

Water, Sanitation and Hygiene for All – The Basis for Sustainable Development

2012



Position paper

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WASH

Clean Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) are basic human needs, and are indispensable for the healthy development of individuals as well as for the sustainable development of societies. Since 2010, safe drinking water and sanitation has been recognised as a human right by the UN General Assembly and the UN Human Rights Council. As part of goal 7 of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the global community set the target of halving the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation by 2015.

According to WHO and UNICEF statistics, this goal was achieved in 2010 with respect to water. However, this achievement is subject to very strong regional disparities, and the quantity and quality of locally supplied water is still not sufficient in many places. In addition, more than 780 million people are still lacking access to clean water, and 2.5 billion people – more than a third of the world population – have no access to improved sanitation.¹ WASH is of central importance for women and girls in particular.

WASH – Central for development, Human Rights and the MDGs

Water, sanitation and hygiene are essential for achieving almost all MDGs as well as for the realisation of numerous human rights. WASH is therefore also a key issue for poverty reduction in particular.

The human right to safe drinking water and sanitation specifies that water and sanitation supply must be available, safe, culturally acceptable and accessible for all. Furthermore, when planning and implementing WASH interventions, equality and non-discrimination principles

must be observed and the needs of vulnerable and marginalized groups must be considered. It is important to inform and involve the population while ensuring that transparency and accountability mechanisms are in place.

Inadequate access to WASH leads to high infant mortality rates and reduced educational opportunities, and also jeopardizes food security. In addition, illness-related absences at work lead to decreased family income.²



¹WHO/UNICEF JMP Report, March 2012, p. 2.

²UNICEF, Water, Sanitation Hygiene, 2010 (http://www.unicef.org/media/media_45481.html).

WASH Triad

Water

The supply of water must meet numerous criteria if it is to meet minimum standards at household level. Draw-off points or tap locations must be easily accessible and located within the living area, or at least nearby. Clean water must be hygienically safe and free of chemical contaminants. Humanitarian aid standards suggest that at least 15 litres of water per person per day should be available. Otherwise, the WHO recommends 50 to 100 litres of water (not necessarily drinking water quality) per person per day.

Depending on the size of the population to be supplied and its geographical conditions, drinking water abstraction is possible through precipitation, surface and ground water. The quality of the raw water obtained in combination with the local abstraction and supply system determines the type and volume of drinking water produced. Treatment at household level is particularly necessary when constructing rain water collection systems, or when using and storing surface water.

Water supply systems must always be acceptable to their users. Their participation in the planning and implementation is critical in order to develop an affordable service structure and to install locally adapted technologies which the target group can operate and maintain over the long term.

Sanitation

Sanitation aims at protecting and promoting individual and public health by securing a clean environment and preventing disease transmission to humans through germs contained in human and animal faeces or domestic, industrial and agricultural wastewater and waste.

Sanitation is a holistic concept that comprises, besides dry and flush toilets, technical and operational components, such as storage, transport, and the treatment and safe management of faeces and wastewater or the potentially valuable re-use of their products in the form of water, nutrients and energy. Along this chain, different system solutions use different technologies.

In the same way as for water supply, besides technical aspects, non-technical measures also contribute significantly to the success of sanitation interventions. These include awareness raising, participatory planning of technical implementation and the service structure, hygiene education, marketing and public relations.

Hygiene

Hygiene refers to individual or common practices aimed at preventing disease. They serve to maintain health and a healthy lifestyle. To achieve this, it is necessary to understand the relationship between disease and unhygienic behaviour. Washing hands, for example with water and soap at critical times, such as after using the toilet, before eating, and after washing babies and people in need of care, is central to hygiene behaviour. Food hygiene is equally important, such as boiling and covering food and drinks.

Hygiene behaviour is a very personal and intimate matter. In order to successfully change hygiene behaviour, skill and endurance are required, in addition to professional and cultural competence. Well-planned activities to promote health and hygiene address these points. They encourage individuals and groups to adopt appropriate hygiene behaviour so as to protect themselves from diarrhoea and other diseases.

