

## 3.4

# WATER SANITATION AND HYGIENE

### Oxfam Essentials

Gender integration in WASH is not optional—it is a lifeline. By centering the needs and voices of women and marginalized groups, Oxfam can contribute to dismantling systemic barriers and fostering resilient communities.

### Key gender aspects

1. Women and girls often have primary responsibility for water collection, household hygiene and caring for others, which affects their time, health, and safety.
2. Inadequate WASH infrastructure design heightens risks to women. For example, design of water points may lead to conflicts between women and their neighbours.
3. Inadequate lighting and poor design in sanitation facilities heighten the risk of GBV and make women and girls feel unsafe using these spaces.<sup>57,58</sup>
4. Research shows that on average, 40% of women are not using the latrines provided by humanitarian actors due to inadequate needs assessments and poor design.<sup>59</sup>
5. Menstrual hygiene is often stigmatized, limiting women's and girls' participation in school, work, and public life.
6. Women, youth, and marginalized groups are often excluded from WASH governance and decision-making.



### Examples from practice

- **IN POST-EARTHQUAKE NEPAL**, Oxfam's gender analysis revealed social taboos limiting women's participation in WASH decision-making, prompting community consultations.<sup>60</sup>
- **IN BANGLADESH AND CAMBODIA**, Oxfam has facilitated the formation of women's WASH Platforms to enhance women's involvement in community water and sanitation projects. These volunteer groups receive training and small grants to undertake their own WASH initiatives, share lessons, and engage in advocacy.<sup>61</sup>
- **IN RESPONSE TO THE 2017 INFLUX OF ROHINGYA REFUGEES INTO COX'S BAZAR**, Oxfam launched the Women's Social Architecture Project to improve WASH (water, sanitation, and hygiene) facilities in refugee camps. Female architects and Oxfam staff facilitated participatory design workshops with women and girls—especially older women, adolescents, and those with disabilities—to address concerns around safety, privacy, and dignity.<sup>62</sup>
- **IN OCCUPIED PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES (OPT)**, the Pathways to Resilience project, efforts focused on strengthening resilience and improving economic opportunities for the most marginalized groups within vulnerable communities in the oPt. A key part of the project addressed the impact of climate change, especially the increased risk of floods, by enhancing WASH services. To ensure the emergency response met the needs of all community members, women's community committees were formed and actively involved in both planning and implementing WASH activities. These committees made sure that women's perspectives were heard, which improved the effectiveness and relevance of the emergency response, leading to better WASH outcomes for everyone in the community.

## !! Sector Requirements

REQUIREMENT	DETAILS
<b>NEEDS ASSESSMENT AND ANALYSIS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assess the distinct needs, roles, and vulnerabilities of women, men, girls, and boys concerning WASH services and practices.</li> <li>Gather and analyse data disaggregated by sex and age to inform programme design and implementation.</li> <li>Integrate knowledge of local social and gender norms, as well as laws that create barriers to access and participation, influence people’s behaviour, and contribute to vulnerabilities in programme design.</li> </ul>
<b>COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engage girls, boys, women, and men in participatory discussions during the full project cycle, from planning, to design and monitoring, using a consult, modify, consult approach to adapt to distinct needs.</li> <li>Ensure that feedback from diverse groups informs infrastructure, services and hygiene item provision decisions.</li> <li>Ensure meaningful representation of women and youth in WASH related community-based structures (for example, community-based volunteers, or user groups), including in leadership roles. Use mechanisms such as quotas, co-leadership, or rotating chair positions, adapted to local cultural contexts.</li> </ul>
<b>IMPLEMENTATION</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Construct latrines that are sex-separated, well-lit, lockable from the inside, and provide safe, private access routes.</li> <li>Situate facilities in secure locations to minimize the risk of GBV, especially for women and girls.</li> <li>Design must consider the menstrual hygiene management (MHM) needs of girls and women.</li> <li>Distribute MHM kits, including reusable or disposable pads, soap, and disposal methods. Where possible engage girls and boys in producing menstrual pads.</li> <li>Deliver basic MHM education sessions, especially for girls, with culturally sensitive demonstrations.</li> <li>Consult with women, girls and other marginalised groups on specific hygiene or WASH items or services that would support their needs.</li> </ul>
<b>SAFE PROGRAMMING</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify and address potential GBV and Safeguarding risks associated with WASH activities, ensuring that interventions do not exacerbate vulnerabilities.</li> <li>Establish confidential and accessible channels for reporting GBV and Safeguarding incidents related to WASH services.</li> <li>Create safe and accessible channels for beneficiaries, staff, and community members to report any GBV and Safeguarding concerns or incidents.</li> <li>Establish and regularly update referral pathways for GBV survivors.</li> <li>Monitor and evaluate programmes for unintended GBV risks.</li> </ul>
<b>DEPLOYMENT OF STAFF</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure that WASH teams include and support female staff within all WASH roles at all levels (not segregating them exclusively to PHP activities). Having women and men across WASH disciplines can support different perspectives.</li> <li>Train WASH teams to recognize and address gender-based barriers to participation.</li> <li>Ensure co-creation and ways of working with Gender and MEAL teams.</li> </ul>
<b>MEAL</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure that WASH programme and project indicators and outcomes are developed through participatory processes, are gender-transformative, and align with the Country Office’s GiE strategy and standards—contributing to systemic change and collective feminist goals.</li> <li>Assess the effectiveness of WASH programmes in promoting GiE throughout the project cycle.</li> <li>Implement mechanisms for ongoing feedback from all community members to adapt and improve WASH services.</li> <li>Document results and lessons to be learnt and create inclusive spaces for staff, partners, and community stakeholders to reflect and collectively identify actions for sustaining change—strengthening the capacities and leadership of local partners in the process.</li> </ul>



