

## GENDER EQUALITY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION (GESI) IN WASH



## About World Vision

World Vision is a Christian humanitarian organization dedicated to working with children, families, and their communities worldwide to reach their full potential by tackling the causes of poverty and injustice. World Vision serves all people, regardless of religion, race, ethnicity, or gender. Established in 1950, World Vision's global partnership operates in nearly 100 countries, including implementation countries, country offices focused on fundraising and technical support, and regional and global teams providing quality assurance. More than 34,000 staff members—95% of whom work in their own countries—work in health; education; livelihoods; food security; child protection; economic empowerment; and water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) programming.

## Global WASH program overview

Over the past 37 years, World Vision's work in the WASH sector has grown exponentially. Most recently, between 2011 and 2021 our WASH programming grew by over 500%, enabling us now to directly impact more than 3 million people each year with access to clean water—which is 6.5 times more than in 2011. With more than 1,200 technical WASH staff members guiding our work in 42 countries, World Vision has emerged a leader in its global commitment to accelerate universal and equitable access to WASH services under United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 6.

During the last seven years (2016 to 2022), World Vision reached nearly 25.5 million people with clean water, 18.4 million with improved sanitation, and 31.7 million with hygiene promotion. Our WASH programming is supported by an annual global WASH investment of \$164 million (2022). Driven by the vision of transformative WASH for child well-being, World Vision's strategic direction is laid out in our [Global WASH Business Plan](#), which outlines our intent to increase impact across 42 priority countries in six regions, with an emphasis on reaching the world's most vulnerable.

## Gender Equality and Social Inclusion

Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) is essential to overcome barriers that prevent the most vulnerable children and adults from achieving their full potential. Gender equality affords women and girls, men and boys, equal enjoyment of human rights, socially valued goods, opportunities, and resources. Social inclusion addresses inequality and/or exclusion of vulnerable populations by improving participation in society and enhancing opportunities, access to resources, voice, and respect for human rights.

World Vision is accelerating access to equitable WASH services for all by deepening our focus on the most vulnerable, especially in fragile contexts. We have long been committed to GESI within the WASH sector, recognizing the unique burdens that poor WASH services place on women, girls, and marginalized groups such as the elderly, indigenous groups, persons living with disabilities (PLWDs), and people living in fragile contexts. Inadequate WASH services increase their risk of injury, illness, harassment, and violence, among other issues.

### THE FACTS

- » **Women and girls are responsible for water collection in 8 out of 10 households with water off premises (UN Women).**
- » **An estimated 1.3 billion people (or 1 in 6 people) experience significant disability (WHO).**
- » **Children with disabilities report trying to reduce their consumption of water to minimize the need to go to the toilet, with potentially harmful implications (UNICEF).**
- » **It is estimated that climate change will force over 140 million people to migrate within their countries by 2050 (World Bank), which further drives the exclusion of women, youth, persons with disabilities, indigenous groups, and other marginalized groups.**
- » **Up to 19% of women and girls globally do not use any form of menstrual hygiene material, and even more use paper or underwear alone ([washdata.org](http://washdata.org)).**

**Transformative WASH services are safe and accessible, plentiful, proven, and sustained.**

**They create lasting changes in communities that allow children and families to flourish.**

## GENDER EQUALITY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION (GESI) IN WASH

World Vision's past work has accommodated the needs of vulnerable groups, specifically in infrastructure design. Moving beyond just access, providing equitable and inclusive WASH services empowers meaningful participation of marginalized groups by removing barriers, enabling decision-making and personal agency, and reinforcing positive and equitable social norms. Our vision is to provide transformative WASH services that appropriately respond to and reflect the choices and desires of the most vulnerable.

Achieving transformation in GESI requires creating enabling environments that allow everyone to engage in and benefit equally from WASH service delivery at individual, household, community, and societal levels so that all people can enjoy a full life.



## World Vision's distinctives

Some of World Vision's distinctives that enable us to achieve equitable and inclusive WASH services follow.

