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Technical Brief 4

Gender Equality and Female Empowerment in WASH

USAID Water and Development

TECHNICAL SERIES

INTRODUCTION

Programs that support women's access to sustainable water and sanitation services enable them to enjoy better health, pursue their education, participate more fully in the economy, build their social capital, increase their dignity, and reach their full potential. When women and girls are empowered, they build a better world—one with greater economic opportunities and stability for all. Recent studies have shown that programs that include women in the early stages of development tend to have a long-term sustainable impact on water and sanitation service delivery.¹ This is indicative of the potential for women to be more than beneficiaries of water and sanitation programming; they are also change agents, leaders, and professional members of the water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) workforce.

This technical brief is a tool to support Mission WASH leads, gender advisors, and implementing partners in designing strategies, projects, and activities that both improve women's and girls' empowerment and achieve the United States Agency for International Development's (USAID) water security, sanitation, and hygiene development objectives.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **Activities should account for women and girls as more than beneficiaries of water and sanitation services.** They are consumers, customers, influencers, professionals, household deciders, and keepers of traditional knowledge and solutions. Water and sanitation activities that empower women to be change agents have multiple benefits.
- **By working to change discriminatory legal, social, and cultural norms, activities can enable women and girls to become water and sanitation change agents.** By reducing barriers to women and girls receiving water and sanitation training, jobs, promotions, and leadership opportunities in their households, communities, and workplaces, they can become key actors in making water and sanitation services more sustainable. This requires both community-level and policy change.
- **Participatory approaches are key.** Gender-related barriers to WASH vary widely by geographic, religious, legal, and cultural context, and whether multiple layers of vulnerability—such as disability or extreme poverty—exist. Programs must take the time to understand the preferences, needs, and experiences of the women and girls and the specific barriers they face. The economic, health, educational, environmental, and social benefits to women's empowerment in the water and sanitation sector must be a priority for all.

¹ Gross, B., van Wijk, C. and Mukherjee, N. (2000). Linking Sustainability with Demand, Gender and Poverty: A Study in Community-Managed Water Supply Projects in 15 Countries. Water and Sanitation Program, Delft.

BACKGROUND

Globally, women and girls spend 200 million hours every day collecting water.² This responsibility contributes to significant time poverty among many of the world's poorest women and girls, preventing them from going to work or school, from starting or growing businesses, and from engaging in social activities. However, WASH activities provide many opportunities to contribute to women's economic empowerment. Simply by freeing up their time by providing a safe and sustainable source of water in or very near home, women may be able to enter the formal or informal workforce for the first time. Increasing science, technology, and engineering educational opportunities for youth and adult women and working with water and sanitation service authorities and providers to create female-friendly workplaces, contributes both to a more professional WASH sector and to women's economic opportunity. Financial literacy, business, access to finance, and vocational training can enable women to start or grow WASH-related social enterprises or small and medium enterprises (SME).

For adolescent girls and female teachers,³ improved WASH in schools is critical. Providing latrines in schools, including facilities for menstrual hygiene management (MHM), improves the overall learning environment and may improve girls' enrollment, attendance, and success at school.^{4,5} Failing to provide for the sanitation needs of women and girls in schools ultimately risks excluding half of the potential workforce.

The impacts of WASH on public health have particular implications for women of reproductive age. Without water and sanitation infrastructure, hygiene supplies, and consistent hygiene and waste management behaviors in health facilities, women and children of all ages are at risk of healthcare-acquired infections, such as sepsis, a leading cause of child and maternal mortality worldwide. Without WASH facilities, in some cases pregnant women may be forced to carry water to maternity wards in order to ensure a clean birthing environment. Most health care workers are women, who face disproportionate risks from poor infection prevention and control due to a lack of access to WASH.⁶

Women's roles and expertise are equally important in natural resource management issues such as watershed management. Women and girls are not always involved in community response or in setting government policy on environmental concerns. Particularly in indigenous communities, women often hold important traditional knowledge about how best to manage and use both water and land resources, making them valuable change agents; yet policies, customary law, and programs often do not effectively build on this context-specific expertise by involving women in design, implementation and monitoring and building their capacity to participate and engage in decision-making.⁷ Where conflict over water resources is a risk, women's participation in water resources management may contribute to peace processes.⁸

Please refer to the Key Definitions section on pages 10 and 11 of terms used throughout this document.

