

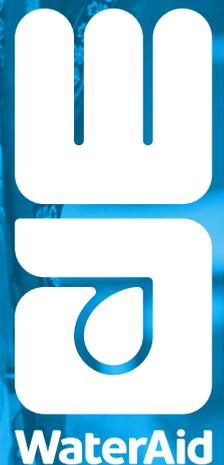
WATER, SANITATION AND HYGIENE:

The foundation for building resilience
in climate-vulnerable communities



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report seeks to explain how water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) builds people's resilience to climate change, especially those most vulnerable to its impacts. Climate change is affecting rainfall and weather patterns, increasing the frequency and severity of floods, drought, storm water surges, temperature extremes, fires and sea level rises. Access to clean water, decent toilets and good hygiene as a normal part of daily life helps people mitigate these events and processes. To cope with climate change both now and into the future, people must be able to access what the Joint Monitoring Programme (JMP) of the World Health Organisation (WHO) and UNICEF define as 'basic' levels of WASH, yet in 2020, 771 million people still lacked basic water, 1.6 billion people lacked basic sanitation, and 2.3 billion people lacked basic hygiene services, including 670 million people with no handwashing facilities at all.¹

These figures reflect a number of significant global problems, including generations of under-investment in public services, poor planning and implementation, poverty, and additional vulnerabilities experienced by women, the very old, very young, and people living with disabilities. The water sector is also under pressure from pollution, damage to ecosystems, inadequate management of resources, and increasing demand, particularly in urban areas. Climate change worsens many of these threats and brings additional pressures and unpredictable consequences.

Communities must therefore be supported to respond to a diverse range of scenarios. Climate change is a global challenge, but its impacts happen at a local level. Effective adaptation interventions must draw from local circumstances, knowledge and insights, and it is vital they are led and owned by communities themselves. However, a strong water sector and the necessary political, economic and regulatory conditions are also needed to keep services running.

Investing in clean water, decent toilets and good hygiene makes a lasting difference. While these services do not themselves ensure resilience, communities without them will struggle to be resilient. There is robust evidence in published, peer-reviewed literature that community wellbeing and climate change resilience are improved by better WASH systems and services. Key outcomes include:

- Increased household wealth from more secure or diversified employment and livelihoods;
- better WASH governance and empowerment of communities through strengthened social capital and safety, particularly for women;
- improved access to education and training;
- better community health.

Alene and his community used to collect dirty water from a spring that had started to dry up due to the changing climate. As part of the Deliver Life project, three climate-resilient water tanks have now been installed. Derekwa, Ethiopia.



WaterAid/Joey Lawrence



Fatimata Coulibaly, a member of the Benkadi women's group, is in charge of water monitoring and management. Kakounouso, Samabogo, Circle of Bla, Segou Region, Mali.

Through our work in vulnerable communities, WaterAid has developed programme guidance for climate resilient WASH and a toolkit for strengthening WASH systems so they can respond to a range of threats.

It is essential that we act now by embedding WASH investment in National Adaptation Plans (NAPs), and mobilising funding to make existing NAP WASH policies a reality. This will help vulnerable communities adapt, minimising the human and economic costs already affecting them, and prepare them for the uncertainty and impacts climate change will bring in the future.

Together, we can make a bigger difference for people most vulnerable to climate change. Doing what can and must be done now to improve WASH services and address current challenges will increase community resilience to climate change. Monitoring and evaluating WASH programmes that assess community resilience to climate change will then provide important insight and improvements over time. Much of what we know from existing research and experience can be implemented immediately in strategic, inclusive WASH programmes (Box 1).

The full report of *Water, sanitation and hygiene: The foundation of building resilience in climate-vulnerable communities* can be found at: washmatters.wateraid.org/publications/water-sanitation-hygiene-foundation-building-resilience-climate-vulnerable-communities

WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT WASH SYSTEMS AND SERVICE DELIVERY

- WASH systems, incorporating actors, factors and their interactions, are complex.
- Community engagement is important, but community-led efforts alone are not enough.
- Inclusive and participatory decision-making and implementation is key for sustainability.
- Communities, government and service providers must all be involved in leading programmes to be successful.
- WASH service delivery must be backed up by the necessary finance and political motivation.
- Contextual factors affecting WASH sustainability must be identified and addressed to deliver effective levels of service and strengthen resilience to climate change.
- WASH systems are woven into and are vital for other sectors.

¹JMP, *Progress on household drinking water, sanitation and hygiene 2000-2020: five years into the SDGs*. 2021, World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF): Geneva.

WATERAID IS AN INTERNATIONAL NOT-FOR-PROFIT, DETERMINED TO MAKE CLEAN WATER, DECENT TOILETS AND GOOD HYGIENE NORMAL FOR EVERYONE, EVERYWHERE WITHIN A GENERATION.



Front cover image:
Parul Begum and her family received a household Rain Water Harvesting System from the climate resilience project supported by the HSBC Water Programme and WaterAid. The system stores and preserves the rain water it so it can be consumed as pure drinking water. Shibbati Poshchim Para, Ward 9, Paikgacha, Khulna, Bangladesh.

Back cover image: Moustapha Thombiano watering tomatoes crops in a garden with water drawn from the hole dug in the sand around the riverbed crossed with sand dam, in the village of Sablogo, in the Commune of Lalgaye, province of Koulpelogo, Region of Centre-East, Burkina Faso.

Thanks to players of People's Postcode Lottery who have been supporting our work on climate in 2021 as part of the Postcode Climate Challenge.

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