- **Organizational commitment:** World Vision's mission and the Sustainable Development Goals will not be met if we exclude the most vulnerable. Therefore, equitable and inclusive WASH programming is essential to achieving our goals. World Vision is committed to WASH programming that is informed by GESI approaches to ensure excluded groups participate in decision-making structures and benefit equitably from WASH-related development interventions.
- **Participatory design:** Since WASH activities are often some of our first interventions in a community, we seek

## STRONG WOMEN STRONG WORLD™

Access to WASH services and economic empowerment opportunities are crucial for poverty reduction and are foundational to achieve gender equality and empowerment for women and girls. Integrating these activities can help ensure women are equipped for success.

Through the three-year Strong Women, Strong World™ (SWSW) program, World Vision is designing, implementing, and measuring the impact of WASH and economic empowerment interventions to remove barriers and build a supportive foundation so that women and girls can shine. SWSW spans four countries—Guatemala, Honduras, Kenya, and Zimbabwe. Implementation research with Emory University is helping capture learnings on the best approaches for the greatest transformative impact on women and girls, so successful approaches can be scaled across different regions and countries.

The first year of the project (2022) focused on building and training teams. Other initial achievements included:

- » **Eight community-based organizations in Honduras were trained on GESI principles** to promote a culture of peace and acceptance.
- » **In Kenya, 38 faith leaders** were trained on Channels of Hope Gender to help address and reframe harmful gender norms.
- » **In Guatemala**, three program areas established **community development plans** covering WASH, agriculture, and gender, with the participation of community leaders, faith leaders, and the Ministry of Health.
- » Across four program areas in **Zimbabwe, 12 school development committees** were selected to mobilize communities to collect construction materials for school WASH programs.

to set an equitable and inclusive tone by engaging with the community, listening, and developing participatory designs. In doing so, World Vision WASH programs seek to address key GESI challenges and barriers to inclusion experienced by communities where we work.

- **Inclusive programming:** World Vision prioritizes inclusion of women and other vulnerable groups in water management committees and leadership roles so that decisions made meet their specific and diverse needs. We work to ensure that all WASH infrastructure developed

## GENDER EQUALITY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION (GESI) IN WASH

meets the needs of women, girls, and others from marginalized or excluded groups, and that it is accessible for persons with disabilities.

- **Multisectoral approach:** Our work integrates WASH with gender equality and social inclusion, economic empowerment, and faith and development sectors to holistically affect change for the most vulnerable. While WASH is a key entry point, empowerment of marginalized groups is multifaceted and requires involvement of stakeholders across sectors.

### Integrated approaches

**Advocacy:** World Vision implements our social accountability model, **Citizen, Voice and Action (CVA)**, to engage women and other excluded groups in bottom-up advocacy and action to reduce inequality from local and national systems. As a result, from 2021 to 2022 **9,299 female group members** were trained and are active on WASH advocacy, accounting for **50% of total members**.

**Disability Inclusion:** Disability inclusion focuses on the ultimate removal of barriers—physical, environmental, attitudinal, and institutional. Physical barriers are addressed through adaptations to infrastructure, such as ramps or assistive devices for toileting or collecting water. The remaining barriers are addressed through community engagement, advocacy, and training. Disability inclusive WASH services at school help children with disabilities attend and stay in school. From 2017 to 2022, World Vision reached 4,964 schools with improved sanitation facilities accessible to children with limited mobility.

**Nurturing Care Groups (NCGs):** The NCG approach is a model where women chosen by groups of 10-15 neighboring households each meet with health promoters, and then relay messages back to their neighbors every two weeks. In general, NCGs have been used to promote behavior change in multisectoral contexts focused on WASH; maternal, newborn, and child health; nutrition; and livelihoods. An evaluation of a pilot conducted in January 2021 found that NCGs had a significant impact on routine behaviors such as increasing the availability of soap from 34% to 84% and **decreasing several measures of stigma related to menstrual health and hygiene by about 75%**.

