Inclusive water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) workplaces

GUIDANCE FOR THE WASH SECTOR
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UTS Institute for Sustainable Futures

THRIVE NETWORKS

Water For Women

Australian Aid

UNIVERSITAS INDONESIA
Veritas, Probitas, Justitia

YAYASAN PLAN INTERNATIONAL INDONESIA

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cbm inclusion advisory group

IWDA INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DEVELOPMENT AGENCY

edge effect

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The Institute for Sustainable Futures, University of Technology Sydney (ISF-UTS) conducts research to support water sanitation and hygiene (WASH) policy and practice across the globe. They provide their partners and clients with technical expertise including gender equality and inclusion research, policy and practice advice; technical water and sanitation options assessment; institutional analysis; and planning, governance and decision-making support.

Cover Photo

Cambodian government officials who are responsible for WASH programs responding to interview questions as part of this research project in 2019

Expert advisers

The following expert advisers provided detailed feedback on this document.

International Women's Development Agency (IWDA)

IWDA is an Australian-based organisation, resourcing diverse women's rights organisations primarily in Asia and the Pacific, and contributing to global feminist movements to advance our vision of gender equality for all. Established in 1985, IWDA is Australia's only development organisation entirely focused on gender equality. IWDA's approach represents a third way between the models of women's funds and international development NGOs: we resource the work of diverse women's rights organisations, enable them to be more effective by providing support that goes beyond money, and make our contributions to feminist movements through advocacy, knowledge creation and translation.

Edge Effect

Edge Effect is a social enterprise which assists organisations to work in partnership with sexual and gender minorities (also known as people with diverse sexual orientation, gender identity/expression, and sexual characteristics (SOGIESC), or LGBTIQ+ people).

CBM Global

CBM Global is an international development organisation that works on ending poverty and improving the lives of people with disabilities in the poorest regions of the world. The Inclusion Advisory Group, an initiative of CBM Global, partners with the disability movement to influence organisations, institutions, and systems to realise the rights of people with disabilities. We believe that tailored input, communicated effectively, with the right people at the table can help make inclusion a reality.

Research partners

The following research partners were part of the research underpinning this guidance: Thrive Networks (East Meets West), Plan International in Indonesia and Australia, and the Gender Studies Program at the University of Indonesia.

Thrive Networks

For over 30 years, Thrive Networks (locally known as East Meets West) has been working in partnership with governments, communities, and the private sector in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos, benefitting over 7.5 million people living in poverty. Our expertise lies in pro-poor water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) interventions, primarily through an output-based aid approach. Our long-term presence in the region, local leadership and core belief in the power of partnerships and collaboration creates a unique and trusting relationship with decision-makers and government authorities. We leverage substantial public resources for sustainability and scale results by developing, implementing, and managing innovative business models and public-private partnerships.

Plan International in Indonesia and Australia

Plan International in Indonesia and Australia are members of the global Plan International federation, one of the oldest and largest independent development and humanitarian organisation, working in 71 countries around the world. We work with governments, local civil society organisations (CSOs), local private sector organisations and other partners and supporters to create a more enabling environment for gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) and to ensure equal access to water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH). Plan International in Indonesia's project entitled 'WASH and Beyond: Transforming Lives in Eastern Indonesia', funded under the Water for Women Fund, includes a focus on supporting marginalised women and people with disabilities. Any data in this research collected from Plan International in Indonesia project areas has focused on women and people with disability in the Indonesian context.

University of Indonesia

The Gender Studies Graduate Program of the School of Strategic and Global Studies at Universitas Indonesia (UI), locally known as Prodi Kajian Gender SKSG UI, is the first and oldest post-graduate program on gender studies, established in 1989. Students come from different parts of Indonesia and Timor-Leste, interdisciplinary backgrounds, varied occupations and diverse socio-cultural backgrounds.
Prodi Kajian Gender SKSG UI adopts a multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary approach to collaborate with various international, national and local institutions, and has been involved in conducting research for the purpose of policy making and policy advocacy.

