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WASH services

The opportunity

Water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) remain critical components of the UNICEF Strategic Plan and help to push global progress on Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 6, which calls for clean water and sanitation for all. Progress on WASH also contributes to achieving other SDGs, especially in the areas of poverty reduction, health, gender equality, climate, nutrition and education.

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Safe water is a key to good health and the foundation for building sustainable communities and societies. Investing in water, sanitation and hygiene not only improves human development indicators – life expectancy, education and purchasing power parity – but also can transform the growth of communities and countries.

Effective WASH facilities and services also lead to a healthy and productive workforce. An investment in WASH services in the workplace can lower absenteeism and staff turnover, thereby creating opportunities for growth and profitability. This includes the potential for cost savings, which can benefit both producers and consumers by increasing economic efficiency.

- Investing in WASH improves **human development indicators** and can transform the growth of communities and countries.
- WASH is highly cost effective: **for every dollar invested in water and sanitation, \$4.30 is generated in economic returns** through increased productivity.
- Investing in WASH leads to a **healthy and productive workforce** with lower absenteeism and staff turnover, creating opportunities for growth and profitability.

The challenge

Inadequate WASH services, facilities, and systems are estimated to contribute to a staggering \$260 billion global loss every year, largely due to lost time and productivity. This cost is borne by businesses and governments, but the impact is felt by the poorest communities. An estimated 10 per cent of the total global disease burden could be prevented by improvements to WASH.

HIGHLIGHTING THE NEED

- Worldwide, **2.2 billion people** still lack access to safe drinking water.
- **More than half of the global population** does not have access to safe sanitation.
- **Three billion people** do not have access to handwashing facilities with soap.
- Still, **673 million people** practice open defecation.

The consequences of unsafe water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) on children can be deadly. **Over 700 children under age 5 die every day of diarrhoeal diseases** due to lack of appropriate WASH services. In areas of conflict, children are nearly 20 times more likely to die from diarrhoeal disease than from the conflict itself.

Notably, water and sanitation systems are increasingly threatened by the destructive impact of climate change, which is contributing to disparities in access. Vulnerable groups – isolated communities, poor households, people with disabilities, and particularly women and girls – bear the brunt of inadequate WASH services. And while gains have been made, there are several challenges that must be addressed collectively:

Increasing humanitarian needs: Over the past 10 years, the number of people who need humanitarian assistance has more than doubled, stretching limited resources.

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Inadequate sanitation and hygiene practices: An estimated 673 million people still practice open defecation, with significant costs to the health and nutrition status of countries and to national economies.

Lack of WASH facilities in schools: A growing body of evidence reveals that inadequate sanitation, water, and washing facilities in schools limit the attendance and performance of girls, notably when their menstrual hygiene needs are not met.

Environmental degradation and crises: The conditions created by conflict, climate change, and natural disasters interrupt and degrade WASH services, affecting the health, nutritional status, safety, and dignity of children and women.

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Mali

Hamsatou, 13, a displaced girl from Mopti, washes her hands at the Socoura displacement camp. She fled her village in Bankass when it was attacked by armed men in 2019. "I was terrified," she says. "I thought I was going to get killed." Today, she's healing at a UNICEF-supported Child-Friendly Space.

Sustainable response

① Respond to the COVID-19 pandemic – Hand Hygiene for All

UNICEF will continue efforts to stop COVID-19 transmission through [Hand Hygiene for All](#), accelerate access to [WASH in health-care facilities](#), support [safe reopening of schools](#), and ensure continuity and affordability of WASH services. Looking ahead – this is not the first, nor will be that last, pandemic – UNICEF will work closely with WHO to strengthen WASH and infection prevention and control interventions as critical elements of pandemic prevention, preparedness and response. UNICEF has developed new investment opportunities for Hand Hygiene for All.

② Make the ‘shift’ to climate-resilient wash services – Water Security for All.

UNICEF has committed to making all its [WASH programmes climate-resilient](#) by the end of 2021. In March 2021, UNICEF launched [Reimagine WASH: Water Security for All](#), building on the [Water Game Plan](#) to lead global and local solutions for safe and affordable drinking water, [climate resilient WASH services and communities](#), preventing [water scarcity](#) crises through early action, and increasing water cooperation for peace and stability. A new investment case for [Water Security For All](#) has been developed.



Bolivia

On 15 July, (left-right) Maribel, 8, and Shirley, 6, smile as they wash their hands with water in recycled bottles at a rudimentary hand-washing station at La Montaña School in Chuquisaca Department's Totorenda Guarani community. Similar hand-washing stations are in use in all schools in areas where water has become scarce.

4
key change agendas
promoted by UNICEF
since 2019

250
million fewer people
practicing open defecation
is our global target for 2021

3 **Implement the [Water Under Fire](#) change agenda.**

Since 2019, UNICEF has promoted four key change agendas: [volume 1](#) – link the humanitarian response with sustainable development and peacebuilding; [volume 2](#) – build a WASH sector to predictably provide quality WASH responses; volume 3 – stop attacks on water and sanitation infrastructure and personnel; and volume 4 – ‘Water Under Fire in Action, voices from the field’, a film to be launched at the Stockholm World Water Week in August 2021. With the endorsement of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, UNICEF, the Global WASH Cluster and REACH together are establishing an evidence-based [WASH Severity Classification](#) for all countries facing humanitarian crises.

