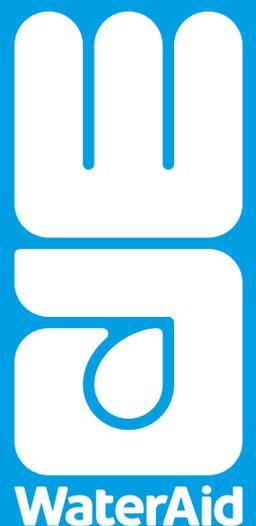


# **WATER, SANITATION AND HYGIENE:**

**An overlooked adaptation  
solution for climate change**

**Lobby brief**

September 2022



**The world needs to act now to protect communities from the impacts of climate change. Yet progress is too slow. The ‘low-regrets’ adaptation solutions proposed by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) – such as water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services – will make vulnerable communities more resilient. WASH services will reduce vulnerability to climate impacts, and help close the gap on gender, education, prosperity and health inequalities: all of which are needed for community and individual resilience. However, these adaptation solutions need financing, but to date, this has been insufficient across the world.**

### Why is WASH a critical adaptation intervention?

- The IPCC identifies providing water and sanitation services as one of the most effective measures to reduce climate-vulnerability in the near-term and as a ‘low-regrets’ adaptation measure.<sup>1</sup>
- Sustainable and responsive WASH will help decrease inequalities and deliver universal access, but achieving this is more difficult because of climate change.
- WASH will help build resilience to climate change, particularly for communities who do not currently have access to WASH or those who have fragile water sources which often fail in the face of droughts, floods and extreme weather.

### What is needed to ensure WASH climate solutions are sustainable and resilient?

- Actors working together to create and sustain a strong WASH ‘system’ involve a lot of different elements that are all necessary: institutions, governments and communities with proactive plans, early warning systems and easy access to sufficient financing that can support repairs, restoration and replacement when needed.
- Insights and engagement of local communities – particularly groups who are marginalised, such as women and those with disabilities – who can speak to what is needed based on their lived experience, unique

perspective on local geography and weather, and can drive change on the ground, i.e., engaging in locally-led adaptation.

- Increased public climate financing to accelerate adaptation measures.

### Adaptation

We know that vulnerable communities need adaptive solutions that can make a difference immediately. Since 2014, the IPCC has stated that one of the most effective measures to reduce climate-vulnerability in the near-term is to provide water and sanitation services. Furthermore, in its most recent report,<sup>1</sup> the IPCC highlighted WASH services as a ‘low-regrets’ adaptation measure.

In fact, these adaptation measures are needed because climate change is exacerbating inequalities by putting groups who are marginalised more at risk. Climate risk is a combination of a climate hazard and an individual or community’s cumulative vulnerabilities (e.g., gender, income, health, disabilities). Without clean water, decent toilets and good hygiene, communities are more likely to become ill due to climate impacts (such as cholera outbreaks). Women and girls are often more impacted by climate change as they have the added burden of caring for sick family members, in addition to resourcing basics like food or water for their families.

Safely managed sanitation and water supplies, along with improved hygiene practices, reduce the disease burden and exposure to waterborne and water-washed diseases – which are predicted to increase due to climate change. With reduced risk of disease, people are healthier and better able to cope with climate impacts.

To date, most discussions regarding WASH and climate adaptation have been focused on making existing WASH services more resilient. Yet this conversation seems to ignore the simple solution of how WASH services can help communities better adapt to climate change. Without easy access to even basic water, sanitation and hygiene facilities, people in rural areas and cities are more exposed to and less able to cope with increasing droughts, floods, disease, sea level rises and uncertain weather.

In an era of climate change, all efforts to build stronger resilience will need to cross traditional sectoral divides. Different sectors are interdependent – for example, both electricity and agriculture rely on water – so we need to think about broader systems. We need to work across sectors and with governments to create holistic solutions that value all water users, including households, schools and healthcare facilities. WASH services are most effective in building resilience when they connect and work with other linked systems to help reduce vulnerabilities and increase responsiveness.

Whole WASH systems need to be strengthened to create sustainable services that are responsive to climate change in the long-term – it's not just about building new infrastructure or applying a new technology. Climate-resilient WASH services are not about the ability to withstand a cyclone; they exist within a wider system that supports those services to be back up and running after the event as quickly as possible. Sustainable WASH services require strong government leadership, well-functioning and accountable institutions, sufficient finance, reliable data, up-to-date plans, and active and empowered people. These services also need to tackle deeply engrained gender and social inequalities to ensure their longevity and reliability for the people who need them the most. A strong WASH system that provides such services will be prepared for and will bounce back after climate impacts.

## Finance

More public and private financing is needed to fund responses to climate change, with a focus on adaptation solutions. To date, 95% of climate finance – all of private finance and most of public funding – has been centred on mitigation. The Glasgow Climate Pact highlighted the need to balance the funding for adaptation with that of mitigation and called on wealthy countries to at least double their public finance for adaptation from 2019 levels by 2025. We need to raise our ambitions now. The longer we wait, the more expensive the adaptation and mitigation measures will become.

