

WASH and Gender Technical Brief

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ENDING
EXTREME POVERTY
WHATEVER
IT TAKES

July 2020

Why do we need to think about gender in WASH programming?

Access to safe water and sanitation is a human right. Its critical importance has been highlighted in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which include ensuring access to clean water and sanitation for all. Goal 6 focuses on *equitable* water, sanitation and hygiene, and particularly the needs of women and girls and those in vulnerable situations.¹ It has been estimated that 800 million people lack access to clean water and 2.5 billion people lack access to proper sanitation.² But why do we need to think about gender in our WASH programming?



Women collecting water at a Somali IDP camp. Photo by Marco Gualazzini, 2017

¹ [Exploring Gender Aspects of Community Water, Sanitation and Hygiene in Timor-Leste](#), WaterAid

² [SDG Gender Index](#)

Gendered roles in WASH related tasks

Typically, women are in charge of most WASH-related tasks including fetching water, washing and cleaning, taking care of children's hygiene, etc. These tasks come with risks and consequences for girls and women, who feel the greatest impact of poor access to clean water because of rigid gender norms. In many settings, girls and women make journeys of more than an hour each day, facing the risk of sexual violence, unplanned pregnancies, fatigue, injuries, and bone and muscle damage. Water collection also negatively affects girls' attendance at school, while WASH related tasks generally increase women's workloads. Contaminated water sources also increase the burden of care that women, as the primary caregivers, face.³

Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM)

MHM is defined as: Women and adolescent girls using a clean menstrual management material to absorb or collect menstrual blood, that can be changed in privacy as often as necessary for the duration of a menstrual period, using soap and water for washing the body as required, and having access to facilities to dispose of used menstrual management materials.⁴ Menstruation presents a range of challenges for women and girls: fear of stained clothes from leaking; a lack of private space to wash, change, or dispose of sanitary products; shame and stigma; and limited access to proper sanitary materials. Women and girls may resort to negative coping mechanisms such as burying used menstrual materials before dawn, making them vulnerable to attack, disposing materials directly into toilets, or may feel unable to go far from home during menstruation. Girls are often discouraged from attending school, negatively affecting gender gaps in primary and secondary school attendance.⁵

Sanitation

Sanitation services are essential for overall development. Yet women in developing countries – particularly the poorest, most marginalised and those displaced by conflict or disaster – often rely on unsafe communal sanitation facilities that expose them to health risks and sexual violence. Violence against women and girls have been reported to occur in public toilets and open defecation sites, but also places to collect water, bathe and wash clothes.⁶

Women's decision-making power

Women are frequently under-represented in WASH management committees and governing bodies due to social norms, unequal opportunities and power relations. Furthermore, their attendance in such committees does not translate to their meaningful participation. Men are often more literate and are used to dominating public platforms meaning that women's voices often go unheard.

Increased inequalities during humanitarian response

Natural disasters and conflict exacerbate existing gender inequalities in terms of time-use/time burden, socio-economic vulnerability, access to and control over resources, access to services including reproductive health services, mobility, participation and gender-based violence. Water points and sanitation may be located in isolated or unsafe locations, dramatically increasing exposure to Gender-Based Violence (GBV): 1/5 women or girls are likely to experience sexual violence (adolescent girls are at particular risk) in humanitarian settings. Lighting, locks, privacy and separate sanitation facilities for women and men can also affect their use, putting communities at greater risk of disease outbreaks, which in turn adds to women's burden of care. Tensions with host communities over water resources and socio-economic vulnerability can lead to sexual exploitation while MHM challenges can negatively affect women's mobility to access humanitarian assistance.⁷

³ [SDG Gender Index](#)

