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# Gender Equality Thematic Review

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# Executive Summary

WaterAid's Global Strategy *Everyone, Everywhere 2030 (2015 – 2020, then extended to 2022)* aims to contribute significantly to the achievement of universal access to Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) by 2030. *Everyone, Everywhere 2030* articulates WaterAid's ambition to tackle and challenge inequalities preventing the poorest and most marginalised people from realising their right to safe water, sanitation and hygiene.

Essential to realising this goal is reducing gender inequality within and through WASH.

In support of advancing this strategic aim, WaterAid has commissioned a Gender Equality Thematic Review - an assessment of performance, emphasising operational processes and early evidence of effectiveness. The Gender Equality Thematic Review will enable WaterAid to assess the efficacy of gender equality and mainstreaming work and identify learning and recommendations to advance its *Journey to Gender Transformative WASH*. Additionally, the review will inform the continued operationalisation of WaterAid's commitment to a gender transformative agenda as it embarks on a new global strategy.

The Gender Equality Thematic Review had three primary objectives:

- To create an analytical tool to assess different aspects of WaterAid's work, based on the 'Journey to Transformative Change' levels (Harmful, Inclusive, Empowering, Transformative) in the *Equality, Inclusion and Rights Framework*. The tool should include specific criteria for each thematic area being assessed. The criteria will cover both WaterAid's and its partners' organisational capacity, guidance and resources, as well as the quality and results of programme work delivered. The consultant will then assess the selected thematic areas against the criteria identified. The analytical tool should be used for the review and be applied by WaterAid in different contexts after the review.
- To relate the findings to WaterAid's organisational capacity, partnerships and network at a global, regional and national level.
- To identify programmatic, organisational and operational recommendations to progress WaterAid's work on gender equality to realise its ambitions stated in the *Equality, Inclusion and Rights Framework* and other documents/ strategies.

In 2020, WaterAid updated its *Equality, Inclusion and Rights Framework* to reflect its increased ambitions for tackling WASH inequality. The *Equality, Inclusion and Rights Framework* presents WaterAid's *Journey to Transformation*, which details progressive steps and shifts to move WaterAid towards achieving accessible, sustainable, universal access to WASH.

The Gender Equality Thematic Review leveraged the *Equality, Inclusion and Rights Framework* to develop an analytical framework to assess WaterAid's gender equality work categorised across the spectrum of harmful to transformative, against two broad areas articulated in the Terms of Reference:

- Organisational Capacity, Guidance, Resources
- Programme Quality and Results

## Summary of Findings against the Gender Equality Criteria

The Gender Equality Thematic Review reflects WaterAid's journey to address inequalities within and through WASH as articulated in their *Equality, Inclusion, & Rights Framework*. The following section summarises the findings from the Gender Equality Thematic Review. Icons below are used to demonstrate where WaterAid has been assessed according to the analytical framework<sup>1</sup>.



