



Gender equality is achieved when women and men, and girls and boys, have equal rights, life prospects and opportunities, and the power to shape their own lives and contribute to society.

The Gender Tool Box gathers knowledge material and method support on gender equality in the form of Tools, Briefs and Thematic Overviews.

## [ BRIEF ]

# Gender Equality and Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

**There are strong linkages between gender equality and access to water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH). When gender equality and women and girls' empowerment are taken into consideration in policies and programmes, women will have more time to earn an income, girls are more likely to attend school, and family health and hygiene improves. Access to clean WASH is crucial for poverty reduction and for achieving gender equality and empowering women and girls. This guide gives a brief overview on why and how to consider gender equality in WASH policies, strategies and programmes. A gender equality approach to WASH is key to ensuring that all women and men throughout their life cycle, benefit from, and are empowered by improved water and sanitation services, and hygiene practices.<sup>1</sup> Working integrated with gender in WASH is key to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.<sup>2</sup>**

Having access to clean drinking water, sanitation and hygiene is crucial for every woman, man, girl and boy, to live a life in health, dignity, upholding human rights and ensuring gender equality. The rights to water and sanitation require that these are available, accessible, safe, acceptable and affordable for all without discrimination.<sup>3</sup>

This is a huge challenge as still 2,1 billion people lacked safely managed drinking water and 4,5 billion people worldwide lacked a safely managed sanitation service in 2015.<sup>4</sup>



Photo: WaterAid

Manisha, Dilasha and Samrakshya are learning how to wash their hands properly at their school in Nepal as a result of a project run by WaterAid with support from Sida. The project has improved the students' access to safe drinking water, sanitation and provided them with education in hygiene management. The project has also strengthened the municipality's capacity to handle the responsibility of providing safe WASH facilities to the local community.

Climate change and pollution have intensified stress on water resources and have consequences for the availability and continuity of WASH services. Water and climate change are linked, as the effects of climate change are felt through droughts, floods and storms. These disasters can destroy water supplies and sanitation facilities or leaving behind contaminated water and putting the lives of millions of men, women, boys and girls at risk. Without clean water, especially children are at risk of diseases such as diarrhoea. Adapting to climate change is crucial for basic services, which are vulnerable to climate-related hazards.

Women tend to have the main responsibility for health and child care and spend around 2.5 times more time on unpaid care and domestic work than men<sup>5</sup>. Women are also often managers of domestic water resources as well

1 <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hrbodies/cedaw/pages/cedawindex.aspx>

2 <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>

3 [https://www.un.org/waterforlifedecade/human\\_right\\_to\\_water.shtml](https://www.un.org/waterforlifedecade/human_right_to_water.shtml)

4 [https://www.unwater.org/publication\\_tag/sdg6-synthesis-report/](https://www.unwater.org/publication_tag/sdg6-synthesis-report/)

5 <http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/economic-empowerment/facts-and-figures>

as promoters of home and community-based sanitation activities. Providing access to clean water close to the home can dramatically reduce women's workloads, and free up time for other activities. For their daughters, this time can be used to attend school.

This division of labour generally results in women's and men's different priorities for water use and management. Yet, in many societies women's views are not systematically represented in decision-making bodies, and gender-based inequalities are often made invisible in debates and cultural norms. Women have often accumulated knowledge about water resources, including location, quality and storage methods, as well as insights in common habits and problems within a community. Hence, women's active participation in WASH-solutions can improve health, improve status, increase women's safety, create opportunities for income generation, as well as providing them with public and influential roles.

Goal 6 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development on ensuring the availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all, includes important dimensions related to the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation. The Goal 6 has clear cross-sectorial relevance to other goals.

Sida supports an integrated approach which is crucial for progress within multiple goals to ensure sustainable management of water and sanitation *for all*. Countries and organisations therefore need to move away from sectorial development and management of water resources and adapt an integrated approach which takes into consideration the water cycle in entirety.

**Water supply:** Women have a key role in the provision, management and safeguarding of water. Women and girls spend significantly more time acquiring water than men and boys.<sup>6</sup> Today, women and girls around the world spend a collective 200 million hours collecting water.<sup>7</sup> Water collection is a heavy task that expose women and girls to threats of violence and health hazards when they need to go far distance to collect water. The time girls spend on water collection can affect their school attendance. Lack of access to water also decreases women's roles in contributions to agricultural production, food security and business opportunities. Across the developing world, women make up 50 percent of the agricultural labour force<sup>8</sup> and since agriculture is water dependent these statistics invigorate the importance of inclusive water resource management to reach gender equality.