WASH and Health

Adequate WASH conditions help to reduce preventable diseases including fatal diarrhoea. According to the World Health Organization, about 2.4 million deaths and 9.1% of all diseases per year could be prevented by means of WASH.

Diseases associated with insufficient water and sanitation supply as well as unhygienic behaviour include diarrhoea, cholera, hepatitis A, Giardiasis (parasite), Poliomyelitis (infantile paralysis), typhoid, Salmonellosis, schistosomiasis (bilharzia), conjunctivitis (bacterial, viral and parasitic conjunctivitis), dracunculiasis (Guinea-worm), and intestinal parasites such as hookworms or tapeworms.

Adequate WASH facilities help to relieve the excess burden on health systems in developing countries. For example, they could reduce high bed-occupancy rates in hospitals that occur partly due to preventable diseases caused by inadequate water, sanitation, and hygiene. Children are the most vulnerable to diseases associated with a lack of WASH: Throughout the world, about 3,600 children under the age of 5 die every day just because of diarrhoea. This is the second-highest single cause of death for children of this age group³, although about 47% of all cases of diarrhoea could be prevented by regular hand-washing with soap.⁴



The cholera outbreaks in Zimbabwe (2008/9) and Haiti (2010/11) that caused thousands of deaths within a short period of time have once again clearly revealed the close connection between WASH and health.

As women are responsible for home nursing in many cultures, they particularly benefit from a healthy society. It enables them to remain healthy themselves and have more time to acquire an education, and thus contribute to the welfare of their family.

³Black R.E. et al., for the Child Health Epidemiology Reference Group of WHO and UNICEF: Global, regional, and national causes of child mortality in 2008: A systematic analysis, *The Lancet*, 5 June 2010; 375 (9730): 1969-87.

⁴Curtis, V., Cairncross S.; Effect of washing hands with soap on diarrhoea risk in the community: a systematic review. *Lancet Infectious Diseases* 2003 May; 3 (5): 275-81.

WASH for Education and Income



every year about 5% of the gross domestic product is lost due to insufficient water and sanitation supply. This sum is higher than the total amount of funds provided through development aid in this region.⁷ In addition, people affected by diseases are no longer fully able to contribute to agricultural production. Income losses due to illness directly impact the purchasing power and thereby the nutritional standards of poor families.

Finally, inadequate sanitation and a lack of toilets lead to high school-dropout rates, in particular among girls once they reach menstruation age. If there are no sanitation facilities at school where privacy is respected, girls will not attend classes when they are menstruating, or even drop out of school altogether.

When planning and designing sanitation facilities in schools, it is important to develop culturally appropriate systems that take into account the special needs of girls and boys.

Universal primary education is the objective set out as MDG 2. Schools are in a position to systematically combine education and the issue of health by means of hygiene education activities. The knowledge children obtain in school and daily hygiene practices can help to shape behavioural patterns at an early stage, which have the potential to effect behavioural changes in their home and private environment.⁸ Therefore WASH at school plays an important role in promoting WASH in the wider society.

Every year, 5 billion working days⁵ and more than 440 million school days⁶ are lost as a result of diseases associated with inadequate water and sanitation. In many regions there are millions of women and girls who are traditionally responsible for supplying water to their families, and therefore have to spend several hours a day fetching large amounts of water from far-off water taps or other water sources. They are thus not able to use this time for going to school or working to earn an income.

WHO studies point out that every dollar invested in WASH in a society provides an added value that is 3 or 4 times higher, depending on the region. In Africa alone,

⁵WSSCC, "It's The Big Issue", 2002.

⁶UNDP, Human Development Report, "Beyond Scarcity: Power, Poverty And the Global Water Crisis", 2006.

⁷Ebd.

⁸IRC/UNICEF/WSSCC, "Strengthening Water, Sanitation and Hygiene in Schools", 2010.