UNICEF focuses on delivering predictable and high-quality humanitarian WASH responses. The organization demonstrates leadership in the humanitarian development nexus while promoting WASH as a positive driver of social cohesion and contributor to peace building in fragile and conflict-affected contexts. Youth can play a pivotal role in strengthening social cohesion, thus including them in such initiatives is critical.

4 **Move from ending open defecation to safely managed sanitation services for all.**

[UNICEF’s Game Plan to End Open Defecation](#) is ending in 2021. UNICEF will continue to strive for the global target of 250 million fewer people practicing open defecation, but will also develop a new ‘Sanitation Game Plan 2.0’ to guide UNICEF’s emerging work on [safely managed sanitation services](#) and UNICEF’s Global Framework for [Urban WASH](#).

WUNICEF will also focus on WASH data collection innovations to overcome the impacts of lockdowns and restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic on the methods that are integral for national and global monitoring and reporting on SDG 6.1 and 6.2 indicators through the WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme ([JMP](#)) and [GLAAS](#).

In line with its mandate to uphold the [rights of the child](#), UNICEF will increase efforts to ensure WASH services are [disability inclusive](#), contribute to [gender equality](#) and are [affordable](#), helping to **eliminate extreme poverty**. UNICEF aims to engage millions of **young people** around the world as champions of WASH, the environment and combatting climate change.

As the Strategic Plan 2018–2021 is in its final year, UNICEF will continue to strive for [sustainable WASH results](#) while charting a course for UNICEF’s WASH programme 2022–2025. More details are found at www.unicef.org/WASH.



India
 Bali, ensures correct handwash for son Bhuma, 7, during COVID-19 pandemic.

How the private and public sectors can invest

Along with inviting our partners to contribute with innovations, technical assistance, capacity building and research, philanthropists, corporations, foundations, governments, bilaterals and multilaterals can invest through UNICEF in several sustainable ways:

Invest in pooled, flexible funds for water and sanitation

Flexible funds target contributions to UNICEF enable UNICEF to direct investments where they are needed most within the field of water and sanitation. This funding gives experts the flexibility to focus on interventions that will have the best results, and therefore enable a strong return on investment. This is particularly important during the COVID-19 pandemic and as we build a next and better tomorrow – it provides flexibility to adapt in a volatile and changing environment.

Invest in specific results

UNICEF recognizes that some partners need to designate their resources to a particular result or country or would like to complement financial investment with advocacy and technical expertise. UNICEF has a long history of developing strategic partnerships to meet partners' priorities and their philanthropic, corporate or institutional goals. Partnerships could support any of the 2021 priorities, and include focus areas on supply chain, data and evidence generation, and advocacy.

Kiribati

Years 6-8 enjoying their handwash routine during recess.



Why partner with UNICEF?

UNICEF's core accountability is to act wherever children lack a basic level of service. But the work does not stop there. All people need unfettered, long-term access to water that is safe to drink, household sanitation facilities that dispose of waste safely, and sustainable hygiene practices. UNICEF works with governments and the private sector to ensure that policies, standards and systems are in place, but the most critical work happens locally. UNICEF knows that the power to maintain safe, reliable, and sustainable practices must rest in the hands of communities themselves. And while behaviour change is the essential starting point, improvements must also be sustained by robust local markets with adequate supply chains so goods and services are available.

UNICEF achieves the greatest impact for children.

UNICEF's priority is to ensure that WASH solutions remain operational in the long term. UNICEF works with its partners on sustainability plans that provide the much needed urgent support, but are also imbedded in the community system.

UNICEF works at scale: Building on its knowledge, technical expertise and lessons learned from existing programmes, UNICEF is uniquely placed to identify and design solutions at scale to provide water and sanitation services to schools, health-care facilities, and communities, in full alignment with national government commitments to the SDGs.

UNICEF leads and pioneers. By working with field partners and programmatic experts, UNICEF can identify, develop and scale together with private-sector partners fit-for-purpose and value-for-money solutions for water and sanitation that respond to the unmet needs of communities around the globe.

UNICEF meets needs across the entire childhood and adolescence through global experts specializing in WASH and who work across sectors to ensure water and sanitation go hand in hand with children's health, nutrition, and education.

UNICEF is there before, during, and after emergencies: working with communities before disaster strikes and staying through recovery. UNICEF's response to COVID-19 demonstrated how hand hygiene is critical in the face of a pandemic.

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Mali

Emmanuel, 10, in the 6th grade at the Sébougou school, here after washing hands before entering class. "Our teacher says us every time that handwashing is the best tool to avoid disease". UNICEF supported 51,747 school-age children to access education through Temporary Learning Spaces (TLS) set up in Internally Displaced Peoples' (IDP) sites and schools, through Community Learning Centres (CLC), reintegration into host schools, broadcasting of education programmes via community radios, distribution of solar radios and the establishment of listening groups.



Kelly Ann Naylor

Associate Director
WASH Section
Programme Division
kanaylor@unicef.org

Davide Simone Nardi

Partnerships and Advocacy Manager
WASH Section Programme Division
dnardi@unicef.org

Alanna MacTavish Khalil

Chief Programme Coordination Unit
Private Fundraising and Partnerships Division
alkhalil@unicef.org
programmecoordination@unicef.org

www.unicef.org

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