 2030, and just 71% in Central and Southern Asia. In some countries, more than 30% of water points are not working at any one time,⁷ with barely any investment in maintenance.

Sanitation

Globally, over 4.2 billion people are still using toilets and sanitation services that do not reach the 'safely managed service' standard, leaving human waste untreated, threatening human and environmental health. In Africa, at current rates of progress, universal access to even basic sanitation services will not be achieved until 2158.

Hygiene

At present, almost 1 in 3 people do not have a place in their home to wash hands with soap and water.

But it doesn't stop there.

Across the world's 46 LDCs,⁸ almost half of healthcare facilities lack basic water services.⁹ 1 in 7 schools worldwide have no water, 1 in 8 schools have no toilets, and 1 in 4 schools have no handwashing facilities.¹⁰

If progress is not accelerated, countries risk losing whatever gains they have made to frequent disease outbreaks, reduced water security, and the impacts of climate change.



A significant proportion of women and girls do not have the services they need for menstrual health.



◀ A village assembly in Satala, where there are lots of natural water sources that need to be protected, through a strategy of prevention and sustainable management. Zinder, Niger. February 2019.

Why WASH matters

Over the next decade, the global population and rural-urban migration will grow, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, where the population is expected to double by 2050, with the majority of people living in urban areas.¹¹ Currently, the majority of the global population without basic drinking water, sanitation and hygiene reside in rural areas.

Climate change, political instability, disease outbreaks and economic downturns pose additional threats to health, water security, food security, the economy, social development and gender equality.

Providing sustainable and safe WASH is critical in building the resilience of our societies. Investing in sustainable and safe WASH is fundamental for countries to have a healthy workforce, the foundation for a thriving economy.¹²

The consequences of inaction would be monumental. Governments and countries as a whole stand to gain hugely if investment in sustainable WASH services is prioritised.¹³

▼ Mengheang Heng uses the accessible toilets at the Mong Riev Health Centre. Tboung Khmum Province. November 2018.

Did you know that globally:



Investing in universal basic drinking water can yield up to US \$32 billion annually.

Investing in universal safely managed sanitation can yield US \$86 billion annually.

Investing in universal basic hygiene can yield US \$45 billion annually.



Health benefits

The lives of up to 300,000 children would be saved every year if everyone had WASH.¹⁴ Improved hand hygiene practices can reduce the incidence of infectious diseases.¹⁵ Safely managed sanitation services can help reduce the spread of sanitation-borne antimicrobial resistance (AMR) by limiting the spread of pathogens and the need for antibiotics.¹⁶

The global COVID-19 pandemic highlighted how sustainable and safe WASH services, particularly hygiene, builds resilient and responsive social, economic and health systems.

When governments do not invest in WASH interventions, inadequate access contributes to 1.6 million preventable deaths each year, disproportionately affecting children and vulnerable populations.^{13,11}

Left unchecked, diseases will become more frequent leading to increased national spending on healthcare and reduced productivity.¹⁷

Social value and economic benefit

Basic WASH services can provide up to 21 times more value than their cost. Upgrading basic services to safely managed WASH services is a long-term investment that will yield up to US \$37–86 billion per year, avoiding up to 6 billion cases of diarrhoea and 12 billion cases of intestinal worms between 2021 and 2040.^{13,11}

With clean water and toilets at home, women and girls will save more than 77 million days every year from not walking long distances in search of water.¹⁸

When governments do not invest in WASH services, socio-economic gains are lost, including reduced workforce productivity and educational attainment, particularly for women and girls.

As climate change impacts intensify, women and girls risk spending more time each day in search of water. This, along with poor access to secure, private toilets, can increase their vulnerability to gender-based violence.

Environmental benefit

Investing in safely managed sanitation services can improve water security. Properly treated wastewater and faecal sludge can help meet industrial and agricultural water and fertiliser needs, which contributes to the circular economy. It also makes it easier to prioritise good quality water for human consumption.

Eliminating open defecation and systematically treating faecal waste would contribute to reducing the contamination of land and aquatic ecosystems.

When countries neglect investing in safely managed sanitation services, land and aquatic ecosystems are contaminated and water security is compromised.

Sanitation can generate US \$5 economic return per US \$1 invested in African countries.¹⁹

Climate resilience

Sustainable WASH services provide resilience to the impacts of climate change, making water available when and where it is needed most and reducing the disease impact of disasters.²⁰

These WASH services become more critical and more at risk with climate change impacts.

1.9 billion of the world's population currently live in potential severely water-scarce areas that risk security for WASH services. By 2050, it is predicted that this will increase between 42% and 95%, or 2.7 to 3.2 billion people.²¹

These communities will be severely threatened without sustainable, climate-resilient WASH services that ensure populations have access to water of the necessary quality and quantity for their everyday needs.