A sample of WaterAid Regional Members, Regional Offices, and Country Programmes



WaterAid Uganda



WaterAid Niger



WaterAid Cambodia

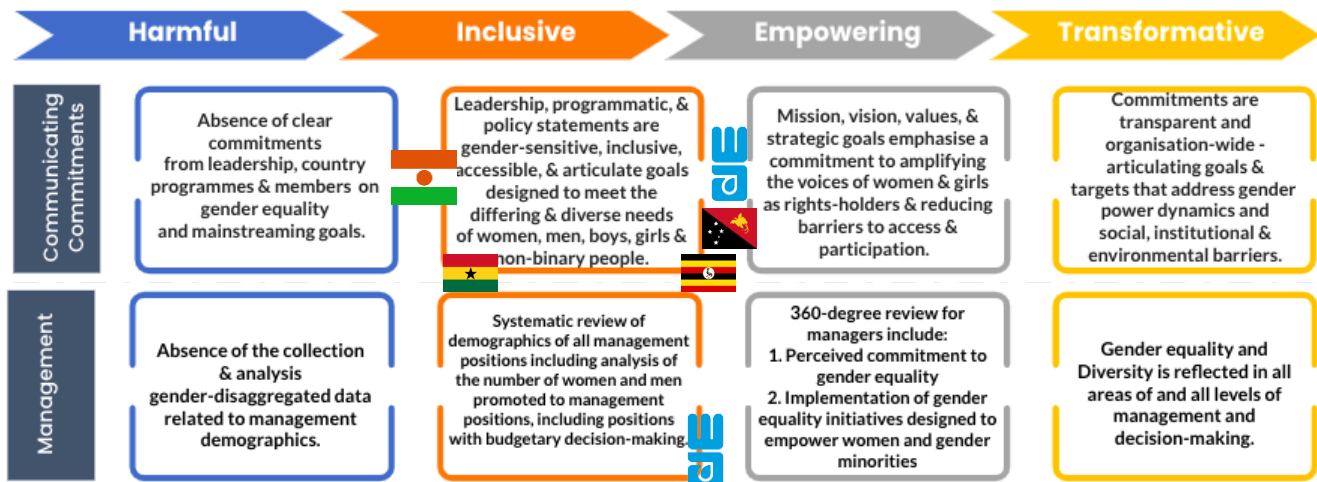


WaterAid Papua New Guinea



WaterAid Ghana

## Global Strengths

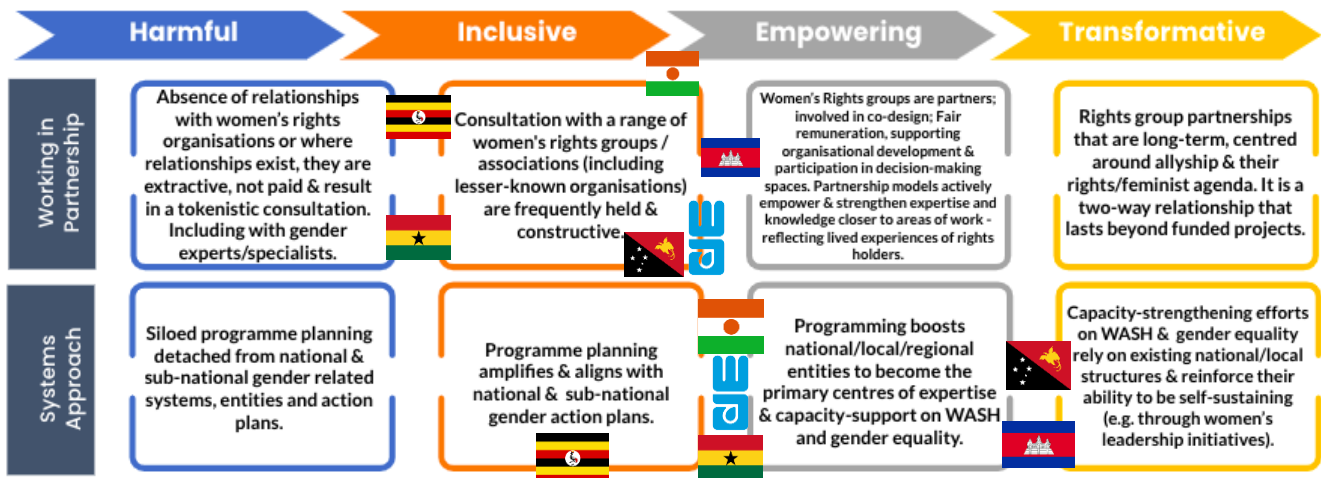


Firm commitments and public statements, to which leaders are held accountable, are enabled by organisational cultures that promote self-reflection. More specifically, leadership was evident in WaterAid Sweden, WaterAid Australia, Regional Teams and some Country Programme strategies, for example, Cambodia, Niger, Papua New Guinea. In addition, commitments are driven through gender audit reports, self-assessments, business plans, and gender policy positioning papers.