Collaborative research discussion group in Cambodia on inclusive workforces.

List of Acronyms

BESIK	Bee, Saneamentu no Ijiene iha Komunidade
CCWC	Commune Committee for Women and Children
CSO	Civil society organisation
DPO	Disabled Peoples Organisation
GEDSI	Gender equality, disability and social inclusion
GESI	Gender equality and social inclusion
ILO	International Labour Organisation
ISF-UTS	Institute for Sustainable Futures, University of Technology Sydney
IWDA	International Women's Development Agency
LGBTQI+	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex
LNOB	Leaving no one behind
NGO	Non-government organisation
OPD	Organisations of People with Disabilities
RHO	Rights-holder organisation
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SGM	Sexual and gender minority
STEM	Science, technology, engineering and mathematics
TVET	Technical and vocational education and training
UI	Universitas Indonesia
UNESCO	The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
USAID	The United States Agency for International Development
WAF	Water Authority of Fiji
WASH	Water, sanitation and hygiene

About the project

How can women (in all their diversity) better participate in and benefit from being part of the water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) workforce?

The Institute for Sustainable Futures at the University of Technology Sydney (ISF–UTS) partnered with the University of Indonesia (UI) and two civil society organisations (CSOs), East Meets West Cambodia and Plan International in Indonesia and Australia, to conduct research to inform how women (in all their diversity) can better participate in, and benefit from being part of, the WASH workforce. This guidance document is one of multiple outputs of that research initiative.

WASH workplaces include government agencies, private sector organisations (including small-scale enterprises), water and sanitation utilities, and CSOs delivering WASH programs. These groups are hereafter collectively referred to as 'WASH actors' in this document.

This guidance was developed using three research methods:

- empirical research in Cambodia and Indonesia on gender dynamics in the government water and sanitation workforce, conducted in partnership with East Meets West Cambodia (EMW), Plan International Australia and Plan Indonesia and the University of Indonesia

- a document review of organisational activities and strategies to address gender equality and inclusion in the Global South and other contexts, both within and beyond the WASH sector

- engagement with civil society partners working on inclusive workplaces in order to incorporate their suggestions and strategies, including expert inputs on sexual and gender minorities and disability inclusion.