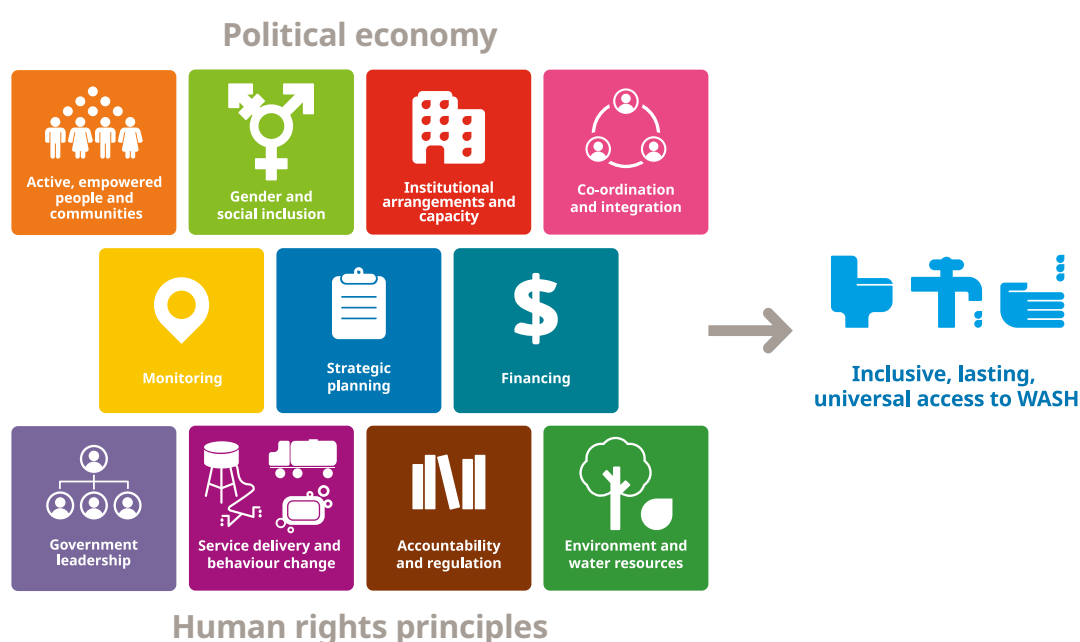
Why is progress slow?

To accelerate progress towards universal access to sustainable and safe WASH services and behaviours, there needs to be a well-functioning WASH system.²² In WaterAid, we have learnt that a well-functioning WASH system consists of 11 building blocks as outlined in figure 3.

Accelerated progress will be achieved when the whole system – all the actors (people and institutions), factors (social, economic, political, environmental, technological) and the interactions between them – is strong.

Based on existing evidence and from our experience of working with government and partners in numerous countries, of the 11 building blocks, there are eight where systemic barriers often lead to slow progress: Government leadership; Financing; Institutional arrangements and capacity; Gender and social inclusion; Service delivery and behaviour change; Co-ordination and integration; Accountability and regulation; and Environment and water resources.²³

Figure 3: Building blocks for a well-functioning WASH system



Barriers to accelerating progress



● Sabiti Yekoyasi, Handpump Mechanic, works with other handpump mechanics to remove galvanised iron pipes. Masindi District, Uganda. November 2020.



Government
leadership

Insufficient government leadership and political prioritisation of WASH

Top level government leadership and championing of WASH is the cornerstone to accelerating progress. Countries where leadership at the top levels of government has been consistent – such as the Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) led by the Indian Prime Minister – demonstrate that rapid change is possible even on an historically under-prioritised issue like sanitation. Where there is insufficient government leadership, it becomes very difficult to address the other barriers holding back progress in WASH: institutional mandates remain unclear, coordination is poor, financing is inadequate and accountability limited.

Hygiene and sanitation are often not a priority in many governments' development plans. Both have been widely neglected, shrouded in taboos and considered a private household issue. Also, sanitation is a complex multisectoral issue that tends to lack a clear institutional home and mandates. This has contributed to weak budget allocation, implementation capacity, an uncoordinated approach to sanitation service delivery and lack of accountability.

Water supply receives more political attention and funding, but this often fails to translate into reliable and safe water supply for people living in poverty. A high proportion of available financing from government is often for capital expenditure, with little or no funds for continuous maintenance or major asset replacement, hence putting at risk the sustainability of the service.

Though governments face difficult choices when deciding what to prioritise and finance, weak political leadership often means that the public demand for better WASH services is not prioritised. This is compounded by the fact that a large proportion of those with lower access to WASH are marginalised populations. They often have limited power and struggle to have their rights and needs prioritised.

▼ Sabinay Shankar works on the water supply line for his house. Kalkidhura village, India. November 2021.



WaterAid/Ranita Roy



Institutional
arrangements and
capacity

Inadequate institutional arrangements and capacity

Institutional fragmentation continues to undermine the effectiveness of the WASH sector: drinking-water, sanitation and hygiene typically have their homes within different ministries, and often the responsible ministries may also vary for rural and urban services. Hygiene, for example, cuts across many other sectors, ministries and departments including WASH, health, education, gender and nutrition, meaning 'it is everywhere and nowhere'.

Institutional fragmentation causes problems when it comes to generating political leadership, setting policies and raising finance. It gives rise to coordination difficulties, weak regulation and accountability, fragmentation in capacity building efforts and different, sometimes competing, monitoring systems. Ultimately, this results in a lack of clear ownership and prioritisation by decision makers and budget holders.

These problems occur at both national and sub-national levels, as well as between administrative levels. Even when there is a relatively strong coordination mechanism with regular meetings (e.g., government-led WASH sector coordination; government/development partner groups) it does not guarantee coordination in planning, financing and programme implementation.



WaterAid/Fabeha Monir

Fragmented institutions lead to **weak human resource capacity**. Few countries have an overview of the human resources working in the WASH sector, or the skill gaps, and no country has a coordinated training plan across all sector institutions and partners.

In 2021/22, only a quarter of countries reported that they had sufficient human resources to implement their WASH policies and plans. The capacity gap is also visible when it comes to service providers, both public and private.²⁴

▲ Rahima Khatun checks Ayesha Afrin's blood pressure at the Raghunathpur community clinic. Patients can now access hygienic toilets and clean drinking water from the clinic's facilities. Satkhira, Bangladesh. December 2022.