² UNICEF (2016) [Collecting water is often a colossal waste of time for women and girls](#).

³ Blagborough, V., (Ed.). (2001). *Looking Back: The long-term impacts of water and sanitation projects*. WaterAid, London.

⁴ van Wijk, C.A. (2004). Scaling up community-managed water and sanitation in India. In: C.A. van Wijk & M.P. van Dijk, eds. *The sector reformed: Institutional challenges in the water and sanitation sector in India*, New Delhi, Manohar

⁵ Adukia, A. (2017). [Sanitation and education](#). *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics*, 9(2), 23-59.

⁶ World Health Organization. (2019). [Delivered By Women, Led By Men: A Gender And Equity Analysis Of The Global Health And Social Workforce](#). Human Resources for Health Observer Series No. 24.

⁷ United Nations Development Program. (2006). [Resource Guide: Mainstreaming Gender in Water Management](#).

⁸ World Resources Institute. (2018). [Women Are the Secret Weapon for Better Water Management](#).

WOMEN AND WASH PROGRAMMING AND AGENCY PRIORITIES

The empowerment of women and girls is a core operating principle for USAID's water and sanitation programming. From U.S. law to Agency policy, the two are linked in efforts to achieve both water and sanitation objectives and gender objectives:

- The authorizing legislation for water and sanitation programming, the [Senator Paul Simon Water for the World Act of 2014](#), requires that USAID's WASH programming be prioritized based on the potential to make significant improvements to the health and educational opportunities available to women and girls, among other criteria.
- The USAID Water and Development Plan, in furtherance of the [United States Global Water Strategy](#) called for in the Act, includes commitments to support gender-sensitive approaches to empower women in the development and implementation of water-related programs.
- The [Journey to Self-Reliance \(J2SR\)](#), the [Private Sector Engagement Policy](#), and the [Women's Entrepreneurship and Economic Empowerment Act \(WEEE Act\)](#), highlight the importance of water and sanitation activities that give women and girls enhanced opportunities to access training, employment, and finance, and those that seek to improve the enabling environment for women's and girls' empowerment by removing legal, social, and regulatory barriers unique to their role in the water and sanitation sectors.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR WASH PROGRAMMING

Project and activity designs are always highly dependent on context. It is important to incorporate women's and girls' needs, preferences, expectations, and barriers related to water and sanitation at the outset. This often requires the inclusion of female staff in implementing formative research, designing interventions, and monitoring.

Below are priority considerations for women's and girls' activities under each of the four Development Results under USAID's Water and Development Plan.

DEVELOPMENT RESULT I: STRENGTHENING SECTOR GOVERNANCE AND FINANCE

Women are active in the management of water and as users of the resource. However, women often lack the ability to exercise control, authority, and voice or the ability to influence decision-making. Women tend to be underrepresented in water governance processes in local, national, and transboundary settings. In addition, women often lack income, control over household resources, and access to credit, despite their high rate of loan repayment.^{9,10} Women-owned SMEs are less likely than male-owned SMEs to get financing and often pay higher interest rates.^{11,12} Collectively, these gender-discriminatory trends are barriers to USAID's ability to fully achieve its goal of strengthening local and national water and sanitation institutions, policy, and financing, which are critical for ensuring sustainability and enabling countries to transition away from reliance on foreign assistance. More information about Agency efforts in support of Development Result I is available on GlobalWaters.org.

Illustrative Development Result I Activities:

Two primary categories of women's empowerment activities may be considered in service to Development Result I (this list is not exhaustive):

⁹ United Nations Statistics, as cited in United Nations, [The World's Women 2015](#).

¹⁰ D'Espallier, et al. (2011). Women and Repayment in Microfinance: A Global Analysis. In *World Development* 39(5):758-772.

¹¹ DGlobal Partnership for Financial Inclusion and International Finance Corporation. (2011). [Strengthening Access to Finance for Women-Owned SMEs in Developing Countries](#).

¹² D'Espallier, et al. (2011). Women and Repayment in Microfinance: A Global Analysis. In *World Development* 39(5):758-772.

1. Address gaps and mitigate barriers to women's equality in national and local government WASH policies.
2. Address the gender financial inclusion gap in order to enable women entrepreneurs to grow WASH businesses.