⁴ WHO and UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme (JMP) 2012

⁵ Be Girl Mozambique SmartCycle Workshop Insight report, March 2019

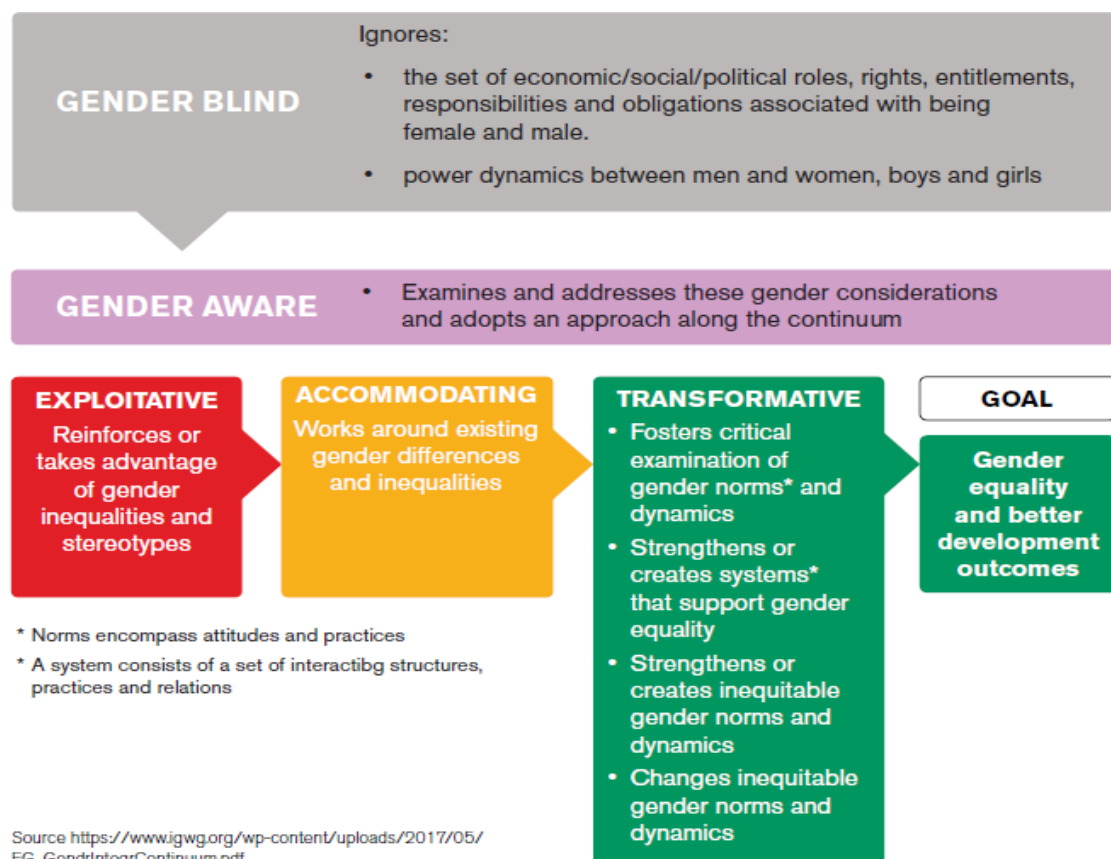
⁶ [Integrating Gender into Water – A practical Guide](#), Swiss Development Corporation (SDC)

⁷ [Integrating Gender into Water – A practical Guide](#), SDC

Gender Transformative WASH Programming

Given the critical links between WASH and gender outlined above, Concern’s WASH programmes will only provide equitable access to their programme participants if they consider gender at every stage, and are **gender transformative** wherever possible. This means that we need to:

- **Analyse the existing gender roles** and power dynamics in the communities we are working in to identify how they affect attitudes, practices and behaviours concerning WASH, e.g. who makes which decisions, who is responsible for which household tasks.
- **Identify the different needs, challenges and preferences** of women and girls, e.g. the location of water points; design of latrines; time of WASH committee meetings.
- Make sure we **do not reinforce negative or harmful stereotypes** (‘exploitative’ on the Gender Continuum), e.g. hygiene promotion which only targets women, implying that only women need take responsibility for collecting water and taking care of hygiene practices for the children; and community level decisions on WASH being made without women’s meaningful participation.
- Design programmes that **address the root causes** of the issues that affect WASH outcomes, such as unequal division of labour, voice and decision making power by transforming gender attitudes and norms (‘transformative’ on the Gender Continuum). For more on the gender continuum see the *Understanding the Gender Continuum Guidance Note*.⁸
- Regularly monitor programme activities throughout implementation to **avoid unintended negative consequences**.



The Gender Continuum

⁸ [Understanding the Gender Continuum Guidance Note](#), Concern 2020

How do we apply a gender transformative approach to WASH programmes?

Prepare our staff

- Hold workshops and meetings that allow staff to reflect upon and challenge their own views on gender as part of a process of gender transformation.
- Train staff on the GBV Pocket Guide⁹ so that they know the basic principles of Psychological First Aid and can respond to disclosures of GBV appropriately.

