The Pacific is home to 2.3 million people; nearly half are children and youth. These children live in one of the most at-risk regions in the world for climate change, exposing them to a wide range of shocks and gradual deterioration, including earthquakes, tsunamis, volcanoes, landslides, floods, drought, cyclones, saltwater intrusion, pollution, and erosion. These shocks and gradual deterioration are regularly impacting water supply and sanitation systems and services, affecting the very future of children, especially the poor and those with disabilities.

Climate resilient Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH)

Overview

Most families in the 14 Pacific Island Countries and Territories (PICTs) live better lives thanks to improved water and sanitation facilities. Good hygiene practices are also on the increase, in part, due to intensive handwashing campaigns during COVID-19.

However, the latest WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme (2020) report found significant gaps in access to water, sanitation and hygiene services between PICTs and urban and rural communities. These gaps mean the sub-region is in jeopardy. In addition, climate change threatens to impact progress made so far due to more natural disasters and prolonged droughts. Children are at serious risk of disease and malnutrition and the sub-region could fail to meet its Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) targets by 2030.

SDG 6: Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all by 2030.

- 70% drinking water has faecal contamination
  (Samoa, Kiribati, Tonga, Fiji, Tuvalu / MICS)

- 15% lack basic drinking water services

- 29% no access to basic level of sanitation

Source: MICS
Source: JMP-WASH data 2020
Source: JMP-WASH data 2020

A young boy helps his mother collect water after a cyclone devastated their village. © UNICEF/2016/Sokhin
Where we are now

Ensuring that all children have access to safe and affordable drinking water, as well as adequate sanitation and hygiene, is crucial for achieving a range of development goals related to health, nutrition and education. Without basic access to safe water and toilets, the lives of thousands of children are at risk.

Water

When children don’t have access to clean water, it negatively impacts their health and nutrition, education, and every other aspect of their lives. At a regional level, estimates for drinking water show that 85 per cent of the PICTs had access to at least basic drinking water in 2020. However, not all pacific countries and territories are the same. For example, the lack of access to basic sanitation ranges from 33 per cent in the Solomon Islands and 22 per cent in Kiribati to nearly universal coverage in some other PICTs. Rural-urban disparities also remain significant, likely due to rural communities running water supply services, while urban areas benefit from water supplied by a state-owned utility company.

Sanitation

A third of children in the Pacific do not have access to good sanitation. One of the leading causes of death in under 5s is water and sanitation-related diseases. Some countries have high access rates to basic sanitation services, including in the Cook Islands, Palau and Fiji, where access is almost universal and in Niue, Palau, Fiji, Samoa, Tokelau and Tonga, where it is over 90 per cent. In contrast, others struggle to achieve basic sanitation, particularly in rural areas. Countries with pronounced sanitation challenges, with limited access to basic sanitation include Solomon Islands at 35 per cent, Kiribati at 22 per cent and Vanuatu at 53 per cent.

Open defecation remains a serious concern in two countries - Solomon Islands 45 per cent and Kiribati 30 per cent.
Hygiene

The main SDG indicator for monitoring hygiene is the presence of a handwashing facility with soap and water. The most recent JMP hygiene data again highlights disparities across and within countries. In addition, social norms continue to impact hygiene and sanitation behaviours and practices, such as the disposal of children’s faeces, open defecation, construction and use of latrines, and handwashing.

WASH facilities in schools, workplaces, healthcare facilities, and public places are commonly inadequate to meet the needs of menstruating girls and women. In schools, 11 countries have access to basic water and sanitation, and 9 countries have basic hygiene access above 60 per cent. However, there is very little data available on WASH in health care facilities to establish the SDG baseline.

### Households with handwashing facilities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RMI</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samoa</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tonga</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kiribati</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solomon Islands</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: JMP/WASH data 2020

Under the new 2023-2027 WASH programme, UNICEF will continue working with governments and partners to accelerate efforts to improve water, sanitation and hygiene to meet the 2030 SDG targets. UNICEF’s mandate builds on the progress, lessons learned and past experience. The strategic focus supports evidence based system strengthening—both public and private—to deliver sustainable, disaster, and climate-resilient quality water and sanitation services. These support national government development priorities as well as community needs, and are aligned with regional strategic priorities. The programme will ensure that children and their families have the knowledge, skills and resources to practice safe water, sanitation and hygiene.

### Strengthening climate resilient WASH systems in communities, schools and health care facilities

- Increasing access to resilient, sustainable, well-managed WASH in schools and health facilities service delivery models for water supplies and treatment, sanitation and handwashing facilities, waste management and ensuring a hygienic environment.
- Increasing access to resilient, sustainable, well-managed WASH in Schools (WinS) service delivery models for water supplies and treatment, sanitation and handwashing facilities, and menstrual hygiene management facilities.
- Increasing WASH cost recovery mechanisms.
Ensuring hygiene and sanitation behaviour change

- Supporting children and their families to have the knowledge, skills and resources to practice safe water, sanitation and hygiene.
- Increasing the practice of handwashing with soap.

Improving quality of data and evidence generation to drive advocacy for WASH improvements at scale

- Strengthening advocacy and implementation approaches to improve WASH in schools and healthcare facilities.
- Prioritizing advocacy to support climate and disaster resilient WASH service delivery models through country systems and development plans.
- Strengthen policy formulation, review, and implementation of sector strategies.

Supporting quality, climate resilient and sustainable WASH services

- Increasing the resilience of community WASH services to disaster and climate shocks.
- Improving water quality, including access to resilient, sustainable and at least basic water services and supplies.
- Reducing open defecation and increasing access to at least basic sanitation, including developing a greater understanding of recalcitrant communities.
- Scaling-up education on WASH and climate resilience in schools.

The consequences of unsafe water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) on children affect not only their health but their overall development, learning and, later in life, economic opportunities. Growing up in a clean and safe environment is every child’s right. It is our responsibility to make that happen.

Estimated budget for the Climate-resilient WASH programme 2023-2027:

US$44 million