



Gender and equity issues in WASH

Addressing inequalities in the ONEWASH Plus programme implementation to ensure adequate WASH services for all

Fast facts

Inequalities in WASH

Lack of access to adequate water and sanitation services affects women and girls, the poor and people with disabilities disproportionately.

Focus on equity

The ONEWASH Plus programme specifically addresses inequalities during implementation with the goal to provide universal access to everyone in the eight project towns and the surrounding rural areas.

Sensitisation

Addressing gender and equity issues during project implementation is an eye-opener for many stakeholders on aspects that might not have been considered previously.

This learning note presents the main issues regarding gender and equity in water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), and provides an overview of specific activities undertaken under the ONEWASH Plus programme (November 2013 to September 2019) to promote equity.

Equity is one of the cross-cutting result areas of the ONEWASH Plus programme. The programme intentionally focusses on improving access to WASH services for vulnerable groups (including people with disabilities, the poor and female-headed households), and proactively addresses gender issues related to WASH service provision. Vulnerable groups are more prone to lack access to appropriate WASH services. The poor often pay more for water than the rich, women and girls usually carry the burden of collecting water, women are underrepresented in WASH management bodies, and inadequate sanitation and menstrual health and hygiene management (MHH) facilities in schools prevent girls and students with a disability from getting an education.

The learning note describes activities undertaken in the towns and surrounding areas of Abomsa, Sheno and Welenchiti in Oromia, Maksegnit in Amhara, Adishihu and Wukro in Tigray, and Jiggiga and Kebridehar in Somali region. It focusses on the concepts and approaches adopted to reduce inequalities. A comprehensive evaluation will be conducted after completion of the ONEWASH Plus programme to assess to what extent the described concepts and approaches helped to reduce inequalities in WASH service provision.

Inequalities in WASH

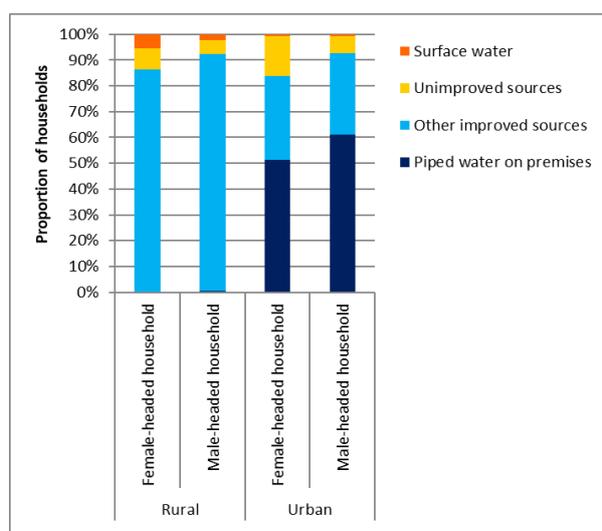
Lack of access to adequate water and sanitation services affects vulnerable groups, women and girls disproportionately. This section presents key areas of inequalities that were recognised and actively addressed by the ONEWASH Plus programme.

Vulnerable groups lack access to adequate WASH

Vulnerable groups such as people with disabilities, the poor and female-headed households are more likely to lack access to adequate WASH services. For instance, 85% of the poorest households in rural areas of Ethiopia lack access to basic water services compared to 2% of the richest households in urban areas.¹ More than half of the poorest households in rural areas practise open defecation, while basically all rich households in urban areas are open defecation free.¹

Female-headed households in the ONEWASH Plus project areas were found to be not only more likely to have an income under minimum wage, but also to be less likely to have access to improved drinking water compared to male-headed households, especially in the urban areas, as shown in Figure 1.²

Figure 1: Female-headed households are less likely to use improved water services



A relatively high proportion of households in the project towns and their surroundings are female-headed, in 24% of rural households and 48% of urban households this is the case.²

In more than 5% of the surveyed households in the baseline at least one household member was found to have a disability. The most common disabilities are limitation in physical movement (51% of disabilities) and blindness (22%).² People with disabilities often face difficulties accessing and using water and sanitation facilities, at household level but also, for instance, at schools and health facilities.

The poor pay the highest price for their water

In Ethiopia, water utilities usually apply a progressive water tariff system for individual connections, which determines the tariff each month from the water meter reading. For instance, in Wukro a household pays 3 ETB/m³ for the first 5 m³ (5,000 L) collected from a private connection in a month.³ The water tariff then gradually increases, and for each cubic meter of water exceeding 50 m³ in a month, the household has to pay 20 ETB/m³. The poor often do not have a private household connection and have to collect their water from public taps or from neighbours. In Welenchiti, a 25-litre jerry can costs on average 0.25 ETB at a public tap (equivalent to 10 ETB/m³) and 1.60 ETB at private households (64 ETB/m³).⁴ Therefore, households without private connections (often the poor) spend more on their water than households with a private connection.

