

Investing in water, sanitation and hygiene for global recovery and resilience

An agenda for the G7 and G20 summits in 2021

Executive summary



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The devastating combination of climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic threatens lives and livelihoods the world over, with a disproportionate impact falling on the world's poorest people. These threats, exacerbated by increasing inequalities and a looming debt crisis, highlight systemic flaws in our global economy.

We now have a critical opportunity to shift towards healthier, more sustainable economies, and equitable societies that work for both people and planet. In 2021, more than any other year, the international community expects the world's most powerful governments to step up – setting out ambitious and comprehensive plans to address the ongoing and unequal impact of the COVID-19 and climate crises.

The immediate priority must be to end the COVID-19 pandemic by investing in an equitable vaccine rollout that integrates hygiene behaviour change programmes. As donor governments prepare for this year's G7 and G20 summits, one thing is abundantly clear – until the pandemic ends everywhere, it remains a threat, including to economies and people in G7 and G20 countries.² The world's richest nations have a moral and economic responsibility to make available the prevention and treatment measures³ that could save hundreds of thousands of lives. It is the right thing to do, and the smart thing, to protect global prosperity jeopardised by a prolonged pandemic.

Without swift and comprehensive action by the G7 and the G20 to invest in preventative and protective measures, including handwashing, we are headed for a 'twin-track' world characterised by ever-increasing disparity in human development and basic survival. Decades of progress in ending poverty and hunger have already been reversed⁴ by the pandemic, and the effectiveness of any further investment – and the chances of achieving the 2030 Agenda – will rest on collective efforts now to end COVID-19 and the inequalities of its impact.

“Policymakers must do everything in their power to promote a more inclusive recovery [from the COVID-19 crisis], one that benefits all segments of society.

So, we will need a fiscal stimulus that delivers for people. This means scaling up public investment in health care to protect the most vulnerable and minimize the risks from future epidemics. It also means strengthening social safety nets; expanding access to quality education, clean water, and sanitation; and investing in climate-smart infrastructure.”¹

Kristalina Georgieva, Managing Director,
International Monetary Fund

Strengthening the provision of essential services like water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) in the most vulnerable communities is a best buy approach in building resilience to future pandemics, emerging global health threats like antimicrobial resistance (AMR) and climate change. WASH helps communities to withstand emergencies and adapt to the changing climate, while enabling them to meet their basic needs. Ensuring everyone's rights to climate-resilient, equitable and sustainable services (especially in public places like healthcare facilities, schools and markets) will redress the inequalities so apparent in the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. It will also facilitate pandemic preparedness and build long-term resilience of the world's most vulnerable people and societies to both health and climate shocks. Rapidly expanding access to WASH will advance the G7 and G20's commitments to support people, prosperity and planet.

Leaders of the most powerful economies have a range of economic tools to help the poorest nations hasten their own recovery – now is the time to use them. The G7/G20 should therefore make an emergency funding package available to enable all countries to protect their people and strengthen their societies.



Front cover: Olga, 16, at a handwashing station provided by WaterAid at Mpolonjeni High School in Mpolonjeni, Lubombo Province, eSwatini. November 2018.



WaterAid/Remissa Mak

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▲ Sokha, 32, washing her hands in front of the Thlork Vien health centre, Chhouk Village, Thlork Vien Commune, Samaki Meanchey District, Kampong Chhnang province, Cambodia. July 2020.

To find out more go to: washmatters.wateraid.org/publications/investing-water-sanitation-hygiene-global-recovery-resilience

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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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