Financing

Inadequate financial resourcing and inefficient spending

Investment levels need to more than triple to meet the SDG targets 6.1 and 6.2,²⁵ with at least US \$200 billion a year to address the financing gap for water- and sanitation-related infrastructure and services.²⁶ Although the high return on WASH investment is widely acknowledged, the economic and social benefits of improving WASH are not well integrated into financing mechanisms or advocated to all potential donors or investors.

The **foundations for a strong and high-performing sector** that can attract finance are often weak.²⁷ Key elements of effective governance may be lacking, such as legal and policy frameworks, finance strategies and costed plans, regulation, and data collection and use. Hygiene monitoring is particularly weak: currently only 15% of countries reporting to the UN-Water Global Analysis and Assessment of Sanitation and Drinking-Water (GLAAS) included estimates of hygiene expenditure.²⁴

The **quantity of finance** is substantially below what is needed to achieve and sustain national WASH goals and meet global SDG targets. This includes weak domestic resource mobilisation for WASH, stagnating Official Development Assistance (ODA), negligible levels of climate finance for climate-resilient WASH, and limited private sector finance. This is especially the case in LDCs, placing the burden of financing on already stretched household budgets. Hygiene behaviour and sanitation investments are poorly understood and commonly seen as a household issue, and therefore have low priority for government investment.

Quality of finance is also a barrier to effective delivery of WASH services. In many countries, the small budget allocated to WASH interventions is significantly underspent. Many national and subnational government institutions do not have the capacity to absorb budgets effectively, thus reducing the attractiveness of further budget allocations and investments. Further spending inefficiencies include low levels of transparency impeding



▲ Bedriya Jemal, a health professional at Buriya Health Post, washes her hands between patients with the water installed in her office. Oromia Region, Ethiopia. August 2021.

good decision-making by government and the ability of civil society to hold governments to account, thus creating a risk of patronage and corruption. Inadequate fiscal decentralisation and accountability constrains local implementation.

Poor targeting of public funds and subsidies means that gender disparities and social exclusion go unaddressed. Investment in ongoing WASH service management and behaviour change is seriously lacking, resulting in the failure of services and low uptake of improved behaviours. Programme design may also reflect donor priorities rather than country needs. Funding is often unpredictable with changing donor priorities rather than providing predictable, long-term resources against government plans. ODA for sanitation is shifting away from sanitation interventions that serve people living in poverty,²⁸ and instead is increasingly concentrating in large sanitation infrastructure for formal urban areas – despite functionality concerns.²⁹ Private sector financing opportunities for WASH are not maximised, including blended financing finance to reduce the riskiness of investments and to incentivise private capital and private enterprise.



Gender and
social inclusion

Inadequate attention to gender equality and social inclusion

In many countries, WASH services are typically not gender-responsive and inclusive. Women, girls and gender minorities experience discrimination and inequality in realising their rights to water and sanitation not only in their homes but also in institutions, workplaces and public spaces. This limits these groups' schooling outcomes and engagement in the workforce or public life. In healthcare facilities, the lack of WASH undermines patient and provider safety, in particular child and maternal health.

Lack of gender-responsive WASH is highly discriminatory in that it neglects the specific needs women and girls have during menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth, perimenopause and older age.

Millions of women around the world undertake unpaid WASH-related work in the household and community, promoting safe sanitation and hygiene practices as WASH/health volunteers. Women have limited access to WASH employment and leadership opportunities, and are often found in the lowest paying WASH positions and are underrepresented in technical jobs and leadership roles.

Women's exclusion from committees, boards and community organisations, and the power dynamics within these organisations, undermines their voices and acts as a barrier to ensuring WASH reflects their needs. WASH policies that do not recognise and address harmful social and gender norms are in danger of reinforcing gender-related roles, discrimination, exclusion and inequality.

Barriers to accelerating progress



Mothers bring their babies to get vaccinated at Diaramana Health Centre, Cercle de Bla, Segou Region, Mali. April 2018.

WaterAid/Guilhem Alandry



Co-ordination
and integration

WASH is not owned and mainstreamed by the health sector

There is a fundamental lack of ownership of public health functions by the health sector as they relate to WASH. The commitment and incentives to prioritise 'prevention first' and work with the WASH sector is weak. Health ministries have the ultimate duty to provide safe, equitable and quality health services to their populations, but this cannot be achieved without WASH.

While health ministries are the stewards for WASH in healthcare facilities, the responsibility for tackling barriers to achieving WASH often falls outside their direct mandate.

Despite women representing up to 90% of frontline health workers and the majority of patients, health systems do not prioritise and respond to the rights and demands of women for clean, safe and dignified healthcare. For example, 1.2 million women across 114 countries identified WASH as the second highest priority after respectable and dignified care.³⁰

In 2019, there were over 20 million maternal sepsis cases and other maternal infections, leading to 17,000 maternal deaths and over one million neonatal deaths.³¹ Many of these could have been prevented with adequate WASH in healthcare facilities.

The quality and quantity of finance invested in preventive

public health interventions is substantially below what is needed to deliver against national goals. From 2021 to 2030, it will cost US \$6.5–9.6 billion to provide universal, basic WASH services in healthcare facilities in the 46 LDCs – an average of US \$0.65 per capita, per year.³²

External financing for health is often tied to disease- or sector-specific curative health outcomes and easy-to-count outputs, and therefore fails to incentivise cross-sectoral collaboration or respond to national health priorities.

▼ Margaret Awovunga, Midwife, can now wash her hands between patients because of a new solar-powered water system. The health centre also has a dedicated shower and toilet in the delivery room for new mothers. Bongo district, Ghana. December 2019.