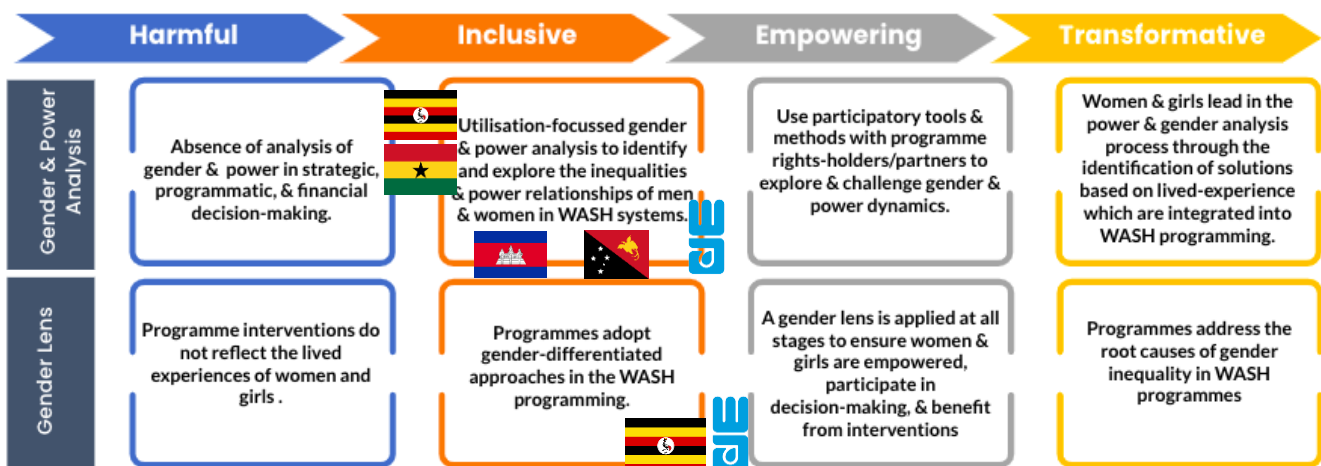
Gender disaggregated management demographics are available globally in a management dashboard. This dashboard consistently monitors turnover and gender distribution amongst management and

<sup>1</sup> The review did not assess Country Programmes against all areas of the analytical framework due to a lack of evidence and primary focus on significant areas in country summaries within this review.

leadership roles.