Address gaps and mitigate barriers to women's equality in national and local government WASH policies.

- Conduct research to understand the full scope of legal, policy, or regulatory barriers that result in unequal access to water and sanitation between women, men, boys, and girls.
- Work with national governments to resolve policy-related barriers to women's and girls' access to water and sanitation processes and services.
- Support social mobilization to increase the participation of women and girls in building accountability for inclusive water and sanitation policies.
- Elevate women's voices in policy-making discussions by supporting women's organizations and facilitating other types of citizen action-centered on women's needs and experiences with water and sanitation.
- Provide technical support to governments seeking to improve their regulatory regimes or enforcement of laws, policies, standards, and regulations that contribute to more equal access to water and sanitation.

Enable female water and sanitation entrepreneurs to secure the financing they need.

- Support civil society and other stakeholders to address the root causes of the gender gap in financial inclusion, such as by removing legal and regulatory barriers on women's ability to open bank accounts and access credit.
- Provide financial literacy and business development services to female entrepreneurs.
- Identify and address supply chain issues in the production and distribution of menstrual hygiene supplies and other WASH related products of female-led social enterprises and SMEs.
- Facilitate access to microfinance for women-owned WASH enterprises.

Activity Example: Women + Water Alliance, India (2017-2022)

The Women + Water Alliance is a partnership between USAID and Gap, Inc., committed to improving and sustaining the health and well-being of women and communities touched by the apparel industry in India. The Alliance focuses on the pivotal role of women in society, and their unique needs, while engaging both men and women. To help advance women's self-efficacy, approximately 75,000 rural women in India are currently enrolled in Gap Inc.'s women's program, Personal Advancement & Career Enhancement (P.A.C.E.), which teaches life skills, including financial literacy and WASH behaviors, as well as communication and other leadership skills. As a result, women now have a stronger voice in decision-making within the family and community and are now taking collective action and proactively reaching out to government stakeholders to help address their WASH-related issues. Additionally, to help accelerate women's access to sustainable WASH services and unlock WASH financing for households, Alliance partner [water.org](https://www.water.org) contributed to the release of a nationwide circular from the Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation to district administrations, promoting water and sanitation lending. In three years, over \$2.4 million in loans supporting over 50,000 people have been disbursed by partner financial institutions.

DEVELOPMENT RESULT 2: INCREASE SUSTAINABLE ACCESS AND USE OF SANITATION AND THE PRACTICE OF KEY HYGIENE BEHAVIORS

USAID's efforts to improve sanitation access and hygiene behaviors are critical to improving health and nutrition; reducing time poverty; mitigating vulnerability to gender-based violence;¹³ providing privacy and dignity; reducing ground and surface water pollution; and potentially increasing girls' school attendance and retention.¹⁴ More information about Agency efforts in support of Development Result 2 is available on [GlobalWaters.org](https://www.globalwaters.org), including guidance on how to increase access to sanitation in [USAID's Rural Sanitation Technical Brief](#). USAID's [Toolkit for Integrating GBV Prevention and Response into USAID Energy and Infrastructure Projects](#) provides guidance on why and how to incorporate gender-based violence considerations and approaches into a range of activities, including those designed to advance water and sanitation access.

Efforts to improve women's and girls' access to sanitation should prioritize basic and safely managed sanitation that is female friendly.¹⁵ Female-friendly toilets are those that meet international standards according to the [Joint Monitoring Programme on Water Supply and Sanitation](#), and whose designs meet biological and cultural needs that are specific to women: safety and privacy, accessibility, affordable and available when needed, well maintained and managed, with waste bins on premises and water nearby, and space to care for children, the elderly, and menstrual hygiene.¹⁶ Social and cultural norms around sanitation and hygiene, such as menstruation taboos, must also be considered.

Illustrative Development Result 2 Activities:

Two primary categories of women's empowerment activities may be considered in service to Development Result 2 (this list is not exhaustive):

1. Promote female-friendly basic and safely managed sanitation to achieve area-wide sanitation goals, especially through increased women's participation and support for more inclusive governance.
2. Promote menstrual hygiene management, including by enhancing menstruation education and addressing the enabling environment, to reduce barriers to women's and girls' equal participation in society and amplify women's dignity and agency.