Programme planning: Gender Analysis

Do a rapid gender analysis to gather women and girls, men and boys' views and needs regarding water, latrines, MHM or other proposed activities. This should seek to understand preferences, norms, cultural practices, perceived risk, gender roles, decision-making practices, and participation and leadership norms. It does *not* have to be full formative research, it just needs to ask the right questions, and can also be carried out during an emergency response. Consult an Equality Advisor for support with this if necessary.

For a guide to doing a rapid gender analysis during an **emergency response** or in planning a **development programme**, please see Concern's *How to do a Rapid Gender Analysis – COVID-19* on concern365 which includes:

- Key Informant Interview Guides and links to Focus Group Discussion (FGD) guides, including a set of specific WASH questions that can be included/adapted. FGDs should be single sex and at a minimum with women and girls and include people with disabilities. This could take approximately 1-2 days with team of 2-3 persons.
- The guide also makes reference to the gendered components of Concern's Needs Assessment tool¹⁰ which should be analysed.

In order to answer some of the questions within the FGD guide, specific activities may also be used, these include:

- The Activity Profile in Concern's Equality Analysis Resources document¹¹
- Plan's "Gender and WASH Monitoring Tool"¹², which includes activities to:
 - Identify women's and men's workload in household and community WASH activities
 - Identify roles in household WASH decision making
 - Discuss the change in WASH-related responsibilities for women and girls, and men and boys, over time.
 - Identify the desired WASH changes for women and men (which may be different)
 - Share the results of the discussions

⁹ <https://gbvguidelines.org/en/pocketguide/>

¹⁰ [Rapid Needs Assessment, PQ Guide, concern365](#)

¹¹ [Equality Analysis Toolkit, Concern 2008](#)

¹² <https://www.plan.org.au/~media/plan/documents/resources/gwmt-march-2014.pdf>

Programme design

Use your gender analysis to design a context specific programme that meets the needs of its programme participants and addresses the gender dynamics that contribute to the issues. Select the appropriate indicators and data collection methods at this stage (see more details under Monitoring). Some suggestions for programme design are in the table below.

Issue/Programme Area	Programme Design
Safe and suitable showers, latrines or washing areas ^{13 14}	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consult women and girls on location, lighting (note: lighting does not always make women feel safer), locks, privacy, single sex facilities, MHM needs (space, washing facilities, drying area), wheelchair access and the design of the handwashing stations (mirrors, colours, etc.). • Design accordingly • Ensure that facilities are separated for men and women • Budget appropriately for design.
Safe and accessible water points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consult women and girls on location (distance, safety), opening times, realistic fees. Design accordingly where possible. • Create visible access to water points by clearing pathways where they are surrounded by bushes, trees, etc.
Menstrual Hygiene Management ^{15 16 17}	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MHM MATERIALS & SUPPLIES <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Consult women and girls on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Appropriate menstrual materials (pads, cloths, underwear). Where reusable are preferred, consider providing/introducing imported or locally made reusable sanitary products. ▪ Where disposable are preferred, assess market availability. If availability is low consider linking women to the market to increase supply (e.g. through women’s cooperatives). ▪ Additional supportive materials (e.g. soap, bucket) for storage, washing and drying. – Demonstrate how to use MHM materials. • MHM SUPPORTIVE FACILITIES <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Consult women and girls on design of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Safe and private toilet and bathing facilities with water for changing, washing and drying menstrual materials. ▪ Convenient and private disposal options for menstrual waste. ▪ Waste management systems in place for menstrual waste. • MHM INFORMATION <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Provide basic menstrual hygiene promotion and education. – Address harmful cultural or social norms related to menstruation (see Engaging Men/Gender transformative dialogue section below).

¹³ [Compendium of accessible WASH technologies](#)

¹⁴ [Female-friendly public and community toilets: a guide for planners and decision makers](#)

¹⁵ [Guide to Menstrual Hygiene Materials](#), UNICEF 2019

¹⁶ [A Toolkit for Integrating Menstrual Hygiene Management \(MHM\) into humanitarian response](#) – The Mini Guide