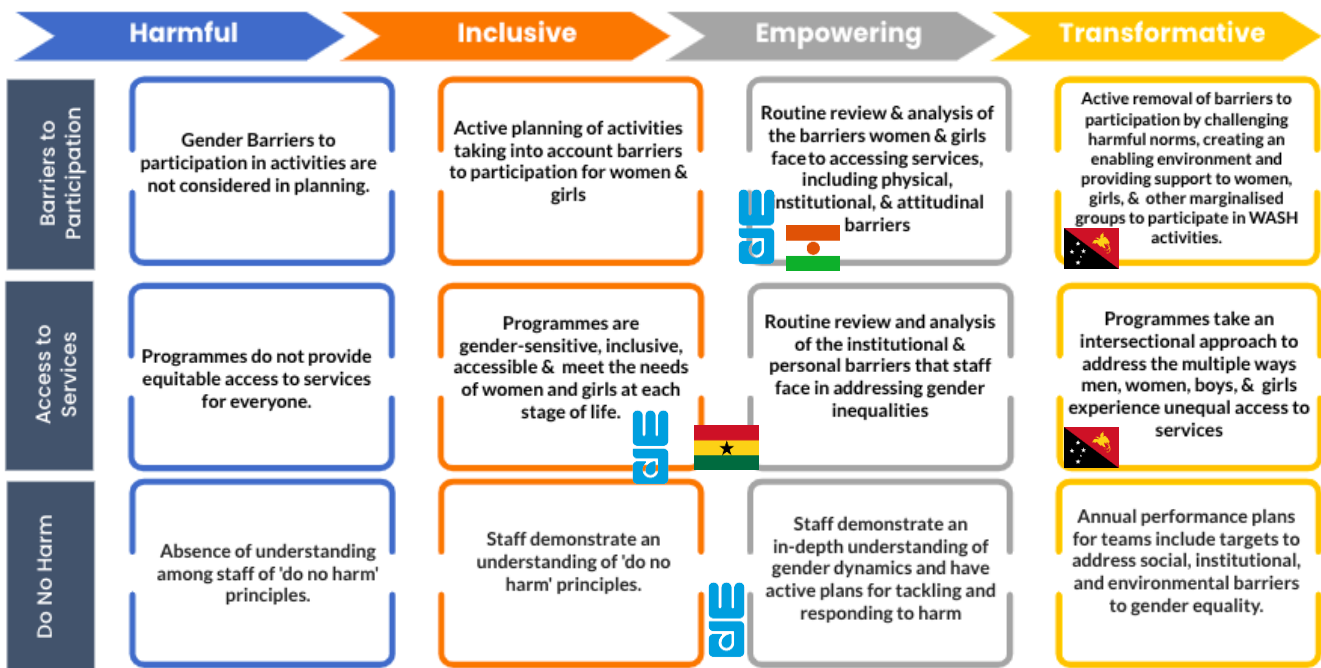
Country Programmes in Cambodia, Ethiopia and Tanzania demonstrate systems approaches through alignment with government partners. Well-established relationships with WASH-related ministries, e.g., the Ministry of Hydraulics in Niger, has helped escalate gender considerations. This is especially apparent in the East Africa region, where women in ministerial leadership positions are aligned with WASH and gender ambitions. Collective learning with government and partners is a common feature; for example, as part of systems strengthening supported through the SusWASH programme in Cambodia and Uganda, Country Programmes, government and partners are advancing learning around adaptive programming. However, there is still a hesitancy reflected by some staff about WaterAid's role in challenging gender norms with government partners, especially where there is a perception that this is beyond the scope of WaterAid's activities.



There is a strong organisational commitment to analysing gender and power. Gender and power analyses were the most referenced tool across the review. Organisational commitment is a primary driver in raising awareness and promoting practice. Conducting gender and power analyses is also a common expectation of donors, for example, a USAID project sought to understand better how gender and power manifest in project spaces. Expanding gender analyses to include a category for 'harmful' was supported by the *Equality, Inclusion and Rights Framework*. Appearance in this widely referenced framework meant that Country Programmes started to consider risks and backlash, helping deepen the

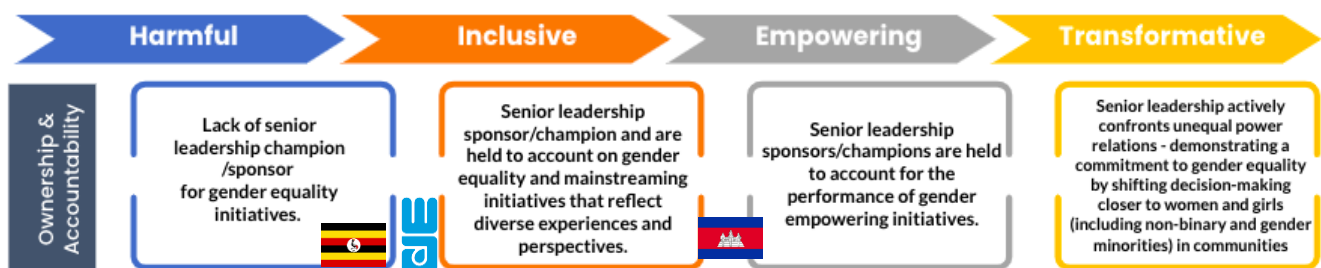
analysis.

There is a general awareness that adopting gender-differentiated approaches is necessary for WaterAid's work. However, it is most often elevated when gender champions take a more robust and purposeful approach. COVID-19 advanced the application of a gender lens among Regional Teams and Country Programmes as a result of a more urgent need to understand the impact of COVID-19 on WASH access.