Promote basic and safely managed sanitation that is female-friendly to achieve area-wide sanitation.

- For sanitation outside the household, engage all stakeholders for an area-wide assessment of public, communal, and institutional toilets, to assess whether they meet the women's and girls' needs.
- Support development of a multi-stakeholder plan of action for improving public or communal sanitation found to be lacking. WASH safety audits of existing infrastructure¹⁷ may be useful.
- Facilitate participatory processes to understand the motivation, experiences, and perspectives of women and girls in terms of adopting sanitation services, including their perceptions and experiences related to safety and dignity. Ensure that women's preferences are used to inform product design and sanitation marketing approaches.
- Map and analyze the gaps in provision of basic sanitation and the extent to which existing basic sanitation access meets female-friendly requirements.
- Support national and local governments to incorporate female-friendly basic and safely managed sanitation requirements in laws, policies, regulations, and standards and to establish enforcement mechanisms.

¹³ M. Sommer et al. (2014) [Violence, gender and WASH: spurring action on a complex, under-documented and sensitive topic](#). Environment and Urbanization Vol 27, Issue 1.

¹⁴ Adukia, A. (2017). [Sanitation and education](#). American Economic Journal: Applied Economics, 9(2), 23-59.

¹⁵ Schmitt, Margaret L.; Clatworthy, David; Ogello, Tom; Sommer, Marni. (2018). "Making the Case for a Female-Friendly Toilet." Water 10, no. 9: 1193.

¹⁶ WaterAid, WSUP, and UNICEF (2018). [Female-Friendly Public and Community Toilets: a guide for planners and decision-makers](#).

¹⁷ See for example UNICEF Nigeria (2020). [WASH Safety Audit Observation Checklist](#) and Loughborough University and WaterAid (2013) [Accessibility and Safety Audits toolkit](#).

- Ensure that WASH providers understand how their work can help mitigate risk of gender-based violence and address safety elements of female-friendly basic and safely managed sanitation.
- Encourage female entrepreneurs to expand their businesses to develop and/or carry high-quality, low-cost products and services that meet the needs of women and girls.¹⁸

Activity Example: Integrated Emergency WASH Response and Prevention of Gender-Based Violence (GBV), South Sudan (2014-2021)

Recognizing high rates of GBV in South Sudan and the links between GBV and lack of access to safe, private latrines, this activity not only aims to provide first-time and improved access to sanitation, but to mainstream best practices for GBV prevention into WASH programs. The activity delivers social and behavior change training and messages on both hygiene and gender-based violence prevention; trains WASH providers in GBV prevention and response; and conducts WASH safety audits to determine ways to improve protection for women and adolescent girls. This activity complements USAID/South Sudan's Emergency Education Program through hygiene and menstrual hygiene promotion, as well as distribution of MHM kits, that are linked to keeping girls in school. The activity aims in particular to increase a feeling of safety when women and girls go about their daily activities, such as water collection and using the latrine.

Promote MHM, including by enhancing menstruation education and addressing the enabling environment, to reduce barriers to women's and girls' equal participation in society and amplify women's dignity and agency.

- Support relevant government ministries in developing menstruation education materials for schools and workplaces. Ensure that males and females receive the same information.
- Research consumer preferences for menstrual hygiene products and identify barriers faced by menstruators in acquiring, using, and safely disposing of their preferred products.¹⁹
- Work to reduce taxes and tariffs on the full range of menstrual hygiene products.
- Support menstrual hygiene entrepreneurs and SMEs to improve financial and operational management, access materials, and understand local market preferences and demand.
- Perform research social, cultural, and religious taboos around menstruation and develop social and behavior change communications campaigns to create positive social norms.
- Collaborate with health programs targeting very-young adolescents and adolescents (both in school and out of school) to promote positive social and gender norms around menstruation.

Activity Example: USAID/Ghana's WASH for Health (2015-2020)

In FY 2018, WASH for Health piloted a new program in cooperation with Be Girl, a U.S. company that manufactures sustainable and reusable menstrual hygiene products. More than 1,000 girls were recruited to participate in the pilot, receiving Be Girl's "period party" and targeted menstruation education for girls, boys, and parents. At the end of the pilot, only 15 percent of girls reported feeling negatively about their periods, down from 54 percent at the start of the pilot; while 87 percent of boys reported being comfortable around menstruating girls, up from 18 percent.