WaterAid/Apag Annankra



WASH is not articulated as a service that needs sustaining

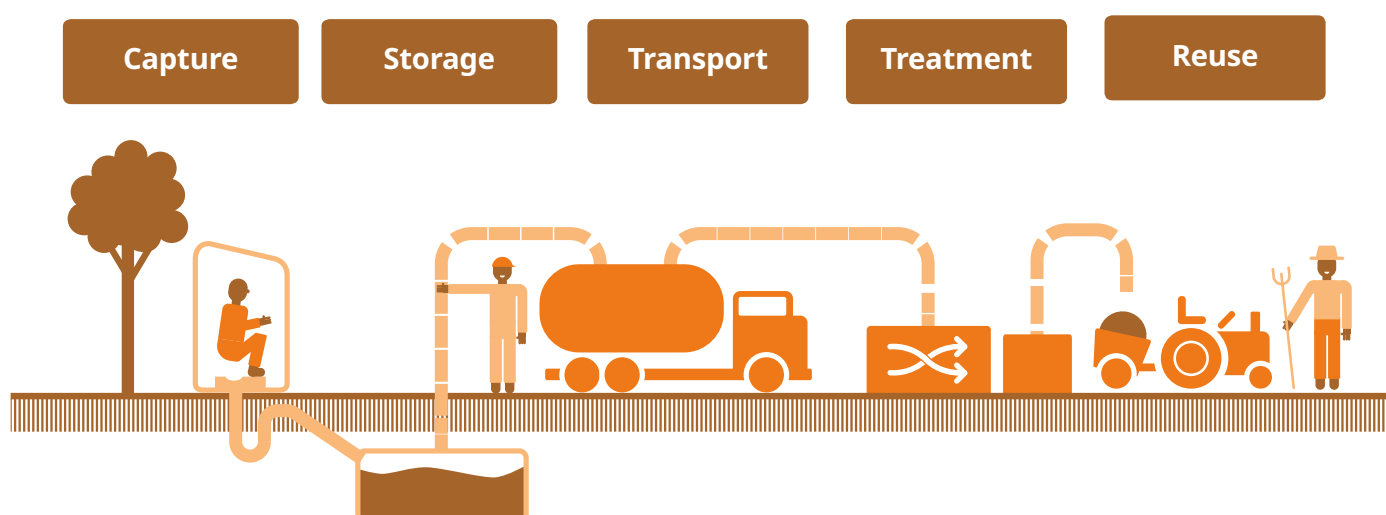
WASH is often framed as infrastructure and delivered with little thought to the associated behaviours and how they will be managed over time to deliver the full benefits. WASH is not about one-time access; it is a group of services and related behaviours that need to be accessed or practised several times a day and be sustained over time. This means that WASH systems need to be strong enough to deliver services continually to entire populations, and to ensure good hygiene behaviours are reinforced.

Sanitation often suffers from projectised implementation and simplistic approaches to toilet building and behaviour change campaigns based on a 'blueprint'. Sanitation policies rarely reflect a universal service aspiration or the aim of ensuring safely managed sanitation for everyone. This would require addressing all stages of the sanitation service chain – containment of human waste (toilets), emptying, transport, treatment and disposal or reuse. For each of these, service providers and viable finance plans are needed, as well as coordination of stakeholders. Formal and informal sanitation service providers, including sanitation workers, face dangerous and undignified working conditions. Furthermore, not enough attention is paid in sanitation

policies and programmes to women and girls and vulnerable groups, such as people with disabilities, those with insecure land tenure, and those living in remote areas, informal urban settlements or areas vulnerable to climate-related risks and disasters.

Water policies do not always clearly define what service management models will be used to reach people in different settings and how implementation of these models will be resourced. Clear arrangements for external support to management, maintenance and financing are not always set out, leading to insufficient resourcing, reduced performance, and long periods of service downtime. Different water supply service management models are needed to reach people in different settings. In many instances, government policies place unrealistic expectations and burden upon communities, allocating responsibility for all aspects of maintenance to water user committees, consisting typically of unpaid volunteers. There can also be an unrealistic assumption that full cost recovery is possible from user tariffs even in rural settings. The necessary professionalisation of management and maintenance seldom exist to enable a transition from handpumps to higher service levels.

Figure 4: The sanitation chain





Environment and
water resources

Poor integration of WASH, water resources and climate change

Institutional fragmentation across WASH, water resources and climate change reduce the ability to accurately anticipate climate hazards and manage water resources effectively. Achieving water security, climate resilience and sustainable, inclusive WASH requires addressing climate and non-climate threats and understanding how solutions can interconnect to build resilience in each situation. Adaptation and resilience efforts that do not ensure communities have fundamental services like sanitation and water will not achieve true resilience.

Minimal climate planning and investment that incorporates WASH is currently seen at all levels from international climate finance down to national and sub-national climate planning. Part of the gap is due to limited robust evidence articulating the linkage between WASH, water security and climate change. There is often minimal or no data on local hazards, vulnerabilities, rainfall, water resource availability, demand and land use. These types of data are needed to unlock potential investments and to ensure climate planning and interventions integrate water security and WASH services.

Data collection, climate planning and intervention selection have limited involvement of the local entities and individuals who can offer insights into what is needed in specific locations.

A key gap in assessing hazards on a timely basis and selecting appropriate adaptation measures is low institutional capacity at all levels in terms of human resources, skills and budgets. National and sub-national governments struggle to respond to the different localised climate and water security hazards across the country, which are likely to all need different solutions.

Data on groundwater potential and long-term historical trends of available water reserves are often not obtainable, leaving key evidence gaps for decision-making.³³ Local governments and communities are usually not equipped to collect the right data needed for both local and national planning to build resilience.

◀ Fatimata Coulibaly, a member of the Benkadi women's group, takes a reading at the water tower. Segou Region, Mali. February 2019.