¹ Estimates for 2011 (washdata.org)

² ONEWASH PLUS baseline survey (2014)

³ Wukro town water tariff in October 2018

⁴ Thomas (2016) Understanding inequities in water services in small Ethiopian towns: the case of Welenchiti

No public taps exist in Wukro and the poor often share private connections: so, they are likely to pay a higher tariff because the tariff increases with a higher monthly consumption.

The poor are most affected by water shortages which were common in all project towns prior to the ONEWASH Plus programme. The poor usually lack the capacity to store more than 100 to 200 litres of water at home. When the water is used up, they are forced to walk long distances to collect water from other parts of town or from surrounding villages.

Alternatively, they pay high prices to vendors that bring in water from other places. In Welenchiti, households paid up to 10 ETB per 25 L (400 ETB/m³) when no water was available from the town's water supply.⁴

Special burdens on females due to inadequate WASH

In households that do not have access to water services on premises, the burden of fetching water commonly falls on the women and girls who are responsible for collecting water in about 75% of the households.⁵ Fetching water contributes to the situation where women's time is inflexible, consumed by routine and non-productive tasks, perpetuating their absence from decisionmaking and other profitable pursuits. For girls, fetching water combined with other household chores contributes to dropout and low school retention rates.

Before implementation of the ONEWASH Plus programme, around 10% of the households in the project towns spent more than 30 minutes to walk to their water collection point and back, while in the surrounding rural areas almost one-quarter spent more than 30 minutes. Long queuing and waiting time for fetching water were common, exceeding one hour for about one-fifth of the households in the urban and for two-fifth in the rural areas.⁶

Long walking distances for fetching water increases the risk of gender-based violence while gathering water. Likewise, if households do not have a latrine, the only time available to

defecate is often after dark. Apart from the discomfort, there is a risk of harassment and assault during the night-time walk, especially for women and girls.

Low female representation in decision-making bodies

Despite the fact that the burden of fetching water and managing water at home commonly falls on women and girls, they are often under-represented in decision-making bodies related to the provision of water services. Since women and girls spend a long time fetching water, they have a strong incentive to contribute towards improved WASH services and a strong desire to maintain and sustain the facilities once they are in place. However, the baseline found that less than a quarter of WASHCOs in the rural areas around the ONEWASH Plus programme towns had a gender-balanced representation, and that only 4% had at least two women in key positions. None of the town water boards in the project towns was found to be gender-balanced at the time of the baseline.

Lack of MHH facilities impacts girls' education

Lack of adequate sanitation and MHH facilities prevent girls from changing sanitary pads or menstrual cloths in school. Prior to the ONEWASH programme, nearly half of the schools did not have separate latrines for boys and girls. Non-lockable doors and cracks in the superstructure were found to be common. Due to poor cleanliness, most students preferred not to use school latrines. In addition, often no water was available for girls to wash and manage menstruation in a hygienic manner. In addition, availability and affordability of sanitary pads, and stigma and lack of understanding around menstruation are issues that prevent adequate MHH. More than one-quarter of female students missed classes during their menstrual period due to discomfort and fear of staining their clothes.⁷ Regular absence from school impacts girls' education.

⁵ CSA (2017) Drinking Water Quality in Ethiopia, Results from the 2016 Ethiopia Socioeconomic Survey

⁶ ONEWASH PLUS baseline survey (2014)

⁷ Knowledge, Attitude and Practice study by World Vision International under the ONEWASH Plus programme (2015)

Gender and equity-sensitive project activities under ONEWASH Plus

An internal equity mainstreaming note was used by the programme to address gender and equity-sensitive aspects during implementation. This section provides an overview of specific project activities undertaken to address inequalities in WASH.

Improving access to WASH services for all

The ONEWASH Plus programme follows a district-wide approach, targeting that everyone in the district, urban and rural, will get access to adequate WASH services. The clear focus on universal access is expected to ensure that the vulnerable population such as people with a disability, the poor and female-headed households are not left behind. This concept is proactively communicated to all stakeholders to sensitise them on gender and equity issues related to WASH. The evaluation will assess how inequalities have been reduced.

In six towns (excluding Adishihu and Jigjiga), the programme supports the construction, expansion and rehabilitation of existing water supply systems to achieve drinking water provision in line with the Ethiopian Growth and Transformation Plan 2 (GTP-2). Access to reliable water supply within a maximum distance of one kilometre is expected to reduce the burden on women and girls for fetching water and so reduce the women's lack of time, to ensure girls are not kept away from school due to household chores, and to reduce the risk of harassment while gathering water. In addition, the availability of sufficient water (40 lpcd in urban and 25 lpcd in rural areas as per the GTP-2 norms) will reduce the burden on the poor to pay high water prices as water is expected to be reliably available.

The Community-Led Total Sanitation and Hygiene (CLTSH) approach is used to trigger the construction of latrines in all eight towns and satellite villages. The approach has been adapted to an urban context by the programme in consultation with the lead sector ministries. Access to adequate private

latrines is expected to provide more freedom to women and girls regarding time of defecation, and to eliminate the risk of harassment and assault during night-time defecation. Local manufacturing of concrete latrine slabs (see section below on involving women in the private sector) is expected to improve the quality of latrines at affordable prices so that also the poor will have access to adequate sanitation facilities at home.