¹⁸ See for example WaterAid. *Violence, gender, and WASH toolkit*.

¹⁹ See UNICEF. (2019). *Guide to Menstrual Hygiene Materials* and *Guidance on Menstrual Health and Hygiene*.

DEVELOPMENT RESULT 3: INCREASE SUSTAINABLE ACCESS TO SAFE DRINKING WATER

USAID aims to address the critical barriers to achieving reliable and sustainable access to safe drinking water by improving service provider reliability, cost-recovery, maintenance, and quality. Access levels are lowest in rural areas, and this has been the traditional focus of USAID investments. While advancing rural water access will remain a key component of programming moving forward, the rapid pace of urbanization requires increasing attention on urban services and utilities, particularly in dense informal settlements and secondary cities. For more information about Agency efforts in support of Development Result 3, see [GlobalWaters.org](https://www.usaid.gov/globalwaters).

Women have an important role to play as water service providers and customers. However women and girls are often not included or fully empowered in terms of voice and agency in terms of planning and decision-making processes. As managers at the household level, women also often have a higher stake in the improvement of water services and in sustaining services.²⁰

Illustrative Development Result 3 Activities:

The primary category of women's empowerment activities in service to Development Result 3 (this list is not exhaustive) is to support water service providers to be more inclusive.

Support water service providers to be more inclusive and enable women to enter these professions.

- Support training and mentoring programs, through vocational or academic institutions and professional associations, that target female students and adults.
- Facilitate twinning arrangements that connect utilities to transfer expertise and share best practices for promoting women's leadership in the WASH sector.
- Conduct social and behavior change communications activities that seek to change gender norms and policy barriers around acceptable professions or courses of study for females.
- Work with rural water operators and service providers to train, recruit, hire, retain, and promote women
- Support rural women to access credit and banking services needed to start their own water maintenance enterprises.
- Introduce supportive policies and facilities (e.g., sanitation facilities, flexible reporting hours) for women employed at water service providers to have a positive impact on the participation of women in the workforce.

Activity Example: Kenya Integrated Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (KIWASH) (2015-2020)

KIWASH designed and delivered training to water service providers (WSP) on gender equality mainstreaming and development of gender action plans and policies as part of its overall work on improving WSP capacity and corporate governance. The trainings help staff understand that gender and social integration translates to economic viability of the company. During the training, participants spend time identifying key gender issues and concerns in their specific institutions. They make commitments to address issues raised by allocating budgets to train women to take up technical jobs, address sexual harassment, procure appropriate work attire for both men and women, develop and refine gender-appropriate policies for recruitment, and broader human relations management, among others. KIWASH worked with each utility to develop Gender Equity Action Plans, which established improvement goals, training on gender equality awareness, and policies and recruitment strategies to attract female leaders and employees. Several of these utilities have now drafted or implemented new recruitment policies that stipulate gender ratios.

²⁰ UNICEF. (2013). *WASH and Women*.

DEVELOPMENT RESULT 4: IMPROVE MANAGEMENT OF WATER RESOURCES

USAID seeks to help partner countries better cope with rising pressures on freshwater resources, including drinking water supplies. To learn more about Agency efforts in support of Development Result 4, go to GlobalWaters.org.

A community's risk of water stress depends not only on the availability and demand for freshwater, but also on its ability to govern and manage water resources fairly to be resilient in the face of variability or scarcity in water resources. UNDP research on 44 water projects across Asia and Africa shows that when both men and women engage in shaping water policies and institutions, communities use water services more and sustain them for longer;²¹ while a World Bank study of 121 rural water supply projects found strong associations between women's involvement and increased project effectiveness.²² Research also shows that women share water more equitably than men do, especially in times of scarcity.²³

Activity Example: Natural Infrastructure for Water Security Activity (NIWS), Peru (2017-2021)

With support from the Women's Global Development and Prosperity Initiative, NIWS is working to increase women's participation and empowerment in the governance and management of water resources. The NIWS activity works to address water shortages in Peru through harnessing and supporting nature's ability to provide clean water. NIWS is supporting the government of Peru to protect and enhance natural infrastructure through a Payment for Ecosystem Services scheme that targets improvements in forest and wetland management, farming practices, and other practices that work with nature to improve water quality and quantity. NIWS is working to ensure that women are key participants and leaders in shaping investments in natural infrastructure. Specifically, NIWS is working to highlight the need for increased female participation in Peruvian water governance, supporting a women's leadership academy that includes both higher education and community components, and developing evidence and best practices for gender inclusion in water resource activities and businesses. NIWS is also developing guidance on best practices for gender inclusion in linking natural infrastructure investments and productive activities.