Considerations for access to services for women and girls was evidenced in gender self-assessments, gender and power analyses, and baseline assessments. Addressing barriers to participation for gender and sexual minority groups was evident in some pockets of WaterAid - driven by contextual factors or individual motivations an inconsistent across WaterAid. Respondents referred to sociocultural factors for the absence of a global strategic position. Where gender is not addressed when reducing barriers to participation or ensuring equitable access to services, lack of capacity and time appear to be the most significant barrier.

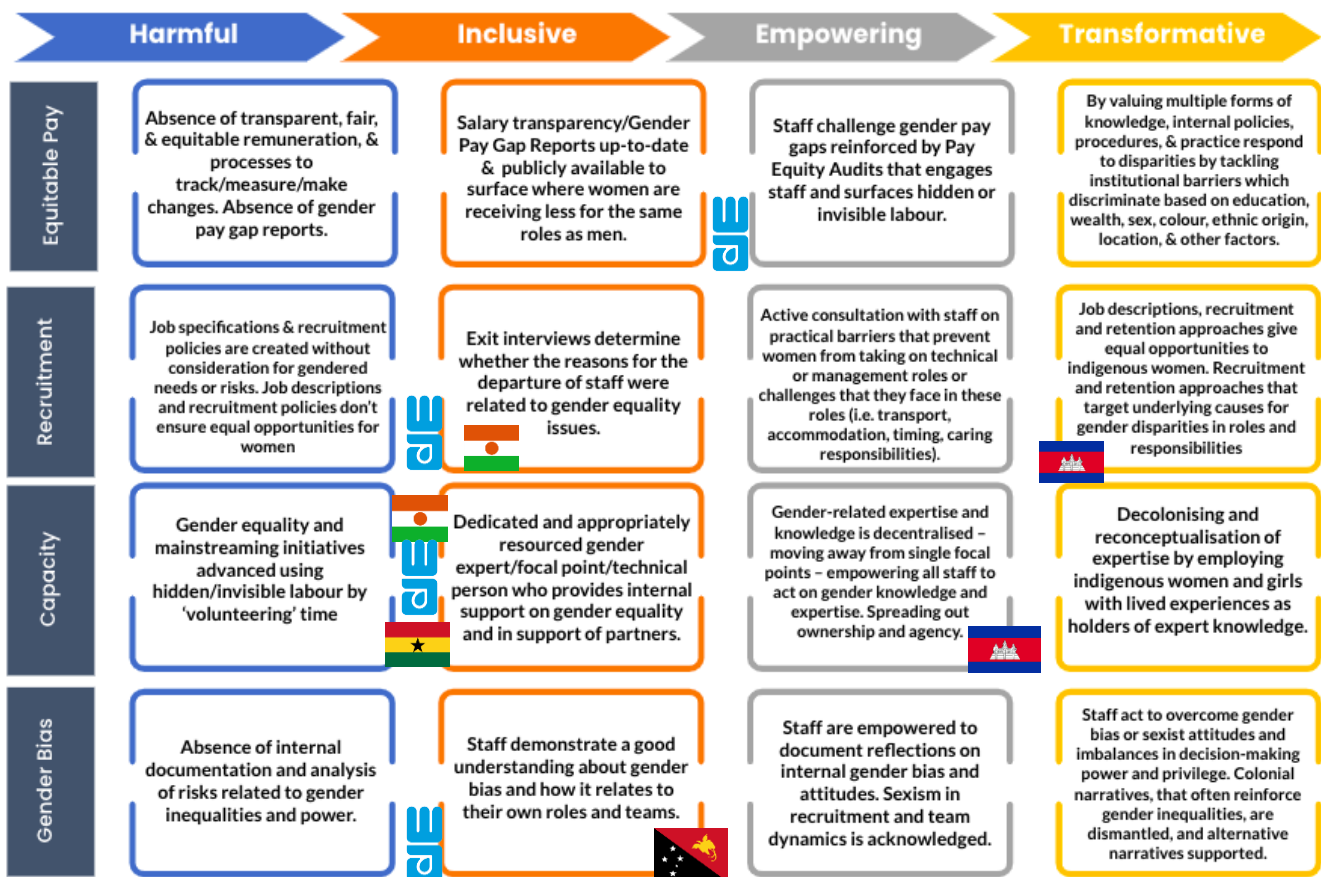
## Global Areas for Growth



Senior leaders who take deliberate action based on thoughtful consideration of where gender inequality may be present within their teams and programming are essential. The conscious

