The human rights to water and sanitation are at the core of the UNICEF mandate for children. Not only are poor hygiene, open defecation, and lack of access to safe water and sanitation systems leading causes of child mortality and morbidity, they contribute to undernutrition and stunting, and act as barriers to education for girls and to economic opportunity for the poor.

UNICEF’s WASH Strategy will guide the organization-wide contribution to global efforts to meet the water and sanitation Sustainable Development Goal – SDG 6 – and the broader SDG agenda, targeting priority interventions for children. The Strategy articulates how UNICEF will support governments and partners to achieve universal and sustainable water and sanitation services and the promotion of hygiene, with a focus on reducing inequalities especially for the most vulnerable children, wherever they are; both in times of stability and crisis.

UNICEF will continue its core work in the areas of water, sanitation, hygiene and emergencies while doing more to build enabling environments, promote accountability, contribute and engage across sectors, and leverage financial resources for WASH. UNICEF will also move in new directions:

- working across the urban-rural continuum, in recognition of global demographic shifts;
- building new partnerships with the private sector to provide WASH goods and services as well as mobilize the broader business community’s contribution to SDG 6;
- mainstreaming risk-informed programming to mitigate the impact of climate change and emergencies.

UNICEF’s core accountability will be to act where children do not have even a basic level of service. We will also address the more ambitious goal of “safely managed” services embedded in SDG 6, as that is critical to addressing inequalities and sustaining the gains that have been made over the past 20 years.

UNICEF’s Strategy for WASH: A Snapshot

**Continue learning and adapting**
- **Water**: safety, sustainability and access
- **Sanitation**: social norms, access and sustainability
- **Hygiene**: more focus, supporting others to promote behavior change
- **Humanitarian**: delivering service, breaking silos, national coordination

**Do better**
- **Enabling environment**: strengthen capacity and systems to enable all actors to contribute effectively
- **Accountability**: support transparency, monitoring and people’s participation as anchors of good governance
- **Working inter-sectorally**: WASH as a contribution to education, health, nutrition and other outcomes, including WASH in institutions, gender and disability
- **Leverage resources for WASH**: public and private financing for scaled-up, sustainable programmes

**Move in new directions**
- **Climate resilient WASH**: a framework for risk-informed programming
- **Urban**: reaching the most vulnerable, wherever they are
- **Private sector**: goods and services as well as broader contribution
**WASH Strategic Framework**

The Strategic Framework presented in the Strategy sets out the vision, objectives and principles to guide our programming approaches and results areas, which will be used by UNICEF country offices to determine context-specific interventions. Programming principles, approaches and results areas are elaborated below the figure.

**Programming Principles**

Seven programming principles will guide all of UNICEF’s efforts to contribute to the realization of the human rights to water and sanitation and to the achievement of the SDG 6.

**Reduce Inequality**

Target resources to the countries, communities and children most in need while encouraging governments and other duty-bearers to do the same. Help strengthen monitoring systems to better identify the most vulnerable and disadvantaged groups.

**Sustain Access to Quality Services at Scale**

Provide strategic long-term support for strengthening national capacity to deliver quality and sustainable services at scale. Encourage new partnerships, including with the private sector, to promote innovative approaches to drive the sustainability agenda.

**Promote Resilient Development**

Help communities build resilience to shocks, particularly from the impacts of climate change and emergencies, and encourage multi-hazard risk analyses and risk-informed programming approaches.

**Strengthen Accountability at All Levels**

Strengthen the accountability relationships between communities and users, policy-makers and service providers, with a focus on supporting communities to claim their rights. Help governments become more responsive to the voices of the poor, and to strengthen capacity for effective and responsive service delivery.

**Contribute Across SDGs**

Maximize benefits over a child’s life-course through contributions in the UNICEF outcome areas of nutrition, health, education and child protection – as well as other SDG priority areas.

**Integrate Humanitarian and Development Programming**

Achieve greater integration of humanitarian and development WASH programming to improve the effectiveness of humanitarian response, the long-term sustainability of national WASH systems and of community resilience to disruptions.

**Strengthen National Systems**

Invest in systems-building and develop national capacity on a priority basis to help all stakeholders contribute effectively towards the goal of sustainable WASH services at scale. Enhance government leadership to help ensure inclusive stakeholder collaboration, including from women and women’s groups.
WASH Contributions to UNICEF’s Key Outcomes for Children, Across the Life Course

**Maternal and Neonatal**
- Reduced maternal disease and death
- Reduced neonatal disease and death
- Protection from violence
- Increased dignity

**Early Childhood Development**
- Reduced child disease and death
- Reduced under-nutrition
- Increased dignity

**Older Children**
- Reduced child disease and death
- Reduced under-nutrition
- Increased school attendance
- Protection from violence
- Increased dignity

**Meeting the Challenge of the SDGs**

Programming designs will address the new WASH SDG agenda, which encompasses not only the ambitious new targets for universal access to safe drinking water and for equitable sanitation and hygiene, but also demands that all water and sanitation systems be “safely managed”. For UNICEF, universal and equitable access means prioritizing support for services to marginalized and vulnerable communities that are still unserved or underserved, to ensure the availability of safe water for children. Only by making sure these communities are targeted first will universal access be reached.