WaterAid/Basilie Ouedraogo



Accountability
and regulation

Weak accountability and regulation



● Madane Sogoba, community member, supports the Benkadi women's group with the management and maintenance of the water infrastructure. Segou Region, Mali. February 2019.

WaterAid/Basile Ouedraogo

Barriers to accelerating progress

Accountability and regulation are inadequate in many LDCs. Information and monitoring systems for WASH remain weak in most countries. For example, information and data about sector performance in meeting agreed targets, and level of service that people receive, are often unreliable or unavailable. The highest quality WASH data is sourced from periodic national household surveys conducted every 2–4 years.³⁴

Except for censuses, the information gathered rarely has the granularity to be useful for planning by local authorities. Administrative data are often unreliable, outdated or poorly compiled. Limited local government capacity and budgets limit the potential for regular data collection and analysis.

Regulation of WASH services is weak or inadequate in many countries. Even where there is a regulator, the extent of informal WASH services delivery remains considerable, especially for populations who are remote, vulnerable and living in poverty.³⁵ In 2021, less than 50% of regulatory authorities fully performed their key functions for drinking-water in rural areas, and for sanitation less than 33% of regulatory authorities fully performed their function in rural and urban areas.³⁵

Policy recommendations

This section outlines policy recommendations for governments to address the WASH crisis and accelerate progress towards sustainable and safe water, sanitation and hygiene for everyone, everywhere. The scale of the challenge over the coming years requires governments to work with greater urgency to accelerate change on a much larger scale.

Investing in WASH will help advance governments' efforts to develop their economies, achieve health outcomes and improve the general quality of life of its population.

It also requires all development partners to increase and coordinate their support to governments, particularly in parts of sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia where hundreds of millions of people do not have safe drinking water and sanitation, which are essential for good hygiene practices. The policy recommendations presented in this section should be considered and adapted to each local context. The timeline on the next page outlines priority policy recommendations for countries with low level access to basic WASH, and where WASH is not currently prioritised in national development visions and plans.

In countries, where access to basic services is high and WASH is a priority, governments can prioritise the policy recommendations to implement based on the analysis of the key barriers to accelerating progress.

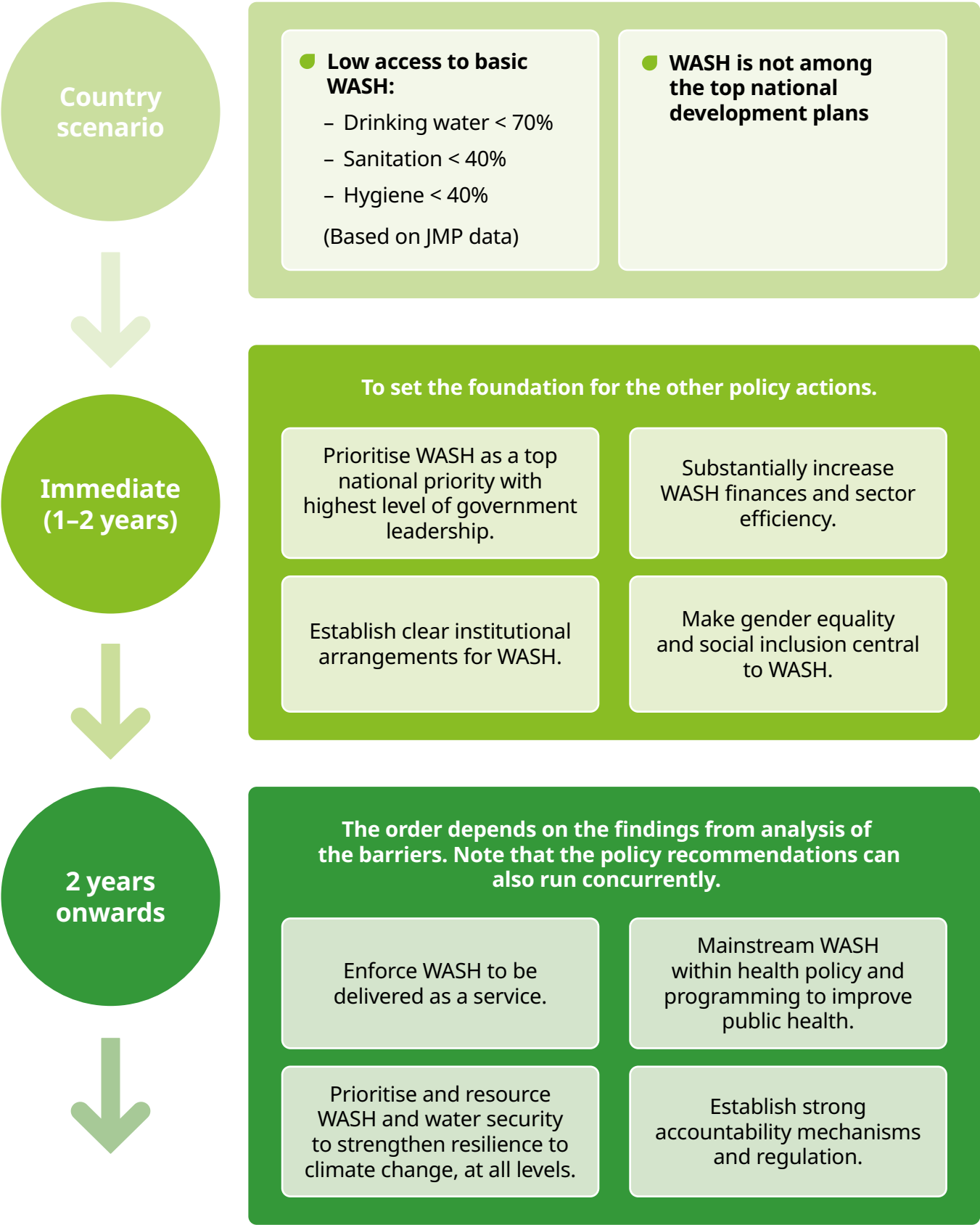
Each policy recommendation is accompanied by descriptions of suggestions and illustrative immediate actions.