Illustrative Development Result 4 Activities:

- Convene and support multi-stakeholder water user groups for collaborative water resource planning and management.
- Support social mobilization aimed at lifting barriers to women's participation in water resource planning, management, and governance.
- Address land and water tenure rights and the ability of women to own property to enable their ability to make decisions regarding the sustainable use of water resources.
- Support participatory gender training for community and watershed management groups.
- Mentor and train women to assume leadership roles in planning and management of water resources.

²¹ World Bank Water and Sanitation Program. (2001). *Linking Sustainability with Demand, Gender and Poverty*.

²² Narayan, Deepa. (1995). *The contribution of people's participation: evidence from 121 rural water supply projects*. Environmentally Sustainable Development occasional paper series; no. 1. Washington, DC: World Bank.

²³ Els Lecoutere, Ben D'Exelle & Bjorn Van Campenhout. (2015). *Sharing Common Resources in Patriarchal and Status-Based Societies: Evidence from Tanzania*. *Feminist Economics*, 21:3, 142-167.

Measuring, monitoring, and evaluating the interconnectedness of sustainable water and sanitation services and gender-related outcomes is vital. For example, evaluations could consider how access to WASH helps reduce GBV or increases girls' attendance in schools; how projects engage women in service provision; and what social norms create barriers to successful women and WASH programming. It is important to involve female enumerators and researchers wherever possible, particularly in Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning activities focused on the experiences and outcomes of women and girls.

MEASURING GENDER IMPACTS OF WASH PROJECTS

Per [ADS 205](#), indicators that accurately help to monitor progress in terms of gender equality and female empowerment need to be included in projects and activities, and **all person-level indicators must be disaggregated by sex**. This requirement was highlighted in a 2015 [Government Accountability Office report](#) on USAID's water and sanitation assistance, which, coupled with other development policies mentioned above, makes it all the more critical that outcomes for women and girls are adequately measured for all WASH activities.

Custom indicators, both quantitative and qualitative, on relevant elements of women's empowerment should be developed in a participatory manner, involving all stakeholders, where possible, and both quantitative and qualitative measures taken into account. Some illustrative custom indicators are:

- Percent of women reporting that reduced time spent collecting water resulted in the opportunity to engage in productive labor
- Number of laws or policies addressing gender equality (e.g., MHM, GBV, and WASH, basic and safely managed sanitation that is female-friendly, workforce equality) enhanced, drafted, approved, or implemented at national, district, municipal or utility level as a result of U.S. Government (USG) support (aligned with GNDR-1)
- Percent of females who report increased self-efficacy at the conclusion of USG-supported training/programming [GNDR-3]
- Number of safety audits conducted for WASH facilities
- Percent of women/girls who were able to change their menstrual materials when they wanted to while at (home/school/elsewhere)
- Number of people (sex disaggregated) with increased knowledge of sanitation and hygiene/MHM approaches through exposure to USG-supported events, communications materials, and products
- Number of women or women's groups participating in stakeholder consultations on water resource allocation plans and management

SELECTED RESOURCES

1. The World Bank (2016). *Toolkit for Mainstreaming Gender into Water Operations*.
2. Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and FSG. (2019). *Gender and the Sanitation Value Chain: A Review of the Evidence*.
3. Loughborough University et al. (2014). *Violence, Gender and WASH Practitioner's Toolkit*.
4. WaterAid. (2012). *Menstrual Hygiene Matters: A Resource for Improving Menstrual Hygiene Around the World*.
5. UNESCO. (2019). *World Water Assessment Program 2019 Toolkit on Sex-Disaggregated Water Data*.
6. UNICEF (2017). *Gender-Responsive Water, Sanitation and Hygiene: Key elements for effective WASH programming*.