Women in all their diversity

The term 'women in all their diversity' refers to all individuals who identify as women, including sexual and gender minorities. It is intended to signal that this guidance document addresses issues of diverse identity[1] and intersectionality in relation to characteristics such as social class, disability, neurodiversity, age, race, religion[2] (Figure 1).
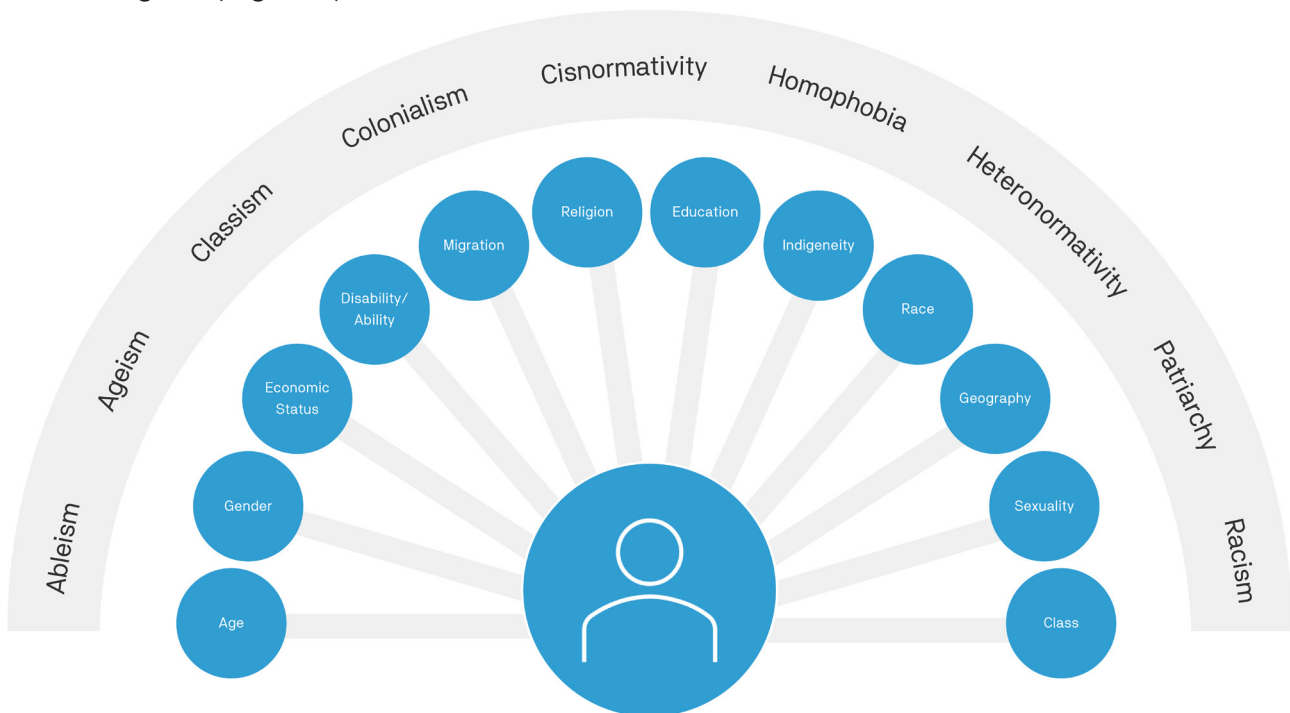
Figure 1. Representation of intersectionality from the perspective of individual characteristics and societal power

Source: Authors, adapted from Soeters, S., Grant, M., Carrard, N. and Willetts, J. (2019)[2]

This guidance is inclusive of non-binary, transgender, third gender and other gender-diverse people. Therefore, for the rest of this document, wherever we use the term 'women', it should be read and understood as referring to women in all their diversity, including people with disabilities. Similarly, the term gender equality, disability and social inclusion (GEDSI) should be understood as including sexual and gender minorities.

Why this guide?

When considering gender equality, disability and social inclusion in WASH, we need to look at both the people who are benefiting from and managing WASH systems, and the institutions that shape and deliver WASH services. We also need to transform these institutions so that they "walk the talk" of equality and inclusion.[3]

Organisational change is needed to achieve gender equality and inclusion outcomes in programs and structures. In addition, there is increasing evidence that organisations with women in senior positions (and greater diversity overall) perform better than those with no women or very few women, and that these women have a positive impact on organisations' governance, identities and public images.[4]

Greater diversity in leadership and decision-making positions also serves to provide much-needed role models for other employees to aspire to, and their presence attracts more women and members of minorities to join organisations by normalising diversity in senior roles. Diversity also serves to promote an inclusive work culture when gender equality and inclusion are prioritised and normalised, for example by developing and aligning organisational policies that are shaped by the lived experiences of employees.

An inclusive workforce supports the interlinked Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), for example by promoting SDG 5 (gender quality) and SDG 6 (water and sanitation for all) in an integrated manner. Moreover, leaving no one behind (LNOB) in WASH is impossible to achieve without an inclusive WASH workforce (including in management and governance structures) in institutions to represent the diverse and marginalised voices and challenge the inherent biases of elites.