◀ Sikander, Sanitation Worker, is safer at work now there are mechanised trucks to service the sewers. Delhi, India. October 2019.



WaterAid/CS Sharada Prasad

Figure 5: Guidance example for prioritising policy recommendations to implement



Policy recommendations

Prioritise WASH as a top national priority with highest level government leadership



National development agenda to prioritise WASH:

- Make accelerating progress to sustainable and safe WASH a top national priority – with focus on sanitation and hygiene, which tend to be neglected.
- Presidential/Prime Ministerial development vision and plan has sustainable and safe WASH as its core.
- At the highest level of government, set out and champion an inspirational vision of sanitation and hygiene behaviours as key drivers of economic progress, development, health, gender equality and climate resilience, and a matter of national pride and modernity.



Illustrative immediate action

Constitute a high-level steering group to review and revise enabling frameworks for WASH (laws, policies, standards, regulation, leadership and funding).

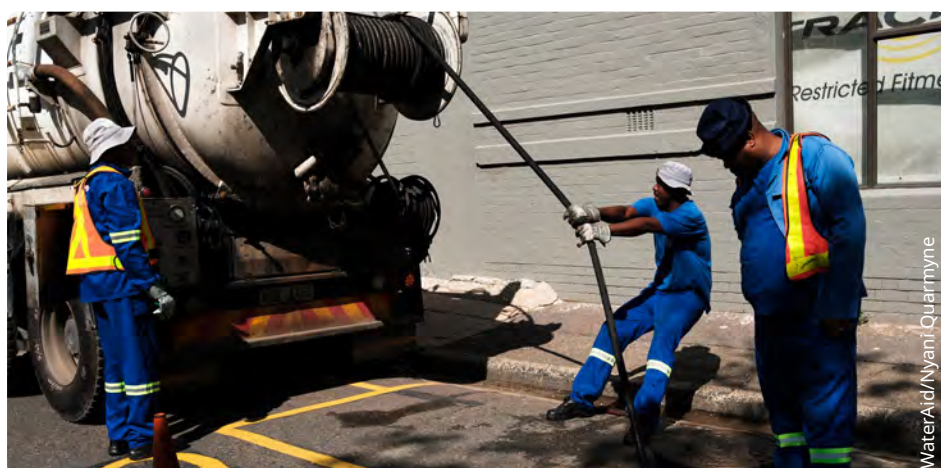
Political leaders stay committed to the vision:

- Ensure long term availability of human and financial resources to achieve and sustain national targets and commitments.
- Drive institutional reform, align bureaucratic incentives with WASH progress, and lead cross-ministerial coordination and collaboration with development partners.
- Establish an effective system for identifying and addressing barriers that hinder implementation.



Illustrative immediate action

Task the presidential/prime ministerial office with overall coordination of sanitation efforts, including holding cross-sectoral meetings to address emerging bottlenecks.



◀ Members of an eThekweni Municipality sewage jetting crew use a hydrojet to clear blockages from sewer lines in the municipality. Durban, South Africa. March 2019.

Establish clear institutional arrangements for WASH



Institutional arrangements and capacity

Establish a clear institutional framework for WASH:

- Set out clear institutional mandates for water (for basic human needs), sanitation and hygiene at the national and local levels – and in particular, clarifying responsibilities for holistic faecal waste management.
- Review and revise legal frameworks to support institutional roles and responsibility for sustainable and safe WASH interventions.
- Map existing institutional capacity and capacity needs, and plan for strengthening capacity from national to local levels across all aspects of WASH, including on climate adaptation and gender-sensitive WASH.



Illustrative immediate action

Define clear responsibilities and standards for managing faecal waste at all levels – from toilets to treatment and disposal/reuse.

Establish or reinforce effective coordination mechanism and cross-sectoral integration:

- Establish guidelines and mechanisms for coordinating the involvement of development partners and private sector investments in WASH.
- Develop ambitious costed national hygiene plans that are multi-sectoral and integrate hygiene within the strategies and operational plans of relevant sectors, including pandemic and climate preparedness planning.



Illustrative immediate action

Establish a multisectoral coordination group for sanitation that is formally supported by a legal framework and has sufficient authority to take decisions on plans, responsibilities and resource allocations.



◀ Younoussa Samake, Technical Director of Bogoni Health Centre, is happy to work in a health centre that has clean water, decent toilets and good handwashing facilities. Segou region, Mali. October 2019.

Increase WASH finances and sector efficiency



Financing

Set the foundations for a high-performing sector that attracts finance:

- Develop costed plans and separate interconnected finance strategies for water, sanitation and hygiene.
- Strengthen governance and capacity of government institutions on planning, budgeting and implementation.
- Strengthen public financial management, monitoring, auditing and reporting, thereby increasing transparency and accountability and reducing the scope for corruption.



Illustrative immediate action

Establish and enforce systems for timely disbursement and efficient use of allocated budget for WASH.

Increase quantity of finance to WASH:

- Substantially increase government, donor and climate finance for WASH, particularly for most neglected populations (rural areas and urban informal areas) and services (sanitation and hygiene).
- Create an environment that encourages greater investment from households (for example, via fair and affordable tariff systems), international donors, and the private sector – including private finance where there is return on investment.
- Establish budget lines and expenditure reporting systems for hygiene, sanitation and on-going maintenance of water supply to incrementally increase access – from basic to safely managed WASH.