WASH and Food Security

Many studies show that there is a connection between WASH and food and nutrition security. Hygienic living conditions, safe drinking water for preparing food, sanitation facilities, and the possibility to wash hands with soap before eating are preconditions for healthy nutrition. However, reality is different in many places. Diarrhoea and worm infestations caused by poor water quality weaken the body and prevent optimal food utilisation, which is particularly critical in regions where food is scarce.

Treated human faeces and domestic waste water are important resources containing essential plant nutrients, organic substances and water, which could be efficiently used in agriculture instead of being channelled, untreated, into waters, thereby causing high levels of contamination. Treated urine and faeces are valuable fertilizers and can improve soil quality, which can contribute considerably to food security. They can be a viable alternative for poorer sections of the population, in particular for those who can't afford synthetic fertilizers.

WASH for All

Quite often, WASH facilities merely require minor structural changes in order to be inclusive and barrier-free, and thus adapted to the needs of people with disabilities. This can be achieved through wider entrance doors and installing additional handrails or ramps. This is also to the benefit of other social groups, such as elderly persons, pregnant women and parents with small children. The cost of constructing barrier-free WASH facilities often only amounts to a slight increase on the overall construction costs. Taking into consideration the needs of people with disabilities during the planning stages can prevent expensive adjustments and alterations later. People with disabilities must be included in the planning from the outset if their needs are to be met.

The Challenge of Sustainability

In spite of decades of efforts, it has not yet been possible to establish sufficient and appropriate water and sanitation systems which can be used and maintained over the long term without major external (international) support. There are manifold reasons for this, and only in a few cases is it because of a lack of appropriate technologies. Instead, as local consumption habits, as well as cultural, socio-economic and institutional conditions are insufficiently taken into consideration, facilities cease to be operated after only a short period of time and end up being abandoned by the users.

The challenge is to plan water supply, sanitation and hygiene facilities in a way that allows for long-term use and maintenance under affordable conditions (without external/international help). To achieve this, it is crucial to involve users right from the beginning in all planning and implementation steps. This begins with respecting property rights, land rights, water rights, rights of way and traditional forms of land use, so as to ensure that nobody is excluded from access. During later planning stages, users must also be informed and able to participate in decision-making so that technical implementation, operator concepts and user fees take into consideration their respective preferences. Social acceptance and knowledge of local, institutional and socio-economic conditions are key criteria when selecting the appropriate technology. This process can help to establish affordable and locally adapted communal self-administration and service structures that support target groups in permanently operating and maintaining their supply systems once the project is finalised.

The goals of water, sanitation and hygiene must be understood as a tightly connected triangle. Failing to achieve one of the goals can adversely affect the implementation of the others.

Designing Sustainable WASH Activities

- 1. Health:** Measures must be taken to protect the health of people directly affected but also to prevent negative impacts on the health of third parties. The construction of a sanitation system, for example, should not lead to the pollution of surrounding water sources or downstream watercourses.
- 2. Technology and use:** Measures are only sustainable if the local population or the municipal administration is able to permanently operate and maintain the new technological systems, and if people are able to sustain the new practices. Therefore, the chosen technology should be robust and designed in such a way as to ensure that it can be used and looked after with the locally available technical and human resources and capacities.
- 3. Financial sustainability:** In order to secure sustainability, it is essential to provide operation, maintenance and consumables that can be organized and paid for with reasonable external support at the local level. Here, technology and tariff systems should be introduced that are adapted to the financial resources of the users, and must not exclude vulnerable and marginalized groups from access.
- 4. Socio-cultural and institutional framework:** Sustainable measures need to be accepted by users from a socio-cultural and gender-specific perspective. This is achieved by informing everybody involved about WASH. Active participation in all decisions ensures that the community values these measures and takes on responsibility for them. WASH measures must be compatible with the legal framework, and must be supported by stable institutional structures.
- 5. Environment and natural resources:** Chosen systems should be economical in terms of water, energy usage and other resources, and should produce as little waste water, faeces and waste as possible. Re-use and recycling are desirable. This includes the use of treated waste water, recycling of nutrients and organic substance in agriculture and the generation of renewable energy (biogas).
- 6. Designing sustainable WASH activities:** Impacts of climate change are increasingly affecting the availability and quality of water, as well as physical access to water and sanitation facilities. For this reason, when designing these facilities, the risks that arise due to extreme weather conditions (heavy rain, storms, floods, droughts) must be taken into consideration while involving the target groups already at the planning stage.