**WASH Business Centers:** World Vision's WASH Business Centers are an example of Sanitation Marketing, where local entrepreneurs promote the benefits of sanitation and hygiene products, while also introducing new and innovative sanitation solutions. WASH Business Centers are one-stop centers for the production and sale of affordably priced WASH products and

### WASH UP! GIRL TALK FOR MENSTRUAL HEALTH

World Vision's program **WASH UP! Girl Talk**, developed in partnership with Sesame Workshop, educates both boys and girls about puberty and periods, techniques for menstrual hygiene management, and girls' empowerment. It builds on the foundational learnings of WASH UP!, a hygiene behavior change program focused on primary school-aged children. Girls and boys engage in education and activities that demystify periods and help keep girls in school—and on track for successful futures.

This program was first piloted in Zimbabwe in 2017 and has successfully reached more than 55,000 girls and boys in 150 schools. It will now expand to at least three new countries by the end of 2023.

An independent assessment of the program's impact by the global nonprofit Education Development Center demonstrated its initial success, finding it had a significant impact on all students' knowledge about puberty and periods, dispelled common myths about menstruation, and improved girls' practical knowledge about their cycles. Results include:

- » The average knowledge score about puberty rose from 58% to 81%.
- » The share of participating students who believed common myths about menstruation decreased by 30 to 45 percentage points.
- » Girls' knowledge of specific aspects of menstruation after Girl Talk lessons increased by 30 to 40 percentage points.



*Part of the Girl Talk curriculum teaches girls how to make reusable pads.*



GENDER EQUALITY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION (GESI) IN WASH

services. In many cases, these centers create a space for women to pursue economic activities and leadership roles. As a result, from 2021 to 2022 **3,591 women became active in the sale, maintenance, and construction of WASH products and facilities, with 36% of business group members being female.**

**Faith-based approaches:** World Vision uses faith-based approaches, including our Channels of Hope methodology and Empowered Worldview, to work with faith leaders from Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, and Hindu faiths to shift gender and social norms in their communities and take GESI-related actions to address inequality in their communities. From 2021 to 2022, a total of **4,628 female faith leaders** were trained to promote safe WASH practices, accounting for **23% of the total number of faith leaders** trained in WASH.

Beyond Access

World Vision’s WASH universal services coverage approach seeks to reach everyone where we work with safely-managed and dignified WASH services. This means that, from the outset, we make efforts to understand and identify who are the most vulnerable; how they currently experience their vulnerability in terms of WASH; the root causes of their vulnerabilities; and their needs, concerns, expectations and priorities—informing what WASH approaches should be used.

Our vision for transformative WASH goes beyond a traditional access-focused approach to ensure that we seek out, listen to, and heed the needs and desires of the most vulnerable. Meaningful participation of marginalized groups is key and requires engaging the entire community in a process of empowerment and the reinforcement of more equitable mindsets and social norms. World Vision’s WASH programs also build the foundation for empowerment by improving family health outcomes and decreasing the household labor burden for women and girls.

