

# An Agenda for Change: achieving universal access to water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) by 2030

The agreement of a Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target of universal access to water and sanitation by 2030 requires a fundamental change in the way we work.

Delivering positive change in sector performance necessitates a system-wide approach that tackles all dimensions – policy, financing, institutions – and other key building blocks of the water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) sector as whole. This will require a reform agenda, based on a sound understanding of the political economy, at three levels of decision making: city or district, national and global.

Recognising that we will achieve more by working together, this paper sets out some of the necessary principles that should guide our approach at each level, in order to ensure permanent water and sanitation services for all.



Women from the management committee meet with community members to discuss hygiene and sanitation education, Kalshi Takar Baa slum, Dhaka, Bangladesh, 2011.

## Global level

- We, as sector stakeholders, are committed to achieving the goal of universal access to WASH by 2030. Our mission is driven by evidence of the fundamental role of WASH in all development outcomes and in the broader poverty-eradication agenda. This target date is non-negotiable if we are to deliver on the internationally agreed SDGs.
- Access to sustainable WASH services, as recognised by the United Nations (UN), is a fundamental human right.
- To achieve universal access to sustainable WASH services by 2030 all agencies must redouble their efforts and fundamentally change their practices.
- We are convinced the sector can achieve lasting universal access by 2030,
- But understand that this will require new partnerships, better use of existing finances coupled with new funding sources, and a serious commitment to monitoring for improvement.
- We know that governments must lead efforts and that external agencies must work in a way that supports and builds government capacity to lead and to succeed. We commit to work collectively and adhere to key behaviours that strengthen countries' capabilities to deliver permanent and accountable access to WASH services (see Box 1).
- We know that work needs to be financed more creatively and effectively, and must address all stages of the service delivery cycle. We know that financing must come from individuals, communities, and district and national governments, and be combined with and supported by traditional aid and/or philanthropy and crucial funding vehicles like loans, social impact investments, and bonds. No robust country plan aiming to achieve universal access by 2030 should fail because of a lack of finance.
- We understand that achieving universal access to permanent WASH services requires improvement in integration and alliance-building with other sectors, including health, education, finance and the environment.
- We commit to building on and supporting country-led institutions, processes and networks aiming to achieve universal access by 2030, and will find creative ways to support countries' participation and leadership in broader sector initiatives like the Sanitation and Water for All (SWA) partnership.



Doing planning at regional level SNNPR region in Ethiopia.

## National level

- Achieving universal access to WASH services that last is only possible with government leadership and political commitment, and when policy makers and service providers are held to account for responsive services that reach all communities.
- Strong institutions that are accountable, responsive and well-coordinated are necessary to deliver and sustain services. All partners will work together to strengthen key sector building blocks, including:
  - Sector policy/strategy
  - Sector coordination
  - Sector finance
  - Institutional arrangements – which include frameworks for regulation and accountability
  - Performance monitoring – which can lead to regulation of service providers and services, and ensures inevitable challenges are understood and addressed in a timely way
- We commit to investing and participating in a continuous process of planning, monitoring, assessment and corrective action. The ability of a sector to continuously learn and adapt, both for policy and operational practice, should be a core requirement and not viewed as an optional extra.

- To deliver universal services we must tackle inequalities by targeting resources at the most marginalised and excluded people, and ensure the articulation of their rights to WASH services is met with responsive and accountable service provision – in short, including everyone.
- National policy-making and monitoring systems should enable – and be informed by – implementation processes at the district level, especially where there are significant gaps between stated policy and actual practices.

### **City and district level**

- Success will mean every household and public institution (e.g. schools and clinics) has access to water and sanitation services that last. Although hard to achieve, this is measurable and is the cornerstone of our efforts, with a focus on nobody being left behind.
- Success at district and city levels will require new alliances and working relationships between local government, local communities and the local private sector, with governments taking the lead. External agencies should work with all these players to ensure success – and we commit to doing this in our work.
- We are not ideological about who provides WASH services. The outcome we seek is simply that water flows and sanitation and hygiene services are guaranteed for all, permanently. Different management arrangements can be constructed to achieve this result: public, private, community or combined.
- Achievement of district-wide or city-wide access requires planning, including comprehensive investment plans. We will support district-level and city-level agencies to coordinate around the development and delivery of these plans. As external agents we and others must respect the primacy of district and city-level planning, coordinated and led by local government.
- District-based or city-based models of universal service provision should inform national (and global) policy, programming, finance, systems and practice priorities. We commit to investing in documentation and learning from our own and others' work at the local level, and to dissemination of this to higher levels through learning mechanisms.
- The monitoring systems used by all WASH agencies should aim to strengthen local and national monitoring systems, and, where these systems are available and sufficiently robust, to use them for their own monitoring.
- We commit to jointly ensuring community empowerment and engagement is recognised as a fundamental part of ensuring the rights of all to WASH services are realised, and ensuring that governments and service providers are held to account.

**Box 1: Behaviours for effective, equitable and sustainable development cooperation in the WASH sector**

**1. Develop and support ‘one national plan’ for investment and technical assistance**

National leadership is essential for directing and coordinating resources – including external support – around nationally agreed sector and development priorities. Government leadership in sector development is stronger when supported by a sector plan that enhances governments’ ability to plan and coordinate sector investments and service delivery. Where such national sector strategies and priorities are weak or not in place, partners should jointly support efforts to build or strengthen them.

**2. Strengthening and using country systems**

National systems for procurement, financial management, reporting, monitoring and evaluation, and audit need to be put in place, strengthened and used. Where full systems alignment is not immediately possible, government and partners should agree steps to progressively strengthen country systems and move towards using them. These systems should cover both national and decentralised levels.

**3. Mutual accountability, learning and corrective action**

Effective development cooperation requires appropriate, inclusive processes that encourage all partners to demonstrate and demand mutual accountability for sector progress. These should be built around a government-led, multi-stakeholder process for planning, monitoring and learning to ensure a feedback loop between analysis and planning and foster evidence-based decision making. This feedback loop should include – but not be limited to – formal, participatory review cycles such as joint sector reviews and sector coordination meetings. Effective cooperation also requires the international community to support and move towards a global monitoring process focused on strengthening capacity at the country level.

**4. Recording and reporting of donor and domestic expenditure through national budget systems, ratified by developing country parliaments**

Transparency and predictability of resources is crucial to allow governments to lead directing and monitoring of sector investment. It is a prerequisite of effective sector planning in the medium and long term, and vital to governments’ capacity to hold external support agencies accountable and vice versa. Ensuring budgets are ratified by parliament will also help strengthen domestic accountability, and avoid creating accountability distortions that undermine country systems.

**5. Prioritising service equity and sustainability**

Effectiveness of sector finance should be measured by its ability to create and deliver equitable and sustainable services and institutions. Moving away from a project-based approach towards a longer-term vision of durable and resilient WASH services is fundamental to underpinning poverty reduction and economic growth. This requires development partners to support country governments to prioritise institution-building over short-term outputs.

Source: SWA Country Processes Task Team, December 2014

## Principles paper

Supported by: Aguaconsult, IRC, WaterAid, and Water For People.  
May 2015