**Sanitation and hygiene:** Inadequate access to sanitation and hygiene disproportionately affect poor women and girls, as they are often faced with additional challenges

related to menstrual hygiene, personal safety, sexual harassments and violence. Without access to latrines, many women and girls become 'prisoners of daylight', using only the night as privacy. Night-time trips to fields or roadsides expose them to risk of physical attack and sexual violence and also increases the risk of being affected by health problems such as urinary tract infections, chronic constipation and mental stress. Furthermore, in many countries, school attendance by girls is lower and drop-out rates are significantly higher in schools that have no access to safe water and no separate toilet facilities so that girls can manage their menstrual hygiene.

Hundreds of millions of men and women face an increased risk of infection by seeking care in health facilities that lack basic necessities, including WASH and health care waste services.<sup>9</sup> Access to WASH at health facilities will encourage women to deliver at health centers which is likely to reduce maternal and infant mortality.

**Conflict and emergency situations:** In conflict and other emergency situations access to safe water and sanitation services is usually limited or non-existent and the access is further compromised as infrastructure is often damaged. In many conflicts around the world, more girls and boys die from diseases linked to unsafe water and sanitation and lack of hygiene than from direct violence<sup>10</sup>. Conflicts and natural disasters that exacerbate water scarcity may lead to a double hardship for women. First, they may have to walk longer distance to collect water which is time-consuming and can expose them to danger. Secondly, due to security, cultural or social constraints, women's mobility can be restricted which will decrease their access to water and adequate sanitation facilities even further.

Gender dynamics within households must be considered in situations of displacement when water and food are distributed. This includes men's and women's ability to access and equitably distribute relief items within households. Men are usually registered and when men disappear (due to war or displacement) women might lack registration information which is important to access relief.

**Access to and Control Over Resources:** Women and girls bear the greatest burden of WASH. Yet they are often excluded from planning, delivering and monitoring community WASH activities because of having less power, resources, time, and status than their male peers.

Women have accumulated knowledge about water resources, including location, quality, natural cyclical variability and storage methods, as well as insights regarding hygiene and sanitation practices within a community, which are important information for policies and programming. Yet, women's and girls' views are not

6 <https://www.un.org/waterforlifedecade/gender.shtml>

7 <https://water.org/our-impact/water-crisis/womens-crisis/>

8 <http://www.fao.org/gender/background/en/>

9 <https://data.unicef.org/resources/wash-in-health-care-facilities/>

10 <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/children-living-protracted-conflicts-are-three-times-more-likely-die-water-related>



WaterAid, Ernest Randriarimalala

Fetra, Tongasoa, Hasina, Hanitrasoa, Andrea and Sara have received access to safe drinking water and toilets in their community in Madagascar through support from Sida to WaterAid and local partners. In their school the toilets are constructed to enable girls to manage their menstruation properly and they have received education about menstruation and menstruation hygiene.

systematically represented in decision-making bodies and men and boys are not encouraged to engage in household work and in unpaid community-based sanitation activities. Hence, women's active participation in water and sanitation solutions can improve health for all community members, increase women's and girls' safety, creating opportunities for income generation, as well as providing them with other public and influential roles. Men and boys can reduce women's work load by sharing household work and by participating in community-based actions. Involving both women and men in integrated water resource initiatives through a gender transformative approach can increase effectiveness and efficiency.<sup>11</sup>

### ENTRY POINTS FOR SIDA

Sida has an important role to promote gender mainstreaming in WASH projects and programmes, and to support women's active participation in the planning, design, implementation, and monitoring of interventions targeting water and sanitation. Sida works with targeted and integrated gender equality interventions as well as with dialogues with partners and decision makers. Entry points for Sida can be identified within the following areas:

#### Mainstreaming gender at policy level

- Strengthen governments' capacity (judicial, legislative and executive) to promote and mainstream gender equality.