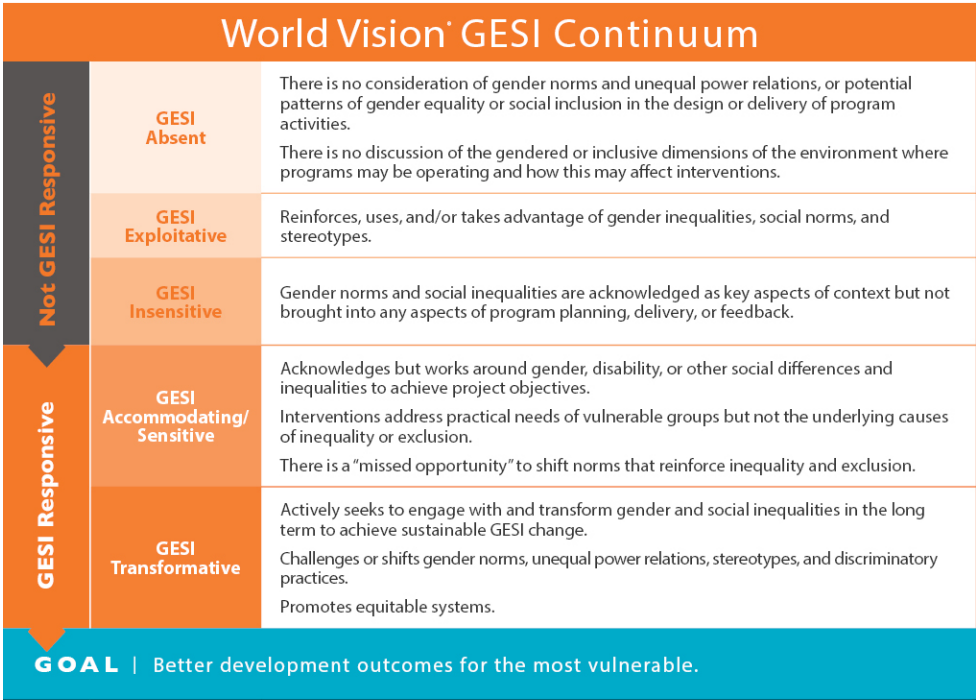
GESI Continuum

World Vision articulates our movement toward equitable and inclusive WASH services using our GESI continuum (see below). The GESI continuum describes the degree of GESI-responsiveness in any given project or program, including WASH. All World Vision programs aim to be in the realm of GESI-responsive, while increasing growth from GESI-accommodating toward GESI-transformative. GESI-accommodating programming acknowledges that disparities exist in the community that affect vulnerable groups, but programs do not actively work to address the root causes of those inequalities and exclusions.

A WASH project is GESI-transformative when it is:

- Structured to challenge harmful social norms and power imbalances to change the position of vulnerable groups
- Committed to ensuring protection, building relationships, and understanding intersectionality
- Addresses unintended consequences and potential harm
- Addresses the root causes of inequality and exclusion to achieve a lasting transformation at individual, household, community, and societal levels

Our goal is to apply an increasingly GESI-transformative approach in all World Vision WASH programs. When a GESI-transformative approach is applied, whole communities are more cohesive, resilient, and able to thrive, and no individual or group is excluded.



## GENDER EQUALITY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION (GESI) IN WASH

## GESI Domains

World Vision's GESI approach features five domains of change: 1) access, 2) participation, 3) decision-making, 4) systems, and 5) well-being.

**ACCESS** is the most straightforward point of connection with GESI, since a mainstay of World Vision's WASH programs is to provide access to safe WASH services for all. We work to ensure that all WASH infrastructure we provide meets the needs of women, girls, persons with disabilities, and others from marginalized or excluded groups.

**DECISION-MAKING:** World Vision's WASH program promotes equal and inclusive decision-making, for example, increasing representation of women, persons with disability, youth, etc., in decision-making and helping to amplify the voices of the marginalized to ensure their views are considered.

**PARTICIPATION:** Country-level WASH teams identify and address barriers that limit participation of vulnerable groups. This may include activities such as promoting participation of women and persons with disabilities on WASH committees, using meeting venues that are disability-accessible, providing childcare so women can participate in meetings, providing transport or reimbursement for those who cannot afford to travel to the venue, and adjusting meeting times so everyone can attend.

**SYSTEMS:** World Vision engages in advocacy for strong WASH policies, mobilizes communities to advocate for their own needs with governments, and trains faith leaders on WASH behavior change. These activities are intended to reinforce healthy WASH governance and social systems that support the needs of vulnerable groups.

**WELL-BEING:** The goal of World Vision's WASH Program is to provide high-quality, safe, and sustainable services that support the well-being of vulnerable groups. Besides protecting people from WASH-related infections and diseases, we promote an improvement in overall quality of life. For instance, access to safely managed WASH services can reduce the burden of daily tasks and incidents of violence for women. It can also influence cultural and societal norms, improving their role in the community.

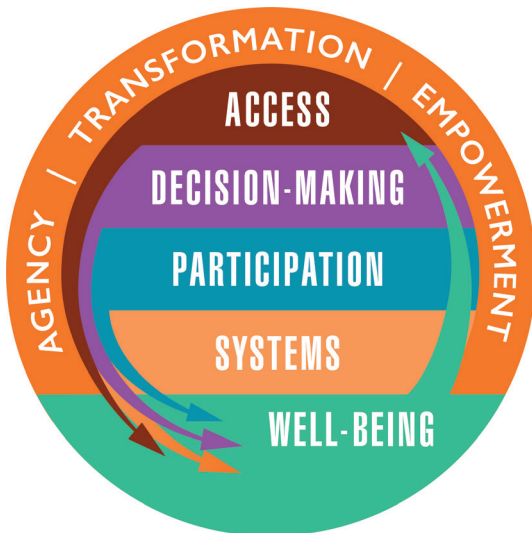
## Monitoring, Accountability, and Learning