In schools, the programme promotes the connection to piped water and the construction of flush toilets that are suitable for students with disabilities. In two schools per town disability-friendly toilets are constructed by the programme as a model. Two separate blocks, one for girls and one for boys, are constructed, each including one separate and lockable latrine that has wheelchair access, and that has a raised toilet seat with handles. The toilets are also designed to be MHH inclusive and have handwashing basins inside the blocks (see section below on improving menstrual hygiene management in schools).

In addition, the programme supports the construction of disability-friendly public toilets in the project towns, with separate units for women and men as well as showers and a room for selling sanitary materials.

Introducing social water tariffs for the vulnerable

Vulnerability assessments are conducted in the district towns by the local administration to identify the poorest households in the community. Private connections will be supported by the programme for about 200 to 500 vulnerable (poor) households in each

town. After getting connected, it is expected that households will pay less for water while having more water available for personal and household hygiene if they consume water quantities in line with the GTP-2 norm. The ONEWASH Plus programme supports the water utilities in each town to develop a business plan to ensure that operations do not depend on subsidies from the government. While the average water tariff will increase, the programme stressed the importance of a pro-poor tariff system that ensures water is affordable for all, e.g. progressive tariff systems that include cross-subsidies for the poor.

Involving women in private sector and water committees

The programme aims to have gender-balanced water committees. Trainings for woreda water offices and water committees proactively advocated for a higher proportion of women in the water committees overall but also in key positions such as chairperson, secretary and treasurer. In addition, when planning the programme activities, attention was given to ensure full participation of women and girls in decision-making processes.

Approximately five water kiosks are constructed in each of the six towns where the water supply systems were expanded with the support of the programme. The water kiosks are an innovative alternative to public taps. They are expected to be run by female shopkeepers, ideally selected by the local administration and favouring women from poor female-headed households. The water kiosks provide space (at no cost for the shopkeeper) for selling different items or for opening a small coffee place. Due to the additional income generated from other activities than selling water, it is expected that the water kiosks will provide a higher service level (e.g. be reliably open throughout the day) at a similar water price charged by the often rather unreliable public taps.

The programme supports associations and small enterprises in the eight towns to produce sanitation products such as concrete latrine slabs and reusable sanitary pads. In some towns (e.g. in Sheno), the project supports

existing groups, while it formed new ones e.g. in Welenchiti. Women are actively encouraged to join the associations with the goal that at least 50% are female. The programme provides sewing machines; raw materials like concrete, gravel and sand; and entrepreneurship training to the members, while the municipality provides working space and shops at low rental prices. It is expected that the small enterprises will supply affordable and high-quality concrete slabs to households that want to build a new latrine, and that they will sustainably supply affordable sanitary pads to girls in schools.

The programme also supports the establishment and strengthening of public private operators (PPOs) responsible for solid and liquid waste management, and taking care of the public toilets. The PPOs are provided with training and equipment, and support in the development of a business plan. Gender-balance is advocated during the trainings.

Improving menstrual hygiene management in schools

The ONEWASH Plus programme organises awareness raising trainings in more than 80 schools in all towns and satellite villages. The model toilets constructed (see section on improving access to WASH services for all) are MHH inclusive, i.e. they provide space for girls to change clothes and have water supply available at the latrine building.

In addition, the project encourages schools to prepare an MHH room, which serves as a resting and counselling place for girls who are experiencing pain related to menstruation. The rooms provide privacy for menstrual hygiene management and are equipped with mattresses, blankets and reading materials. Sanitary pads and other hygiene products, such as soap, are stored in the rooms for students who cannot afford to buy them and for emergency cases.

Awareness raising training on MHH is given repeatedly to school staff and students, and MHH clubs were formed to create awareness about menstruation among girls. Engaging boys is one of the strategies, as boys are usually the ones teasing, bullying and making

fun of girls when they have their periods or when their clothes get accidentally stained. Boys participate in the MHH clubs and take part in the discussions, communicating messages to other boys not to make fun of girls, tease or bully them because of menstruation.

Beyond schools, education on MHH is undertaken in communities to break the taboo and shift harmful social norms surrounding

the issue. MHH has been included in the urban health extension manual and is used in refresher trainings for health extension workers and for experts in the local government health offices. In addition, a menstrual hygiene management guideline was developed. Selected women from the community are also trained with the expectation that key messages will cascade down to other women.

About...

ONEWASH Plus learning notes promote the sharing of experiences from innovations within the ONEWASH Plus programme.

This learning note focusses on how gender and equity issues have been addressed under the ONEWASH Plus programme. It was prepared by Lars Osterwalder and Bethel Terefe, and reviewed by Marieke Adank and Tamene Gossa.