## Examples along the Gender Continuum

IMPLEMENTATION PATHWAYS	TRANSFORMATIVE	RESPONSIVE	SENSITIVE	UNAWARE
<b>CONSTRUCTION (LATRINES OR SCHOOL REHABILITATION)</b>	Comprehensive latrine design that goes beyond physical infrastructure to challenge existing gender norms, involving community dialogue about girls' safety, challenging harmful gender stereotypes, and ensuring meaningful participation of girls and boys in the design and implementation process   Community engagement.	Construction of sex-separated, well-lit, lockable latrines with safe access, considering specific needs of menstrual hygiene management.	Separate latrines for boys and girls, but with minimal additional considerations for safety or privacy.	Basic latrine construction without considering gender-specific needs, with a single, undifferentiated design for all students.
<b>MENSTRUAL HYGIENE MANAGEMENT</b>	Community-wide MHM programme involving men and boys in education, local production of MHM supplies, and challenging menstrual taboos through community dialogues.	Comprehensive MHM kits with reusable pads, soap, and educational materials; private washing areas; and MHM education sessions for girls.	Inclusion of sanitary pads in hygiene kits distributed by female staff to women and girls with a demonstration on their use.	Distribution of basic hygiene kits without specific MHM products or education.
<b>WASH COMMUNITY BASED STRUCTURES AND GROUPS</b>	Community WASH structures that actively challenge gender norms, promote women's leadership, and engage the community in discussions about unequal distribution of care work and gender justice.	Equal representation of women and men in Community WASH structures and groups, with women in leadership roles and gender-specific needs addressed in planning.	Inclusion of women in Community WASH groups with respect to local norms, without systematically addressing barriers for women's participation.	Formation of Community WASH groups without considering gender and age balance or representation.

### Going the extra mile

- Promote critical reflection among the staff, partners and allies: “Who controls water and sanitation resources—and why?”
- Use WASH activities as an entry point to challenge harmful gender norms, promoting issues such as shared household responsibilities and equitable water governance, girls’ school drop-out rates due to lack of sanitation, women’s employment in WASH services and construction, norms around menstruation and bodily shame.
- Tackle stigma around menstruation and sanitation work through education and advocacy to reduce discrimination.
- Engage men and boys through positive masculinity workshops and discussions on hygiene, MHM, and equitable water use to challenge stigma and promote shared responsibilities in WASH.

- Promote shared leadership in WASH Committees by supporting women leaders alongside facilitating dialogue between women and men on collaboration, mutual support, and inclusive decision-making.
- Partner with feminist organizations to support and elevate women WASH engineers and those working or studying in technical and scientific fields, particularly those challenging male-dominated sectors, by promoting visibility, mentorship, and opportunities for leadership.