Equality and diversity within WASH organisations are a key part of transforming the WASH sector. These organisations are the entities through which WASH standards, policies, services and systems are identified, developed and delivered. Yet at the time of writing there were limited research and resources available to support the diversity of actors involved in WASH, and to focus on who leads, works in and manages these systems.[3] Most research and programming related to WASH organisations has focused on water utilities, leading to initiatives such as the World Bank Equal Aqua Initiative. While this is an important and positive step, it does not address all of the varied organisational types in the WASH sector, or the vast range of actors who are part of the sector at large. In this guidance, we seek to build from this important initiative, and diversify the types of organisations in WASH with a focus on the Global South.

This guidance document supports the many calls to action on gender and inclusion in the WASH workforce. In line with their Gender Equality Priority, UNESCO's World Water Assessment Programme (WWAP) is facilitating a coordinated and participatory call for action to accelerate progress towards the achievement of gender equality in the water sector.[5] The Water for Women Fund is part of this initiative, along with a number of global actors such as World Bank, Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO), African Ministers' Council on Water, among others. Also, a number of WASH CSOs and research organisations have published their own call for the WASH sector to look deeply at how the organisations that comprise the sector operate.[3] This has included a call to review organisational practices, prevailing norms and assumptions that underpin them, and attitudes and behaviours of staff within organisations. This call is an essential part of pursuing a truly gender-transformative approach. This guidance supports these initiatives by looking at dimensions of gender inequality within the WASH workforce, and how to practically change them, drawing on research led by ISF-UTS, international examples, literature and practice.

The target audience for this guidance is leaders, managers, technical staff, human resources personnel and other practitioners working on water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) programs, policies and projects in any context. This includes CSOs delivering WASH programs, government agencies, private sector organisations (including small-scale enterprises), donors, and water and sanitation utilities. Varied staff members may benefit – for instance, human resource staff can use this document for developing inclusive recruitment policies; and program managers can use it to consider how staff are recruited and trained, and engage in reflexive practice. Other staff can use it to consider how they relate to their co-workers, and the ways in which unconscious bias and different levels of resistance can play out in an organisation. They can also use it in developing communication approaches and ways of managing such resistance.[6]

The document will be particularly useful for government agencies, given the broad range of issues and initiatives that it addresses. These issues and initiatives are relevant to a wide range of workplaces. Integration of gender equality and diversity initiatives in all WASH-related departments and ministries is essential for changing societal stereotypes, norms and work cultures. Collaboration between ministries that are progressing gender equality, disability and social inclusion (GEDSI) priorities can be promoted by collecting GEDSI data through audits or analysis, by budgeting for inclusion, by encouraging men to participate and lead as Gender Focal Points, and by including specific indicators to monitor progress in GEDSI mainstreaming activities.[7] Many more examples relevant to government agencies are presented throughout this guidance.

WASH actors are uniquely placed to leverage change through their roles in WASH programming, and this guide, supported by recent evidence and collating ideas and advice from around the world, aims to equip them to do so in practical and effective ways. The following page has some brief examples, and this guidance contains many more.

Individuals

When working with selected women, people with disabilities, and sexual and gender minorities in WASH organisations at different levels (government departments, commune councils, multi-agency sanitation teams), WASH actors can draw on a range of the strategies outlined in this guidance to support these individuals directly in their roles, and in managing work and life demands, receiving recognition for their work, receiving fair pay, accessing training, accessing mentoring and building networks.

Organisations

WASH actors can demonstrate leadership and influence their own organisation or the organisations they are working with by establishing expectations around their collaboration, especially where financial support is being offered to another organisation through a WASH program. Strategies may include the introduction of quotas, recruitment approaches that support diversity (e.g. the language of advertisements, gender diverse recruitment panels), support mechanisms for women staff, sensitisation for men, improving and resourcing diverse family friendly policies and related strategies. WASH actors can also provide targeted GEDSI training, including sexual and gender minority (SGM) training, to their staff and to organisations with whom they partner. Through advocacy-focused activities and intentional partnering with rights-holder organisations (RHOs), WASH actors can also influence their partners and other organisations (e.g. local governments) to put into place GEDSI initiatives and ensure marginalised voices are included in decision-making fora.