¹⁷ See Concern’s [MHM in School checklist](#)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Budget appropriately for design
Community Led Total Sanitation (CLTS)/Hygiene	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify tasks in which men are not traditionally involved (e.g. latrine cleaning, hand washing, etc.) and the stages at which they dominate (e.g. decision making). • Identify social and behaviour change approaches that target men, e.g. use male change agents (community/faith leaders, men's groups, motorbike taxi drivers, etc.) to promote positive gender norms. • Avoid reinforcing traditional gender roles and harmful gender stereotypes in behaviour change campaigns. • Include men and women in gender transformative dialogue on gender roles, including father's groups, husband schools, etc.
Sanitation Marketing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify stages at which men are not traditionally involved (e.g. latrine cleaning, hand washing, etc.) and the stages at which they dominate (e.g. decision making, business ownership). • Consider training women on running businesses, constructing latrine slabs and/or taking up a role in the supply chain of latrines through their businesses.
Representation on WASH Committees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure the percentage of female members on committees match or exceed national standards and/or stipulate an equal gender balance on committees • Ensure that either the head, treasurer or secretary is female • Facilitate sessions with female committee members on public speaking, communication and leadership • Facilitate sessions with male committee members on sharing power and decision making • Support committees to hold meetings at a suitable time for all members • Design tools for non-literate participants where possible • Qualitatively monitor the participation and decision making power of women
Engaging Men/Gender transformative dialogue: To address social norms that affect women's agency, unequal division of labour/burden of care, harmful gender norms, GBV etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build into programme design gender transformative dialogue sessions with male and female WASH programme participants. The design will be supported by the Equality Advisor and may include single sex and/or mixed sex groups and inclusion of community leaders. • Reinforce messages on positive gender norms in all channels of behaviour change communication e.g. Information, Education and Communication (IEC) materials, radio, drama, videos to encourage men to publicly assume a more active role in WASH tasks in the household, work-place and community. For example, show men sharing responsibility for WASH behaviours (e.g. cleaning a latrine or helping a child to wash their hands and women demonstrating community level decision-making power). • Engage community leaders and thought leaders to influence boys' and men's attitudes. • Engage men (especially fathers and fathers-to-be) and boys who want to be positive role models to promote gender equitable WASH behaviour in the household and community. • Link WASH programme participants to Savings and Loans Groups, Income Generating Activities, business training and leadership skills training.

Examples of Gender Transformative WASH Programming

- **Behaviour Change Communication materials**

The Global Scaling Up Handwashing Project in Senegal initially only targeted women as the primary caregivers. They later updated their IEC materials to illustrate the role of men in handwashing and to reinforce and sustain positive behaviour change of the family and community (Water and Sanitation Program (WSP), 2010 – see right).¹⁸



WSP revised billboard: “We commit ourselves more than ever to get our family to wash their hands with soap!”

- **Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM)**

Be Girl is a social enterprise that has developed long lasting, reusable menstruation products through a participatory design approach. In Mozambique they held workshops for boys and girls focusing on knowledge and attitudes to MHM. For girls this covered the basic concepts of menstrual and reproductive health, including how to track periods and ovulation, how to manage periods safely, and reject myths around menstruation. The focus for boys was fighting existing taboos and stigma around the subject, understanding the basis of reproduction and making informed decisions with future partners, and building a culture of mutual respect.¹⁹

In India, WaterAid and a local organisation created groups for men and boys to assess knowledge, attitudes and practices around MHM through different innovative approaches. Male members of school management committees also provided training and awareness-raising sessions in schools to support effective MHM. This led to men and boys being able to discuss menstruation more freely, and support MHM needs within the household, community and schools.²⁰

In Bangladesh, Plan International supported men to involve their wives in their sanitation businesses through developing a line on sanitary pads.²¹

- **CLTS & Sanitation Marketing**

Plan Sierra Leone conducted action research on the role of women in CLTS and discovered that women were not participating as equals with men in triggering meetings. Women explained that ‘they preferred to let their husbands or other men do the talking’. Based on the results of the study Plan gave more emphasis to and provided the skills for getting women actively involved in triggering meetings – to have a voice and take part in decision-making in the Open Defecation Free process and to sustain it. New norms for women’s participation were established so that women’s views were expected and valued. Plan also reorganised the guidelines for community selection of Natural Leaders so that larger numbers of women were selected (2:3 ratio).²²

- **Gender Transformative dialogues**

WaterAid used WASH as an entry point to challenge gender norms in Timor-Leste. A community dialogue manual was developed as a guide for integrating gender awareness and dialogue sessions between women and men within WASH planning processes. The manual aims to create a shared understanding of gender roles and relations and how workloads can be more equally divided. As a result, men are giving women the opportunity to speak in community meetings and management groups. One woman said: “I am amazed with my husband after

¹⁸ [Frontiers of CLTS: Innovations and Insights: Engaging men and boys in sanitation and hygiene programmes](#)