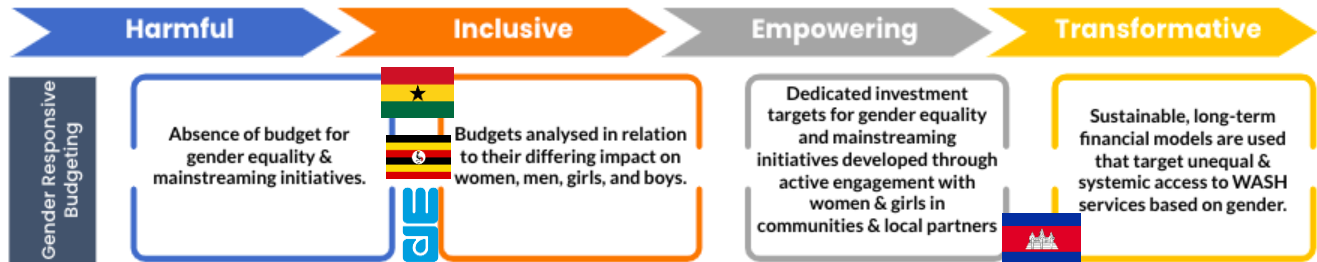
establishment of spaces to discuss gender equality have proven successful. For example, the Gender Equality Working Group in WaterAid Cambodia was a push to engage men and women as gender champions to make positive shifts in the organisational culture. This created the space for staff to discuss gender from the perspective of accessing different resources, decision-making, and privilege. Relatedly, the Global Gender Equality Working Group emerged as a space for conversation, critical reflection, and mobilisation.

Barriers to strong leadership commitment stem from some leaders lacking confidence or clarity in advancing initiatives. There is also a perception of gender as distinct from WaterAid’s principal focus of WASH. This conflicts with the emphasis WaterAid’s communications place on addressing gender inequality to realise universal access to WASH and the contribution gender-responsive WASH makes to other Sustainable Development Goals. While there are some examples of senior leaders who champion gender equality initiatives, few examples emerged of mechanisms that hold these leaders to account for progress and performance. While gender champions appeared across leadership roles, respondents noted that women primarily advance gender initiatives.