Society at Large

WASH actors can provide whole of community, or more targeted, capacity building on GEDSI so that the broader society is more aware of and engaged in addressing barriers to achieving GEDSI. This may support more targeted interventions (e.g. with women WASH workers), for instance by engaging with other family members on GEDSI issues and on how roles and responsibilities are allocated. Community dialogues which enable different stakeholders in the community to understand and appreciate different types of work, including unpaid "invisible" work, can also help move society at large towards valuing all people and all work. Invisible work is typically done by women (may include childcare, housework, emotional and relational caregiving) and is named invisible due to the lack of recognition and payment for this work. Alongside understanding the type of work itself, being seen as a potential worker is an important first step for many people with disabilities (especially women), which can help in addressing social norms around ableism/capability.

Database of GEDSI Actions

This guidance is accompanied by a database of over 180 GEDSI initiatives in the workplace from across the world, drawn from WASH utilities, government departments, CSOs and the private sector. Examples have been sought from a range of countries and regions, though many examples of diversity, equality and inclusion initiatives have come from well-funded water utilities and government departments in developed countries. As the database grows, more examples from around the world will be added. The database is aligned with the structure shown in Figure 2. It is based on the understanding that all people entering the WASH workforce should have equal opportunities to grow and to lead. It is also based on the need to understand the specific challenges and opportunities of GEDSI in particular WASH workplaces. The rest of this guidance follows the same structure as the database and provides examples from the database at each step.

Making WASH workplaces more equitable and inclusive at a range of stages and levels

Diagnosis	Attraction	Recruitment	Retention	Advancement
Deeply understand the power dynamics in the workplace, especially around gender, disability, sexual orientation and other factors – analyse core issues and potential causes of the issues.	Attract a diversity of people from diverse disciplines to WASH roles, by understanding the factors that influence who an organisation attracts to its workforce, and what barriers exist.	Eliminate discrimination in recruitment processes such as biased language in job advertisements and at the interview stage, and increase workforce diversity intentionally.	**Dynamics (informal)** Foster safe and equal workplace dynamics through how decisions are made, who has voice and influence, and valuing different leadership styles. **Policies (formal)** Support all people to have access to equitable working conditions, flexibility to support managing work-life demands, fair wages, accessible facilities and eliminate sexual harassment and discrimination.	Provide and facilitate training, mentorship, networking opportunities, supporting leadership, promotion and career advancement for all staff.

Societal Expectations

Awareness of, and responses to the various stereotypes and norms that restrict some people from joining and participating in the WASH workforce.

Figure 2. The framing of this guidance and the activities database, are adapted from the Equal Aqua: Inclusive Water Institutions Platform framework[8]

I. Diagnosis

It is important to understand what the values and dynamics are within an organisation in regard to gender, disability and social inclusion, prior to choosing what activities to use to advance GEDSI. This ensures that strategies are well-targeted to the particular challenges relevant to that organisation and its context.

This section talks about the various ways in which WASH actors can collect and manage data and conduct an analysis or self-assessment to measure the participation of women and people from marginalised groups at the organisational level. An initial step can be to develop a clear understanding of the current status of gender parity,[9] disability and social diversity in an organisation.

This could entail any or all of:

- collecting and analysing current data on employee composition by management level, and occupational mix by gender and other diversity criteria as appropriate

- conducting a comprehensive assessment of the effectiveness of existing policies and practices to support inclusion and equality

- running focus groups with staff members to learn about their perceptions

- partnering with Organisations of People with Disabilities (OPDs), women's rights organisations[10] and SGM representative organisations and using their expertise to contextualise various self-assessment tools and analyse the information gathered using the tools.

Examples of activities

→ GEDSI audits

→ GEDSI pay gap assessments

→ International standards on GEDSI transparency

→ Scorecards on gender equality, disability and social inclusion

For more examples of activities, please see the [database](#).