Illustrative immediate action

In three years, increase WASH allocation to at least 5% of government budget.

Efficient use of finance and better alignment with equity and sustainability:

- Track and set targets to ensure fair allocation between locations and climate vulnerability; income groups; water, sanitation and hygiene access; capital, maintenance and operation; and, between behaviour change, infrastructure, institutional strengthening and reform.
- Support fiscal decentralisation and local capacity building so that local governments can absorb and use funds more efficiently where and when needed.
- Set up and support affordable and efficient financing models, and set tariffs and allocate subsidies in a way that protects the people living in poverty and covers operation, maintenance and ongoing behaviour change.



Illustrative immediate action

Mandate that the overall per capita investment in WASH in informal settlements and rural areas cannot fall below that in formal urban areas.

Make gender equality and social inclusion central to WASH



Gender and social inclusion

Promote gender-responsive and inclusive policies for WASH services:

- Ensure that WASH policies and implementation plans are gender-responsive, for example, including menstrual health and hygiene in planning, design, capacity development, delivery, monitoring and regulations.
- Establish guidelines for mandatory inclusion of women in the decision-making structures and establishments for policies, plans, budgets, programme designs and budget disbursement for WASH interventions.
- Support cross-sectoral integration in policy design and implementation between women's health, education and water institutions.



Illustrative immediate action

Establish standards for gender-responsive WASH in public spaces, workspaces, schools and healthcare facilities.

Integrate gender equality in WASH sector policies:

- Galvanise partners to challenge gender norms and provide funds to implement gender-responsive WASH policy commitments.
- Support and invest in the participation of representatives of women's organisations, including women with disabilities, in WASH consultations, decision-making and accountability mechanisms.
- Monitor and review the impact of policies on gender equality in WASH and address unintended consequences of WASH policies and services on women, girls and vulnerable groups under a 'do no harm' principle.



Illustrative immediate action

Make menstrual health and hygiene in schools a key education ministry function, integrate it in monitoring systems and take measures to address affordability of menstrual products.

Tackle gender inequality in the WASH workforce:

- Reward, remunerate and represent women majority occupations (such as community health workers/volunteers) with professionalisation, equal pay and safe working conditions.
- Understand and tackle the barriers women face in male-dominated WASH roles and institutions to ensure a better gender balance and staff retention, particularly in leadership positions. Extend employer responsibilities to undertake compulsory gender pay audits and eradicate unfair pay practices.

Mainstream WASH within health policy and programming to improve public health



Co-ordination
and integration

Include WASH as part of broader reforms for public health and health systems strengthening:

- Embed WASH – specifically hand hygiene – in health policies, systems, strategies and standards.
- Strengthen national and sub-national coordination between relevant line ministries and actors at national and subnational levels.
- Devote sustainable long-term funding for WASH in health plans and programmes, embedding incentives for cross-sectoral collaboration.
- Utilise WASH and health data and monitoring mechanisms to target resources and investments in WASH services and behaviours to where they are most needed.



Illustrative immediate action

Review and integrate WASH in universal health coverage and pandemic preparedness strategies.

Increase investments to improve healthcare facility conditions for health workers and patients:

- Develop and implement costed national strategies to improve WASH conditions in healthcare facilities.
- Invest in WASH in healthcare facilities and commit to specific actions to address the specific WASH needs of women and vulnerable populations, to prevent stigma and discrimination.



Illustrative immediate action

Invest in gender-responsive WASH in healthcare facilities, raising standards beyond basic service levels and integrating accountability mechanisms.



WaterAid/Basilie Ouedraogo

◀ Fatimata Coulibaly takes a reading at the water tower. Segou Region, Mali. February 2019.

Champion the delivery of WASH as a service



Enact policies to enable sustainable and safe service provision and expansion:

- Set targets, reform policies and regulations that enable accelerated progress towards adequate and equitable WASH for all.
- Through monitoring, supervision, incentives, enforcement and accountability mechanisms, ensure adherence of WASH service providers and other relevant actors to policies, regulations and quality standards.
- Introduce measures to ensure affordability, such as smart subsidies for toilet construction or emptying.

Embrace the implications of shifting to safely managed services:

- Approach sanitation holistically, covering not just toilet use (behaviour change, demand generation and supply) but also the rest of the service chain: emptying, transport, treatment and disposal or reuse.
- Set out in policy the roles of different water supply and sanitation service models and the associated financing models, covering new connections, faecal waste management, repairs and asset replacement.
- Address operational inefficiencies in service provision, including non-revenue water in utilities, which otherwise can damage financial viability and access to loans.



▲ Sonia, an operation and maintenance member, fills her bottle with drinking water from an installed water purifier in an anganwadi center in Raghur Nagar, India. March 2020.

Support professionalisation of the sector:

- Strengthen sector capacity to provide maintenance and management support, through a gender-balanced cadre of professionally trained personnel and stronger supply chains.
- Ensure sanitation workers have dignified and safe working conditions and are recognised, supported and respected.



Illustrative immediate action

Regulate the working conditions of sanitation workers, including measures to protect informal workers.

Prioritise and resource WASH and water security to strengthen resilience to climate change, at all levels



Environment and
water resources

Enact legislation to direct at least 20% of climate funding to WASH service improvements:

- Embed WASH service improvements in nationally determined contributions (NDCs), national adaptation plans (NAPs) and climate funding proposals.
- Lobby climate finance institutions to acknowledge WASH as key to climate resilience and adaptation and devote climate finance for WASH-related adaptation.