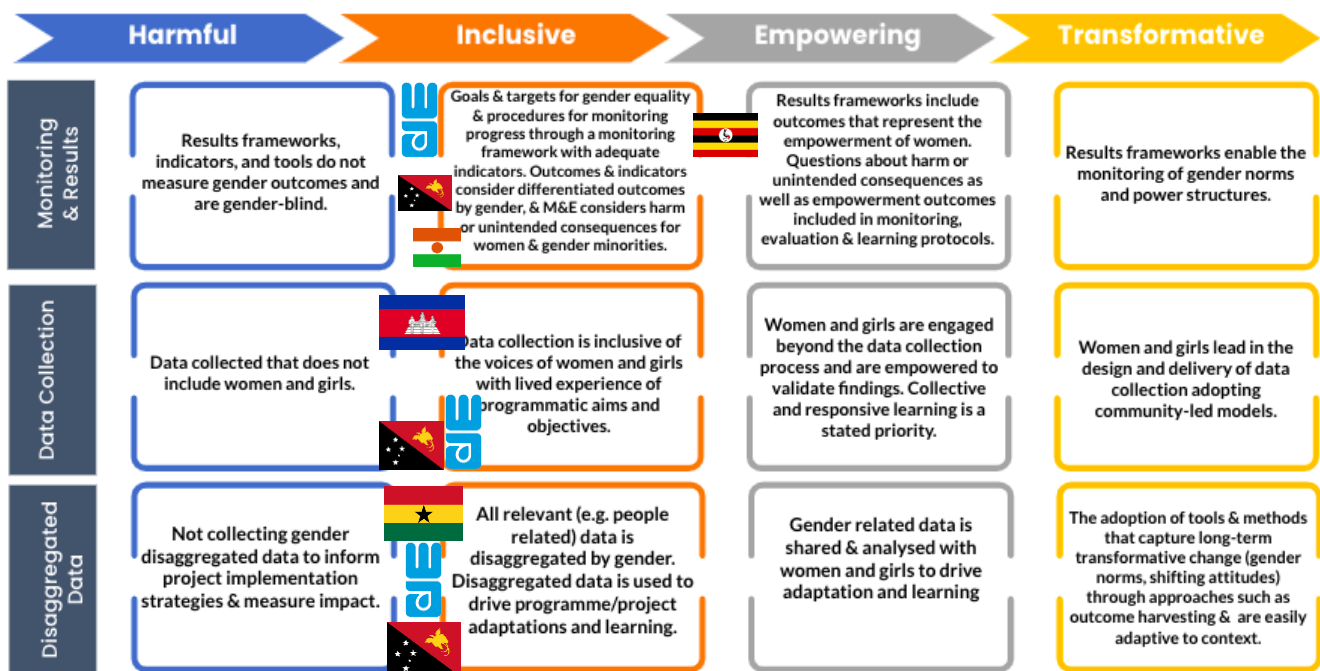


Gender expertise is limited, but the Global Gender Equality Working Group, gender champions and advisors are the primary force for advancing gender equality and tackling challenging topics such as gender norms and the inclusion of gender and sexual minority groups. Capacity is heavily dependent on individuals driving change and giving time outside of primary job responsibilities resulting in gender being deprioritised and women, primarily, advancing gender initiatives reinforcing harmful practices of

using hidden and invisible labour. Respondents provided examples of measures taken through Human Resources and Safeguarding mechanisms where staff have demonstrated bias or sexist attitudes. These measures were described as reactive and little documentation of solutions or action plans to preemptively tackle and respond to bias or sexist attitudes surfaced during this review.

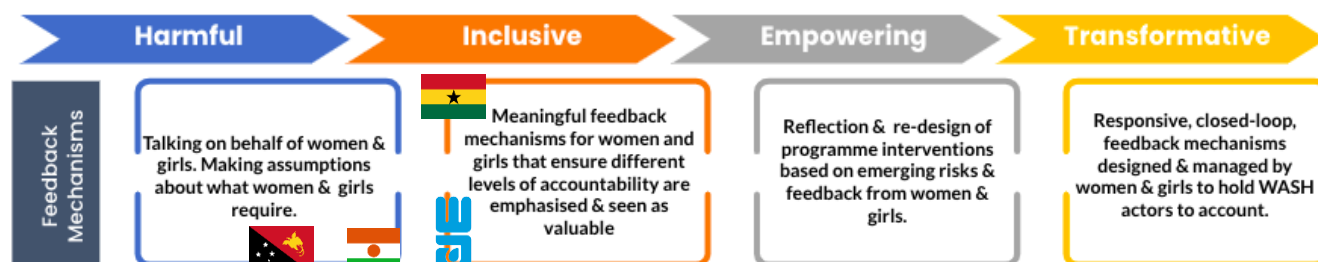


As a relatively unexplored area for WaterAid, learning and foundational knowledge are required to advance Gender-Responsive Budgeting. Investments in training and global motivations are essential to meaningful application and outcomes for women and girls. However, the review surfaced a number of WaterAid partners who are applying or piloting Gender-Responsive Budgeting, therefore opportunities to learn from established partnerships exist.