Some examples of tools that may be useful at the diagnosis stage include:

- The **Gender Equality Diagnostic Tool** developed by the Australian Government's Workplace Gender Equality Agency,[11] and the Access and Inclusion Index developed by the Australian Network on Disability,[12] are both useful instruments for identifying what an organisation is doing well, and for identifying focus areas for improvement. It should be noted that while the Gender Equality Diagnostic Tool is an example of heading in the right direction, it does not include diverse sexual and gender minorities and so additional approaches, as outlined above, are needed to complement the tool.

- The Global Water Practice at the World Bank provides water organisations with **data scorecards** which provide an assessment of where they stand in terms of gender and diversity compared to regional and global averages.

- WaterAid Cambodia has developed a **Gender Power Analysis tool** as a first step towards understanding the barriers and obstacles faced by women, especially in WASH leadership roles. The tool has helped to identify the priority issues and create entry points to start discussion on these issues in the WASH sector in Cambodia.

What can WASH actors do to understand their organisational GEDSI dynamics?

Subsequent to a diagnosis, WASH actors can support their own organisations and their partners to better understand GEDSI issues relevant to their workplaces by conducting their own **GEDSI pay gap assessments**. This can be a useful way to self-assess any differences in the wages paid to men and to women, people with disabilities and people of diverse gender and sexual orientations in similar roles. This needs to be combined with pathways and mechanisms to consider and respond to findings. For example, sharing the data on diagnosis with partners can be a powerful and collaborative way to identify possible areas for improvement. This can help partners to set up or improve their organisational systems to record this data in future.

There are also various certifications, diagnostic tools and scorecards that WASH actors can draw upon to assess an organisation's commitment to inclusion and diversity (including SGM individuals and people with a disability). Some examples include:

Collecting and disclosing key data: Tools such as Stonewall's Global Workplace Equality Index have been developed to benchmark the performances, and meet the needs, of organisations to promote equality of opportunity for sexual and gender minorities in the workplace.

Scorecards: The SEAF (Small Enterprise Assistance Funds) has a Gender Equality Scorecard which rates an organisation based on performance areas including pay equity, workforce participation, leadership and governance, benefits and professional development, and workplace environment. While most scorecards have their limitations as they do not include other sexual and gender minorities or people with disabilities, they can be adapted to gather information on marginalised peoples in an inclusive and dignified way.

Pay gap assessments

Collecting and disclosing key data

Scorecards

Accreditation: The EDGE (Economic Dividends for Gender Equality) assessment methodology is a third-party certification that measures where organisations stand with respect to gender balance across various levels, pay structure, effectiveness of policies and practices to ensure equitable career flows as well as the inclusiveness of their culture. Rainbow Tick is another accreditation standard which can be used to help organisations become safe and inclusive for the SGM community by providing a framework for planning, implementing and measuring change within an organisation.

Accreditation

Toolkits: The Australian Government's Workplace Gender Equality Agency provides a toolkit which can be used by WASH actors and their partners to achieve an equitable work culture in a holistic manner. The toolkit includes a Gender Equality Diagnostic Tool[11] which can be used to analyse the status of gender equality and identify gaps within an organisation. This is accompanied by a Gender Equality Strategy Guide which provides a step-by-step approach to implementing the change process, planning the organisation's future gender equality objectives and actions, and monitoring progress over time. Similarly, the Diversity Council of Australia has a tool that assists organisations to conduct a Diversity Survey to understand the composition of their employees which can help the organisation to make informed decisions about the directions and aspirations of an organisation. The Australian Network on Disability also has a comprehensive Access and Inclusion Index[13] which enables organisations to self-assess and measure their progress towards achieving inclusion of people with disabilities.

Toolkits

More activities related to assessing and measuring diversity in the WASH sector can be found in the GEDSI in the WASH workforce database.