¹⁹ [Be Girl Impact Report, 2018](#)

²⁰ [Frontiers of CLTS: Breaking the next taboo](#)

²¹ [Frontiers of CLTS: Innovations and Insights: Engaging men and boys in sanitation and hygiene programmes](#)

²² [Frontiers of CLTS: Innovations and Insights: Engaging men and boys in sanitation and hygiene programmes](#)

[gender] sessions that talked about equal work between men and women. It's not dramatic change yet, but on many occasions, he starts to ask me what [house] work I'm doing and without talking much he starts taking on one or two responsibilities. He is also looking after our children more often, helping them to take a shower or cleaning them after the toilet".²³

Concern has experience globally in implementing a range of gender transformative dialogue approaches including couple's dialogues, father-to-father support groups, and husband schools, which have contributed to greater joint decision-making and increased roles of men in household tasks and childcare.²⁴



**BE A MAN,
 HELP YOUR PARTNER
 AT HOME**

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Poster from Concern's 'Be a Man' poster series from Sierra Leone's Engaging Men programme, 2015, that reinforced messages to challenge harmful masculinities

• WASH Committees

In Nepal, the Red Cross targeted 50% female representation on Ward level WASH Committees and Water User Committees, and supported women to take up management or technical roles within these. As a result:

- Women's participation in WASH committees is now at an average of 55%.
- Women were regularly participating as both general members and in decision-making roles, indicating their commitment and sense of ownership.
- Women gained more voice at household level.
- Community perceptions improved, with fewer restrictions from families on women participating in community activities and groups. Women committee members reported having an identity outside of the home.
- MHM training had tangible impacts upon women's human rights and experiences of being ostracised. It has greatly reduced the practice of prohibiting Hindu women from participating in normal family activities while menstruating and, in some instances, the sheds in which menstruating women had to remain in were removed.

²³ [Frontiers of CLTS: Innovations and Insights: Engaging men and boys in sanitation and hygiene programmes](#)

²⁴ [ENGAGING MEN ON GENDER EQUALITY: Learning from Concern's Programming and Practice](#)

- 50% of all technical trainees, such as water technicians and masons, were women. Many reported increased confidence and social currency, with their technical skills helping challenge negative gender stereotypes in their communities.
- Women's participation in WASH and Water Committees has facilitated women's role in community decision-making. Several Committee members/leaders were nominated as candidates in the recent local elections.²⁵

Training women as hand-pump mechanics, a traditionally male dominated role, can also begin to change social norms around what women can do.²⁶ Note that if this approach is taken, it should be ensured that women are provided with appropriate training and safety equipment, for example, how to lift heavy pipes, which men may otherwise have done.



Village chief Tilo Saidi and Diaba Idrissa, a member of Agaye's water management committee, Niger. Photo by Darren Vaughan, 2018

Monitoring

Monitoring is critical to ensure that intended and unintended consequences of an activity, a project or a programme are regularly measured over time, and changes can be made to ensure the desired result is achieved. In gender transformative WASH programmes, this includes monitoring the impact that programme activities are having on the lives of women and girls in comparison to men and boys. This refers to individual, household and societal levels in terms of both attitudes and behaviour – for example, on WASH-related decision-making power and division of labour within households, as well as on women's participation and leadership in community-level WASH activities. Monitoring should be done through the selection of gender-sensitive indicators as well as the regular collection, analysis and interpretation of qualitative and/or quantitative gender-disaggregated data.

Impact in these areas should be measured qualitatively, through Key Informant interviews, observations and/or Focus Group Discussions as well as quantitatively through surveys. Resources to monitor the role of women and girls in WASH-related activities can be found in Concern's Equality and WASH Standard Indicator Libraries on the Programme Quality Guide. WASH indicators should be viewed with gender lens, while equality indicators can be applied to WASH activities. While the resources available are limited and might not cover the needs of all gender transformative WASH programmes, additional needs should be discussed with the WASH, Equality and M&E Advisors.

Transformation of attitudes and behaviours related to gender transformation in WASH will take time and is not always a linear progression, but regular monitoring and follow-up within programmes will allow adaptations to programme design and gender transformative outcomes to be pursued.

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²⁵ [Gender and WASH Committees: Women's Participation, Leadership and Decision-Making](#), Sanitation, Hygiene and Water Management Project, Bajhang, Australian Red Cross, 2018

²⁶ See video about [Shivkaliya Hand-pump Mechanic](#) trained as a hand-pump mechanic