The Global Desk Review identified examples of gender-related indicators, for example, "percentage of women and girls recognising improvement in the level of WASH services / Gradual improvement of inequality in access between regions and provinces". WaterAid also has a set of corporate indicators; however, a gender-specific indicator does not exist. The only mandated indicators include "number of people reached with WASH (disaggregated by gender at Household level)". Country Programmes decide how to disaggregate this data by gender. Respondents suggested that gender and social norms were not monitored or measured but mostly infrastructure access and use with some gender-blind assumptions around equity of access. As a result, disaggregation by gender is inconsistent and there

were few examples of data being used to drive programme or project adaptations. Few global staff also report utilising gender-disaggregated data within their roles or in strategic decision-making.



Assumptions that reporting mechanisms are synonymous with feedback mechanisms are barriers to advancing this area. While a means to document feedback, reporting does not necessarily represent a systematic, safe space for women and girls to share their experiences on WaterAid's work. A collective determinant of a 'meaningful' feedback mechanism is a worthwhile exploration and could be informed by a gender baseline assessment.

### Advancing the Journey to Gender Transformative WASH

- Publishing statements clearly articulating WaterAid’s global commitment to gender and the approaches it will adopt to tackle gender inequality would ensure clarity and transparency on the ambitions and goals of WaterAid’s leadership. Through this and by unifying WaterAid staff globally around the aspirations of the upcoming strategy, WaterAid will be able to better manage the tensions within the organisation around how and in what ways WaterAid and its leadership commit to tackling gender inequality internally and within and through WASH. Although respondents identified the upcoming strategy as a critical source for articulating commitments to gender at WaterAid, diversifying how and where commitments to gender equality are expressed would reinforce the messages in the strategy.
- WaterAid should enhance the agency of women and girls in its public-facing statements. At present, the data and statements on the website and in planning and strategy documents necessarily describe the disproportionate impact and burden on women and girls. As a result, women and girls are often described as vulnerable, marginalised and disenfranchised. WaterAid will move toward more empowering leadership by reframing the narratives around women and girls in programmatic, leadership, and policy statements.
- Senior leaders must sponsor initiatives and be held to account through a transparent and regular review of progress. In addition, senior ownership of gender-specific Key Performance Indicators reinforces commitments to tackling gender inequality.
- WaterAid needs to increase sensitisation and build context-specific competency around gender, including increasing resourcing to the Gender Equality Working Group. Building confidence in staff is vital. Standardising integration of gender into staff growth days or learning is one way to do this.
- WaterAid should prioritise capacity development on gender and WASH for national and sub-national governments. This is especially apparent where government partners expressed the



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need for additional support. In addition, globally monitor Country Programmes alignment with national and sub-national gender action plans for broader assessments of gaps.

## Conclusion

The review surfaced mixed sentiment and perceptions around the appropriateness of the explicit prioritisation of gender:

*“...there's a fear that [gender] is not our mission. It's not our role, and that we do WASH and there's not enough space for everything else”.*

Other views emphasised the reinforcing and necessary work of approaching gender as an integrated component that strengthens the quality, effectiveness, and sustainability of WASH. For WaterAid to achieve its ambition of universal access, gender equality is non-negotiable. However, WaterAid has promising signs that these tensions are moving toward resolution by developing the new global strategy.

Sentiment found across this review is the space for deeper meaningful reflection on biases or attitudes to gender is a crucial factor. WaterAid staff and some partners expressed and reported harmful attitudes during interviews. While WaterAid does have an optional learning module on unconscious bias, the necessity of tackling bias at all levels of WaterAid was largely absent to address bias among WaterAid staff; pockets of transformative practice should be leveraged and brought to scale as a consistent, mandatory, and complimentary stream of work to advance the global organisational culture. Strong commitments to gender equality evident in WaterAid Regional Members, Australia, Canada and Sweden could be leveraged by the wider federation.

The review found that teams made steady and meaningful progress through their *Journey to Gender Transformative WASH* when two features were present: Self-reflective environments that adopt a ‘work in progress’ attitude and leadership who take committed action as gender champions. WaterAid’s goal of *Everyone, Everywhere 2030* will only be realised through strategic, ambitious action that tackles gender inequality head-on. The new global strategic plan looks well-positioned to enable this vision.