II. Attraction

This section talks about the various factors that shape a person's decision to pursue technical, policy, research and other professional roles in the WASH sector, with a focus on women, people with disabilities and sexual and gender minorities. Understanding the factors that influence who an organisation attracts to its workforce, and what barriers exist, can enable WASH actors to strategically attract diverse talent. Additionally, WASH actors can support the organisations that they work with (government, private sector, CSOs) to develop initiatives that attract a diverse set of people to the WASH sector through a deep understanding of the barriers that start during childhood.

In many locations, women and children are responsible for fetching, carrying, storing and managing household water. Moreover, they closely engage with water resources and thus have intimate knowledge of water quality and quantity issues.[14] With respect to sanitation as well, women and girls are often the most adversely affected when clean and safe sanitation facilities are not available to them. Along with women and girls, SGM communities also experience systematic exclusion from WASH services and systems as they face issues of access to sanitation, menstrual hygiene, discrimination and violence.[15] Similarly, people with disabilities face physical barriers to using WASH facilities, as most WASH infrastructure is designed without their engagement or an understanding of their needs.[16]

While it is well known that women play a critical role in water-related tasks in communities, as seen from their representation in community organisations (village water and sanitation committees, water user associations, etc.), this has not translated to the same level of representation in formal WASH institutions and organisations. Research shows that women are an underrepresented group at water utilities and comprise only 18 per cent of the sector's paid workforce.[8] Moreover, they are found to be overrepresented in domains such as administration, customer relations, accounting and human resources, which are traditionally viewed as roles suitable for women, as opposed to field-based technical positions, operations, maintenance and leadership roles.[8] Such imbalances are often a reflection of broader labour market trends.

Examples of activities

→ Outreach programs

→ Gender-sensitive curriculum

→ Apprenticeship programs

→ Scholarships and subsidies

→ Youth networks

→ Mentor programs

For more examples of activities, please see the [database](#).

It has been found that stereotypes play a large part in the WASH sector some of the reasons behind this scenario (lack of gender parity), it has been commonly found that **stereotypes** play a large part in the WASH sector failing to attract a diverse talent and people from diverse disciplines. Prevailing social norms mean that fewer women, SGM and people with disabilities opt for STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) courses in secondary school and higher/tertiary education.[17] Lack of accessibility for people with disabilities and ongoing discrimination such as bullying faced by SGM, create barriers to continuing education. Further, employers also have a perception that engineering and technical jobs are 'men's jobs' which reinforces the discouragement that women (in all their diversity) face from their families, and society in general, about pursuing courses and careers in traditionally male-dominated areas. These stereotypes are reinforced at the organisational level, in the form of expectations about who does what kinds of jobs, and in recruitment for these roles. There is also a need to recognise the importance of including diverse disciplines beyond STEM in the WASH workforce, including people from social science, politics and geography backgrounds. For example, the Victorian Government in Australia has has included candidates with a diversity of skills and expertise in climate change, renewable energy, community engagement, regional development, and recycled and stormwater management, on their state water boards.[18]

Box 1 **CSOs working with partner organisation to attract diverse talent[19]**

The Governement of Australia funded Timor-Leste Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Program, known locally as Bee, Saneamentu no Ijiene iha Komunidade (BESIK)[19] program adopted strategies to attract women to government roles at the sub-district level. It did this by supporting government in its recruitment strategies through: (1) sending job announcements out through civil society networks (i.e. not only through job placement agencies which men mostly frequent); (2) indicating on job announcements that candidates who did not have a motorbike licence would be supported in securing one; (3) shortlisting all female candidates, and (4) ensuring a gender equal interview panel. These strategies were only adopted in the second round of recruitment, after seeing that the first round applicants were overwhelmingly men. With the above strategies adopted in the second round, there were noticeably more women recruited, achieving close to gender parity.