While the world is expecting wealthy countries to stand by their pledge of an additional US \$100 billion annually to help developing countries work on adaptation and mitigation starting in

2023, it is now clear that amount will not be enough. At COP26 during the first-ever 'Needs Assessment Report', the cost of 78 Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) was estimated at US \$5.9 trillion, and 12 National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) were estimated at US \$135 billion.<sup>2</sup> Yet the world's annual total climate finance has not gone above US \$681 billion and of that, only US \$12 billion has gone to water adaptation.<sup>3</sup>

Climate change impacts are happening right now, and near-term measures to build adaptive capacity and resilience must be prioritised. If they are to be successful, these measures should include access to water and sanitation services.<sup>4</sup> Finance is needed now to ensure these near-term measures can make a difference to vulnerable communities.

### Case study: Papua New Guinea

WaterAid Papua New Guinea has been working to strengthen climate resilience through sustainable, inclusive WASH systems. With the Women for Water Fund, WaterAid has worked with the Wewak District Development Authority and other local partners to better integrate WASH and climate in district plans. This will ensure the whole WASH system is climate-resilient and inclusive – with a focus on specific needs related to gender and disability. Women for Water and WaterAid have also partnered to bring together WASH and climate actors to strengthen data management to develop catchment-wide water balance models that inform climate resilient water resource management. Finally, WaterAid is working with the Papua New Guinea National Weather Service to establish baseline climate data sources to better understand seasonal and long-term changes in local water supplies through more local climate data.

<sup>2</sup> UNFCCC (2021). *First report on the determination of the needs of developing country Parties related to implementing the Convention and the Paris Agreement*. Available at: [unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/54307\\_2%20%20UNFCCC%20First%20NDR%20technical%20report%20-%20web%20%28004%29.pdf](https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/54307_2%20%20UNFCCC%20First%20NDR%20technical%20report%20-%20web%20%28004%29.pdf) (accessed 28 Jul 2022).

<sup>3</sup> Calow R, Watson C, Mason N, Klanten B, Pickard S (2020). *Just add water: a landscape analysis of climate finance for water*. Available at: [washmatters.wateraid.org/sites/g/files/jkxooof256/files/just-add-water-a-landscape-analysis-of-climate-finance-for-water.pdf](https://washmatters.wateraid.org/sites/g/files/jkxooof256/files/just-add-water-a-landscape-analysis-of-climate-finance-for-water.pdf) (accessed 28 Jul 2022).

<sup>4</sup> IPCC (2014). *AR5 Climate Change 2014: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability. Part A: Global and Sectoral Aspects*. pp. 1-32. Available at: [ipcc.ch/report/ar5/wg2/](https://ipcc.ch/report/ar5/wg2/) (accessed 28 Jul 2022).

## Inclusive solutions

Along with governments and NGOs, we signed up to the [Principles for Locally Led Adaptation Action](#)<sup>5</sup> to ensure adaptation financing reaches local communities. These principles look to integrate adaptation action into local priorities, increasing the sustainability of adaptation action, and incorporating local insight and ownership for planning to implementation. These principles recognise the worsening of structural inequalities due to climate change and the work necessary to reduce those disparities. Locally-led adaptation creates an enabling environment, a paradigm shift where the communities who are the most marginalised and vulnerable to climate change are given a voice in decision making, planning and designing adaptation interventions.

We have a strong history of working with communities to collectively create sustainable and inclusive solutions. This way of working, of which we have been doing for decades, is now called locally-led adaptation. As part of this, we are now applying our experience to ensure our WASH projects support community resilience to climate change. This means examining the whole WASH system and multi-sector integration, while considering the needs of groups who are marginalised, like women and those with disabilities, to create sustainable and responsive solutions.

### Case study: West Africa water security

For the last 11 years, WaterAid has been working with West African communities – specifically in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger – to increase water security and consider climate risks. Using the Securing Water Resources Approach (SWRA), communities have worked with WaterAid to look at water holistically across sectors and to identify perceived water and climate risks, monitor anticipated risks, and take action when necessary. This work has included securing guaranteed water allocation for women and girls during times of scarcity, and designing multi-use services for small-scale livelihoods and households. This locally-led initiative allows communities to adapt to changing circumstances in equitable ways for all water users and to quickly call on governments for assistance when water supply is threatened.

## Recommendations

The world cannot wait. We know that people cannot survive for long without clean water, decent toilets and good hygiene. That is why we must adapt to reduce the impacts of climate change now. We already see the impacts in headlines everyday – like the recent heatwaves in India and Pakistan – and it is clearer than ever that the people who are harmed the most from climate change, are often the ones who have done the least to cause it. The most vulnerable communities deserve financial support to build resilience and have a chance to live dignified, healthy lives.

Therefore, we are calling on governments ahead of and during COP27 to:

- Significantly increase public climate finance allocated to WASH as a low-regrets adaptation measure to reduce communities' vulnerabilities to climate impacts.
- Ensure wealthy countries more than double their public finance for adaptation from 2019 levels by 2025, and balance the climate funding for adaptation to match amounts for mitigation.
- Support approaches that address whole WASH systems to ensure sustainability and reliability. By prioritising long-term management and funding to keep WASH services reliable, communities will have essential services during and after climate impacts.
- Adopt the *Locally led Adaptation Principles* as the most impactful approach for building adaptation and resilience to climate change.
- Address the structural inequalities – particularly for the groups who are the most vulnerable – that are being compounded by climate change.

<sup>5</sup> Global Centre for Adaptation (2021). *Principles for Locally Led Adaptation Action*. Available at: [gca.org/reports/principles-for-locally-led-adaptation-action/](https://gca.org/reports/principles-for-locally-led-adaptation-action/) (accessed 28 Jul 2022).