World Vision has developed a [GESI and WASH Reference Guide](#) to compile evidence and support the programmatic integration of GESI-transformative approaches into all World Vision WASH programming. This guide includes program design, monitoring, and evaluation tools tailored to WASH, building on the [World Vision GESI Design, Monitoring, and Evaluation Toolkit](#).

World Vision partners with local and international universities to learn from our WASH implementation and enhance our impact. Partnerships with Emory University, the University of North Carolina, Stanford University, and Drexel University provide expertise in technical capacity building, program evaluation, operational research, statistical analysis, and data dissemination.

One example of this work, a Stanford University study on the equity effects of piped-water systems constructed by World Vision in Zambia, showed a strong impact on women and girls. Households that had access to a shared or individual yard tap showed an 80% decrease in average time spent collecting water. Overall, the study concluded that piped-water systems could "generate substantial increases in time savings, water consumption, and productive uses of water, disproportionately benefitting the well-being of women and girls."

World Vision has selected Emory University as our learning partner for the SWSW program. The Emory team has a strong background in research and learning around effective measurements for empowerment. Specifically, Emory University is advising on impact measurement and formative research. They are documenting promising practices to help refine an evidence-based approach focused on the empowerment of women and girls, and carrying out analysis and synthesis of learnings to support program quality and scale-up.



## GENDER EQUALITY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION (GESI) IN WASH

As part of World Vision's [WASH Research and Learning Agenda](#), our key GESI learning questions include:

1. How do we effectively measure increases in empowerment for GESI-representative groups caused by improvements in key WASH outcomes?
2. What are the impacts of GESI-transformative WASH services, particularly in communities and schools? How can combined impact of an integrated sector approach improve GESI outcomes?
3. What GESI-representative groups do our programs currently consider (especially people with disabilities and indigenous peoples)? How can we best enable our country offices to apply a GESI lens to their program design?
4. What GESI-related barriers exist within our own organization, both globally and within country offices, and how do we catalyze change internally and within the sector?

Finally, World Vision disaggregates its monitoring data by social characteristics such as sex, age, and disability status to track and analyze whether our programs are reaching and serving the most vulnerable.

**GESI-specific WASH access indicators and accomplishments across 43 countries (2020-2022) include:**

- **4,805** functional bathing or shower rooms with water available for women in a postnatal care areas built or subsidized by World Vision
- **2,442** education facilities with at least one basic handwashing facility, constructed or subsidized by World Vision, that meets the needs of people with limited mobility
- **2,210** education facilities with improved sanitation facilities, which are sex-separated, built or subsidized by World Vision, with at least one toilet for every 25 girls, and one toilet and one urinal for every 50 boys
- **445** education facilities that have at least one private improved toilet designated for women and girls, built or subsidized by World Vision, which provides facilities to manage menstrual hygiene needs for washing, changing, and disposal of menstrual waste

## ACCELERATOR FUND IRAQ

Conflict, displacement, and the COVID-19 pandemic have taken a significant toll on the well-being of Iraqi women and girls, who face 31% unemployment, and people living with disabilities, who make up 15% of the total population.

The purpose of the Iraq GESI Accelerator Fund is to identify, refine, implement, and document cross-cutting approaches that elevate the roles of women and marginalized groups as WASH leaders. This 18-month project in Kirkuk and Hawija Districts of Iraq, aims to:

1. Partner with a local organization of persons with disabilities, Rozh Society, to identify people living with disabilities and incorporate them into the design process of inclusive WASH facilities in public institutions.
2. Equip female university graduates and displaced women to join the WASH workforce through certified trainings on financial literacy, entrepreneurship, and business development. The project team will also pilot innovative approaches to measuring evidence of GESI transformation.

Results for this project will be available in late 2023.



*In the school that Layla attends in Iraq, the school and its restrooms are not accessible for children with a disability.*