- Support that specific gender objectives are articulated within national water, sanitation and hygiene policies and strategies and that these are implemented.
- Support improved data management including sex- and age disaggregated statistics and a more coherent monitoring at national (and global) levels that allows tracking women and men, girls and boys, access to services.
- Promote women's participation and representation in policy and planning processes and decision-making at all levels.
- Confirm whether national WASH strategies include access to WASH in schools, with emphasis on safe and well-maintained separate facilities for girls and boys.
- Strengthen budget negotiation capacities at the WASH sector ministries and agencies and promote the allocation of resources to enhance gender equality and empower women and girls in WASH.
- Assess if national level stakeholders (government, donors, civil society, private sector, finance institutions and research agencies) regularly incorporate gender considerations in studies, reviews or research commissioned to progress sector goals.

#### Mainstreaming gender at the programme level

- Ensure that the partner conduct a gender analysis. The analysis is important to understand gender inequalities and is a useful starting point for dialogue on the design of WASH programme.

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.un.org/waterforlifedecade/gender.shtml>

- Ensure that the program is informed by the gender analysis. Gender analysis should be followed up throughout the programme cycle in planning, implementation, monitoring, evaluation and reporting to identify gender inequalities between women and men, girls and boys, and how the programme intervention impacts gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment.
- The gender analysis should include other factors that affect gender equality such as age, social status, class, sexual identity and expression, disability, ethnicity and religion. Women's vulnerability is also influenced by civil status affecting unmarried, married and widowed women differently.
- Ensure that the implementing organisation has adequate gender equality competence and sufficient human and financial resources to mainstream gender equality throughout the programme cycle from inception, implementation, monitoring, evaluation to reporting.
- Consider supporting the scale-up of promising sustainable innovative initiatives that has an evidence-based positive impact on gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment
- Support accountability mechanisms and meaningful participation for women and men, girls and boys, in all phases of the water and sanitation cycle.
- Emphasize the relevance of integrating men and boys' contribution for gender equality and support their efforts for positive change.
- Support activities that train and empower women and girls to exercise their rights and take active participation in decision-making. This can also include discriminated and marginalized groups identified in the gender analysis.

### Mainstreaming gender in monitoring and evaluation frameworks

- Incorporate sex- and age disaggregated indicators to monitor progress on WASH. If data is available, incorporate other indicators such as health-status, disability, etc.
- Support adequate human resources and relevant funding for agencies to mainstream gender equality in their policies, procedures and throughout the WASH services programme cycle. This includes monitoring and evaluation of impact and sharing of lessons learned.

### Example of indicators (\*Note)

- **Proportion of population (women/men) using:**
  - **basic drinking water supply**<sup>1</sup>
  - **adequate sanitation**<sup>2</sup>
  - **basic hand-washing facilities at home**  
(Impact level indicator, measures effect on target group)
- **Share of primary schools with access to separate toilets for girls and boys.** (Outcome level indicator, measures capacity development as a prerequisite)
- **Share of Health facilities with access to toilets and handwashing.** (Outcome level indicator, measures capacity development as a prerequisite)
- **Time spent (women/men) collecting water and firewood.** (Outcome level indicator, measures effect on target group)
- **Share of women and men participating in initiating, siting, implementing, using, and in operation and maintenance of WASH facilities.** (Output level indicator, measures capacity development as prerequisite)
- **Time saved by women and men using improved water and sanitation service.** (Outcome level indicator, measures effect on target group)
- **Share of national budget allocated to water supply; sanitation; and hygiene.** (Outcome level indicator, measures political will)
- **Number of additional women and men using a basic water supply/adequate sanitation/basic hand-washing facility as result of Swedish support.** (Output level indicator, measures effect on target group)
- **The existence of gender specific objectives in WASH.** (Output level indicator, measures political will)

1 JMP pre-2015 definition of "improved water source" and with a total collection time of less than 30 minutes (round-trip)

2 JMP pre-2015 definition of "improved sanitation" and with less than 30 people sharing toilet people sharing toilet.

\* Note: The WHO UNICEF JMP report "Progress on drinking water, sanitation and hygiene: 2017 update and SDG baselines" established new national, regional and global baseline estimates for the new SDG indicators of "safely managed" drinking water and sanitation services, as well as global data on the percentage of people who have access to soap and water for handwashing. These new indicators correspond with the ambition of the SDG targets, and raise expectations for both service providers and monitoring systems. As this type of work with new baselines is new and in progress, it will be essential to follow up on the development in which these indicators are implemented in various programs, and in relation to how gender aspects are integrated in the systematic monitoring of SDG targets.