Integrate WASH into climate resilience efforts and reduce vulnerabilities:

- Target climate-resilient, sustainable water and sanitation services improvements to those who are vulnerable to climate change and do not have reliable WASH access.
- Strengthen and track financial flows from national to local levels to ensure that marginalised communities are being prioritised.
- In the face of climate hazards and unpredictable water availability, establish and enforce guidelines to prioritise and safeguard well-managed water resources.

Incorporate WASH within climate monitoring, planning and financing:

- Strengthen subnational and local capacities to collect and analyse data to understand the interconnections between WASH, water security and climate change, and the vital role that groundwater plays in providing a natural storage reserve, underpinning resilience-building.
- Conduct data-driven planning for climate-resilient WASH as part of national adaptation strategies and to create effective climate-resilient interventions.
- Improve coordination between government ministries with water mandates, for instance via an inter-ministerial coordination group.

Include WASH in agriculture and climate change initiatives:

- Ensure that WASH is a core component of agriculture and food production policies.
- Ensure that there is a 'ringfenced' budget for WASH in all climate/agriculture/food security initiatives to safeguard health and maximise the outputs of the workforce.



WaterAid/Basile Ouedraogo

▲ Justine Sawadogo monitors the rainfall in the village of Bonam. Centre-North region, Burkina Faso. July 2021.



Illustrative immediate action

Conduct groundwater research to assess its potential and shortfalls to meet water security targets.

Establish strong accountability mechanisms and regulation



Accountability
and regulation

Establish and enforce mutual accountability mechanisms:

- Establish mechanisms to monitor progress of approved government and service functions respectively.
- Establish responsive accountability mechanisms that enable communities to hold health and WASH duty-bearers to account for progress on WASH in healthcare facilities.
- Establish and enforce accountability mechanisms to enable governments and people to hold development partners, including donors and NGOs, to account.



Illustrative immediate action

Include targets for hygiene in water, housing, education and health policies.

Increase investment in national management information systems to monitor WASH in all its aspects:

- Strengthen nationally-led monitoring systems for use in decision-making and joint sector review processes both within and beyond WASH, helping connect WASH to climate and water resource management.
- Utilise data and monitoring mechanisms to target resources and investments in WASH services and behaviours to where they are most needed.



Illustrative immediate action

Ensure monitoring systems allow health stakeholders easy access to WASH data.

Establish and enforce independent regulatory authorities:

- Establish or strengthen water supply and sanitation regulatory authorities, giving them clear, specific mandates and skilled, motivated staff with sufficient resources to play their role.
- Provide resources to local government for regular updating, analysis, and use of data for decision-making at and across local and national level.

Roles for development partners

▼ Mariam Sogoba, a member of the Benkadi women's group, washes her hands at the new tap stand connected to the water tower. Segou Region, Mali. February 2019.

Governments are the key drivers of progress towards WASH for all, but development partners also have important roles to support the implementation of the recommendations described in this paper.



WaterAid/Basile Ouedraogo

Development partners should enhance coordination of ODA and loan support and reduce fragmentation

Bilateral donors

(OECD and G7 member states)

- Increase WASH ODA and ensure investments are inclusive and equitable.
- Increase the share of investments in sanitation, hygiene, rural areas, informal urban areas, low-income countries, poorer quintiles and gender-responsive WASH.
- Ensure WASH funding and related incentives align with government plans and with the framing of sanitation as a service.
- Put service sustainability at the core of capital-intensive and infrastructure-heavy investments.
- Recognise all components of WASH as central to climate resilience and adaptation, and reform climate financing accordingly.
- Explore opportunities to implement blended finance and leverage financing from the private sector.

Multilateral agencies

(World Bank, Regional Development Banks, Climate funds)

- 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 ensure a healthy population to support economic development.
- Make the process for accessing climate financing and other financing modalities for WASH easier for LDCs with poor WASH access.
- Explore opportunities to implement blended finance and leverage financing from the private sector.

Development partners should enhance coordination of ODA and loan support and reduce fragmentation (continued)

Private sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Increase investment in WASH to secure a healthy workforce. ● Participate in and support blended financing for WASH. ● Support the government efforts offering innovative solutions to expand WASH services and improve their quality. ● Subscribe to public water and sanitation utility services to support their viability. ● Support water security efforts by ensuring that industrial wastewater is treated to standard before reusing or discharging.
UN agencies and International NGOs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Coordinate in-country international entities to align with government policies and priorities. ● Focus on working with governments to strengthen the WASH systems that underpin service delivery. ● Signal the importance of accelerating progress, prioritising vulnerable groups, framing WASH as a service, increased attention to hygiene, sanitation and climate-resilient and gender-responsive WASH. ● Role model efforts to have gender-balance in workforces with women in leadership positions. ● Support meaningful participation of civil society in WASH. ● Health organisations should work collaboratively with WASH organisations to ensure health strategies, funding and systems integrate WASH as a public health issue.
Civil society organisations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Monitor implementation of WASH policies and budgets by national and sub-national governments. ● Hold governments and services providers to account for their WASH commitments, policies, investments and service standards. ● Engage and empower people to demand their human rights to water and sanitation.
Academia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Build the evidence base for the impacts and benefits of WASH to help partners make the case for investment. ● Address knowledge gaps related to safely managed services, gender and climate resilience.

The policy recommendations in this paper are based on our experience gathered over 40 years, of what drives changes in progress to WASH. We hope that governments and decision makers find this useful in their endeavour to resolve the WASH crisis.

We will continue to work with government institutions, public and private service providers, civil society organisations and communities to strengthen national and local WASH systems to support the acceleration towards universal, sustainable and safe WASH.

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◀ 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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