Demands of VENRO and the WASH Network

The Federal Government must attach more importance to and strengthen the issues related to WASH in politics.

VENRO and the WASH network ask the Federal Government to meet the following demands:

1. Continued decisive advocacy for asserting the global human right to safe drinking water and sanitation.
2. Promoting the WASH triad at the international level as a high-priority matter within the post 2015 MDG debate and when determining sustainable development goals.
3. Actively supporting global campaigns, such as Sustainable Sanitation: the five-year drive to 2015 (UN Resolution 65/153 Follow-up to the International Year of Sanitation) and the Sanitation and Water for All Partnership.
4. Expanding the dialogue between Ministers and the cooperation of all relevant Ministries (in particular the Foreign Office, the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, BMZ, and the German Federal Ministry of the Environment) with the involvement of civil society, so as to interweave WASH projects into the respective aid and development phases.
5. Ensuring that education, health and food security programs include WASH components in order to reap the significant positive effects of WASH in these areas.
6. Attaching more importance to the socio-cultural context and participative accompanying measures in WASH projects within the framework of future donor and subsidy policies. Many WASH projects are failing to be sustainable due to their strong technical focus.
7. Recognizing that hygiene education and sanitation can only be sustainable and successful if there is a demand on the part of the users – therefore it is necessary to integrate activities into WASH projects that create this demand; donor and subsidy policies must address this aspect
8. Focussing donor policies on technically simple and cost-efficient approaches with high efficiency, such as washing hands with soap, introducing water filters at the domestic level, or decentralized sanitation systems.
9. Introducing decentralized sanitation and waste water treatment facilities into the fast-growing urban and peri-urban areas that are lacking access, as they are not covered by the current UN goal of basic sanitation.

VENRO Members

- A**
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 - ADRA Deutschland
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 - Arbeitsgemeinschaft Entwicklungsethnologie
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 - ASW – Aktionsgemeinschaft Solidarische Welt
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VENRO has 115 members

* guest member

Status: April 2012

List of Members WASH-Network:

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- Arbeiter-Samariter-Bund Deutschland
- arche noVa – Initiative für Menschen in Not
- AT-Verband
- BORDA
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- Ingenieure ohne Grenzen
- Johanniter-Unfall-Hilfe
- Malteser International
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VENRO is the umbrella organisation of development non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in Germany. The association was founded in 1995 and consists of more than 100 organisations. Their backgrounds lie in independent and church-related development co-operation, humanitarian aid as well as development education, public relations and advocacy.

VENRO's central goal is to construct a just globalisation, with a special emphasis on eradicating global poverty. The organisation is committed to implementing human rights and conserving natural resources.

VENRO

- represents the interests of development NGOs vis-à-vis the government
- strengthens the role of NGOs and civil society in development co-operation
- engages in advocacy for the interests of developing countries and the poorer segments of society
- sharpens public awareness of development co-operation issues

VENRO – Verband Entwicklungspolitik deutscher Nichtregierungsorganisationen e.V.

www.venro.org

The German Network for Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) was founded by German non-governmental organisations (NGOs) on June 20th, 2011. The members of the WASH Network are German non-profit organisations which focus on development cooperation or humanitarian emergency relief and rehabilitation and are actively engaged in the WASH sector. The member organisations of the WASH Network share the vision that everyone in the world should have access to sustainable and safe water and sanitation and independently practice all the elementary principles of hygiene.

Objectives

- The network strengthens the entire German WASH sector in humanitarian emergency and rehabilitation aid as well as in development cooperation.
- Together with its local partners, the network makes a coherent, effective and sustainable contribution to implementing the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation.
- In addition, the network contributes to the topic's perception as an essential global challenge by civil society, politics, the economy, the scientific community and the public at large.

www.washnet.de