**Programming Approaches**

UNICEF will utilize six programming approaches to deliver lasting results for children. The selection and relative weight of each of these approaches within a particular country will be determined jointly with government partners through the UNICEF country programme development process.

**Strengthen Enabling Environments**

UNICEF will help develop strong national enabling environments for WASH at all levels to achieve an effective sector that delivers results for children through five areas of action: sector policy and strategy; institutional arrangements; budgeting and financing; planning, monitoring and review; and capacity development.

**Utilize Evidence to Promote Child Rights**

UNICEF will generate evidence on children and WASH in programme countries and advocate for children, particularly the most vulnerable, including children with disabilities.

**Leverage Sustainable Financial Resources**

UNICEF will help countries mobilize new funding sources and develop new financing mechanisms to deliver results for children at scale, taking into account the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable children.

**Build Sustainable Markets**

UNICEF will continue to create demand for WASH goods and services through government and civil society outreach efforts, media campaigns, and community-wide programmatic approaches; while partnering with the private sector to build local market capacity to meet the demand for quality services that are affordable to the poorest.

**Empower Communities**

UNICEF will help communities actively participate in WASH programme design and delivery, access information and obtain the necessary support and resources for sustainable and resilient services. We will establish and sustain healthy practices and demand for WASH by changing or reinforcing social norms.

**Deliver Services and Supplies**

UNICEF will support the direct delivery of services and supplies where governments and other partners are not able to meet requirements, for three specific purposes:
- to model evidence-based and innovative approaches and technologies on a large scale;
- during humanitarian response when children are most vulnerable;
- to reach the poorest and most marginalized groups.
Results Areas
UNICEF will focus on five results areas: water, sanitation, hygiene, WASH in institutions and WASH in emergencies. The scale, scope and exact nature of UNICEF engagement across these areas will vary from country to country based on context, specific needs and the capacity of key stakeholders.

Water
To meet the new SDG agenda, UNICEF will increase its support to governments to strengthen institutions and build systems to make services reliable over time and water safe to drink. UNICEF will contribute to an effective and accountable water sector, reliable regulation for oversight, performance monitoring and sound pricing while supporting water safety planning at the community level to manage risks from the water source to the point of use. Programming inputs will target three levels of intervention depending on country context: the water point level, the water service level and the water sector level. At each of these levels, UNICEF support will address access to drinking water, water safety and the sustainability of services and water sources.

Sanitation
UNICEF will continue efforts to eliminate open defecation, while also working with partners to achieve a basic level of access to sanitation for all, and move towards progressively achieving safely managed sanitation. UNICEF will define its support based on the specific context of sanitation in communities; stressing demand creation in communities where open defecation is still common; improved supply in communities where open defecation is low but there are high proportions of unimproved latrines, and financing in communities where basic sanitation coverage is high but some households (often the poorest and marginalized), have yet to be reached.

Hygiene
UNICEF will focus on influencing hygiene behaviour change in the four key areas of handwashing, menstrual hygiene management (MHM), safe water handling and the safe disposal of excreta. Delivering key messages at critical moments – such as to adolescent girls on MHM – will be essential to more effectively improving hygiene. Engagement across sectors and co-location of interventions relating to policy, implementation and monitoring is especially effective for promoting and reinforcing behaviour change; allowing governments to support the promotion of critical behaviours through a wide range of channels.

WASH in Institutions
UNICEF will work on improving access to WASH in schools, health care facilities (HCFs) and other institutions such as early childhood care centres, as part of the SDG 6 agenda of universal access and in support of SDG targets relating to health, education and gender equality. UNICEF will also use evidence-based advocacy and its programming capacity in health and education to achieve results at scale by institutionalising WASH issues within these sectors.

WASH in Emergencies
UNICEF will continue to help vulnerable populations gain and maintain access to WASH in emergencies, both through direct response and by leading efforts to coordinate the overall emergency response effort. Programmes will focus on children and women having access to water, sanitation and washing facilities that are culturally appropriate, secure, user-friendly, gender-appropriate, and designed to mitigate social and gender-based tensions in humanitarian situations.

Evidence-Based Programming and Monitoring
UNICEF will use its extensive field presence to learn and disseminate lessons to help improve its own programme designs – and that of its partners – through the UNICEF country programme development process, evaluations and day-to-day learning opportunities. Field presence will also be used to develop and apply new approaches and innovations at scale. Support to strengthen national monitoring and evaluation systems will emphasize the need to better identify marginalized groups, and assess the extent to which they are being reached.

Implementing The Strategy
To implement the new Strategy for children and contribute effectively to achieving the SDGs, UNICEF will build on its strengths and implement the following five strategic shifts:

- Make UNICEF programming the benchmark of best practice in supporting governments to deliver results for children;
- Achieve scale and transformational change by putting in place a theory of change for our work on improving enabling environments and monitoring progress against this;
- Working across sectors and outcome areas to achieve results for children;
- Reinforcing our leadership role in coordinating and responding to emergencies;
- Managing the evidence, knowledge and experience gained from programming across over 100 countries and making it available to governments and other partners.