## Further Reading

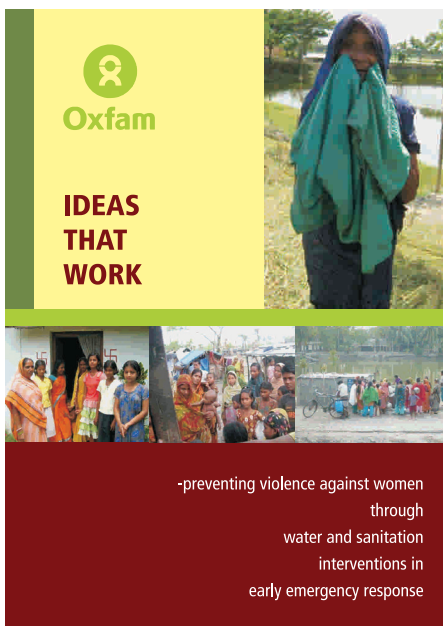


### Sani Tweaks – A Better Approach for Sanitation in Emergencies

Oxfam International. 2018. Sani Tweaks – A better approach for Sanitation in Emergencies. Oxfam WASH.

<https://www.oxfamwash.org/en/sanitweaks>

The Sani Tweaks initiative is Oxfam’s approach to improving the effectiveness and safety of sanitation facilities in emergency settings. It emphasizes a cyclical process of consultation, modification, and re-consultation with affected communities to ensure that latrines meet their needs and are used effectively. Key issues addressed include privacy, safety, cleanliness, and accessibility.



### Oxfam’s Ideas That Work

Rangaswami, S. 2010. Ideas That Work: A gender, WASH and emergencies toolkit. Oxfam Great Britain, South Asia Regional Centre.

<https://oxfamilibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/334900/ml-ideas-that-work-gender-WASH-toolkit-221210-en.pdf>

A compilation of practical experiences that have attempted to reduce risk to violence against women (VAW) in the provision of WASH facilities in the early response phase of an emergency.



## Violence, Gender, WASH Toolkit

SHARE Consortium / WaterAid & Loughborough University. 2014. Violence, Gender and WASH: A Practitioner's Toolkit – Making Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Safer Through Improved Programming and Services. SHARE.

<https://violence-wash.lboro.ac.uk/>

This toolkit is designed for WASH practitioners and specialists in GBV, gender, protection, health, and education across development, humanitarian, and transitional contexts. It offers practical guidance, including briefing notes, checklists, case studies, and training materials, to reduce vulnerabilities to violence.

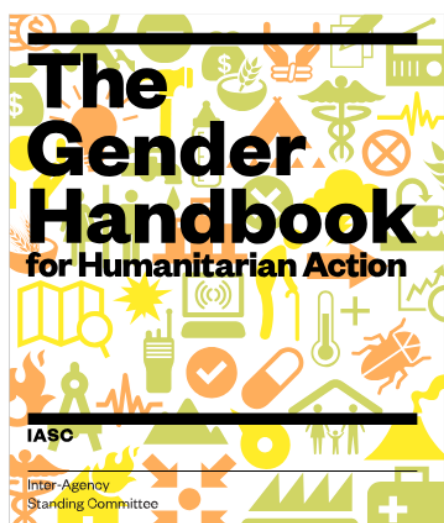


## Engaging men and boys for gender-transformative WASH

Cavill, S., Huggett, C., & Mott, J. (2022). Engaging men and boys for gender-transformative WASH: Part 2. Frontiers of Sanitation: Innovations and Insights. Brighton: Sanitation Learning Hub, Institute of Development Studies.

<https://sanihub.info/resource/engaging-men-and-boys-for-gender-transformative-wash/>

This issue examines the impact of engaging men and boys in WASH processes to drive gender-transformative change. It explores their roles as agents, partners, and subjects of change, showcasing progress, challenges, and practical recommendations for integrating this approach into WASH programmes.



## Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC). (2018). The Gender Handbook for Humanitarian Action.

[https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/sites/default/files/migrated/2019-02/2018-iasc\\_gender\\_handbook\\_for\\_humanitarian\\_action\\_eng\\_0.pdf](https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/sites/default/files/migrated/2019-02/2018-iasc_gender_handbook_for_humanitarian_action_eng_0.pdf)

The Gender Handbook for Humanitarian Action is a comprehensive guide that provides practical guidance for integrating gender equality into all phases of humanitarian action. The handbook includes a dedicated section on the WASH sector page 350-375.