KEY DEFINITIONS

Many concepts in this document and in the broader field of gender equality and women's empowerment are complex, and successful activities depend upon having a nuanced understanding of the dynamics of gender. The terms below represent a subset of the many definitions relevant to the intersections of women, WASH, and water resources management. While these have been selected as the priority for anyone new to working on women and WASH, there are many additional terms and concepts that can help deepen your engagement.

Gender

Socially constructed roles and relations between men and women. It encompasses the economic, political, and socio-cultural attributes, constraints, and opportunities associated with being male or female (ADS 201)

Gender Analysis

A social science tool to gather and analyze information to identify and understand gender differences and social relations between males and females that exist in households, communities, and countries. It helps identify and understand the different roles, division of labor, resources, constraints, opportunities, and interest of men and women in a specific context—country, geography, cultural, institutional, economic, etc. (ADS 205)

Gender Assessment

Involves carrying out a review, from a gender perspective, of an organization's programs and its ability to monitor and respond to gender issues in both technical programming and institutional policies and practices. A gender assessment is a very flexible tool and may also include a gender analysis at the country level (**Gender and the ADS**).

Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

Violence that is directed at an individual based on his or her biological sex, gender identity, or perceived adherence to socially defined norms of masculinity and femininity. It includes physical, sexual, and psychological abuse; threats; coercion; arbitrary deprivation of liberty; and economic deprivation, whether occurring in public or private life. GBV takes on many forms and can occur throughout the life cycle. Types of gender-based violence can include female infanticide; child sexual abuse; sex trafficking and forced labor; sexual coercion and abuse; neglect; domestic violence; elder abuse; and harmful traditional practices such as early and forced marriage, "honor" killings, and female genital mutilation/cutting.²⁴

²⁴ USAID. 2014. *Toolkit for Integrating GBV Prevention and Response into Economic Growth Projects*.

Gender Equality

Concerns women and men, and it involves working with men and boys, women, and girls to bring about changes in attitudes, behaviors, roles, and responsibilities at home, in the workplace, and in the community. Genuine equality means more than parity in numbers or laws on the books; it means expanding freedoms and improving the overall quality of life so that equality is achieved without sacrificing gains for males or females.²⁵

Female Empowerment

Achieved when women and girls acquire the power to act freely, exercise their rights, and fulfill their potential as full and equal members of society. While empowerment often comes from within and individuals empower themselves, cultures, societies, and institutions create conditions that facilitate or undermine the possibilities for empowerment.

Women's Economic Empowerment

The capacity of women and men to participate in, contribute to and benefit from growth processes in ways that recognize the value of their contributions, respect their dignity and make it possible to negotiate a fairer distribution of the benefits of growth. Economic empowerment increases women's access to economic resources and opportunities including jobs, financial services, property, and other productive assets, skills development, and market information.

Enabling Environment

Laws, policies, practices, and norms that can inhibit or promote women's, men's, girls', and boys' potential to fully and equally participate in and benefit from social, economic, and other sectors of society.

Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM)

Women and adolescent girls accessing and using a clean, comfortable, and reliable menstrual management material to absorb or collect menstrual blood, having access to private spaces for bathing, urination and defecation while menstruating, and for cleaning, drying, changing, storing, and disposing of materials, using easily available soap and water for washing the body and cleaning materials, clothing, and bedding as required, having access to private, safe, and separate facilities to dispose of used menstrual management materials, and receiving sufficient social support and pain management resources. They understand the basic facts linked to the menstrual cycle and how to manage it comfortably in an enabling sociocultural environment, with dignity and without discomfort, fear, worry, or unwanted disclosure of menstrual status.²⁶ In some contexts, the term Menstrual Health and Hygiene (MHH) may also be used.

Female-Friendly Toilet

Toilets that are safe, private, accessible, affordable and well managed, cater for menstrual hygiene management and meet the needs of male and female caregivers.^{27, 28}

²⁵ USAID 2012. [USAID Policy on Gender Equality and Female Empowerment](#).

²⁶ MacRae, E.R., Clasen, T., Dasmohapatra, M., Caruso, B.A. (2019) 'It's like a burden on the head': Redefining adequate menstrual hygiene management throughout women's varied life stages in Odisha, India. *PLoS ONE* 14(8): e0220114.

²⁷ WaterAid 2018.

²⁸ USAID monitors basic and safely managed access to sanitation and requires sex-disaggregated data.