People with disabilities, in particular women with disabilities, face **'ableism'**, which refers to attitudes in society that devalue and limit the potential of people with disabilities. Common misperceptions of people with disabilities are that they may be less worthy of respect or consideration, and less able to contribute and participate. This was evident in the research in Indonesia which found that there were no successful applicants among people with disabilities to vacancies in the WASH government workforce, in spite of laws and regulations to ensure rights of people with disabilities.[20] The **limited number of role models** who are women and diverse WASH professionals, especially in technical and leadership roles, is another common barrier which has contributed to people in these groups having lower levels of interest in careers in technical and professional WASH jobs. It is harder to imagine yourself doing a particular job if you have never seen someone who looks like you doing it. Exposing young girls and women in all their diversity to role models greatly helps to increase their knowledge about potential career avenues. Such role models promote positive beliefs about pursuing careers in traditionally male-dominated areas. They help dismantle stereotypes and build the self-confidence of women and people with disabilities to pursue a less conventional career path.[8]

People with disabilities experience a significantly lower quality of access to water and sanitation compared to other household members, and up to 80 per cent of people with disabilities are unable to collect water themselves.[21] Cultural stigma, community attitudes and communication barriers commonly exclude people with disabilities from accessing WASH facilities. When accessing WASH, women with disabilities are more affected by gender-based violence and cultural norms around menstruation compared to other women in the community. Employing people with disabilities within WASH programs helps to ensure that WASH facilities are disability-inclusive, and are built to Universal Design standards,[22] enabling people with disabilities to equally benefit from, and participate in WASH programs.[23] Having people with disabilities as co-workers can also help to shift norms, and the attitudes and perceptions of their capabilities.

Absence of role models seen as one of top five barriers to women's leadership[24]

Research on female Commune Committee for Women and Children (CCWC) Chairs responsible for WASH programs found that CCWCs ranked 'not having enough role models' as being in the top five barriers to women's leadership in Cambodia. Typically, it was found twhat there were only approximately 1-3 women who were part of the commune council which was made up of typically 11 people. In part, this was why it was perceived that there were few role models for younger women and minorities. One of the reasons that this was found to be the case was that the commune councillors were elected after a pre-selection process. Therefore, it is not only recruitment processes (such as those in a traditional workplace) that are factors to consider with respect to increasing the representation of women in the commune council, and in managing WASH programs at the local level.

Box 2

What can WASH actors do to attract more women in all their diversity to the WASH sector?

WASH actors can play a key role by creating an enabling environment to support a diversity of people to choose a career in the WASH sector. They can organise (or facilitate) **outreach programs** in schools, education fairs and career forums to share information and career prospects in the various technical WASH-related fields. The location of such events is important to keep in mind if they are to reach women, SGM and people with disabilities outside capital cities (rural and provincial areas), and ensure accessibility. Outreach programs are particularly important in overcoming barriers for youth with disabilities. Particular attention should be paid to ensuring these programs target segregated education and employment settings, as well as Organisations of People with Disabilities (OPDs). For example, the Water Authority of Fiji (WAF) has a two-day outreach program targeting secondary school students, women's community groups and business associations to raise awareness of the value of water and to encourage women to pursue careers with WAF. Engineers Without Borders Australia have a similar school outreach program where they send their volunteers to primary and secondary schools throughout Australia to deliver education/awareness material aimed at inspiring students about STEM courses and humanitarian engineering. Their initiatives also have a diverse focus on engaging indigenous and women students as well as those from low socio-economic backgrounds. Peer networks, such as Women in Engineering (WiE) Pacific and Timor-Leste Network, also provide important support mechanisms for women working in male-dominated fields. The Australian Volunteers Program also encourages and supports SGM and people with disabilities to participate in the program.[25]

Outreach programs

WASH actors can also work with relevant government ministries to encourage diversity and inclusive participation in STEM and other WASH-related disciplines by making **changes to the curriculum** so that courses include positive gender role models.[26] Some examples in this regard include the UNESCO International Bureau for Education who, with the collaboration of the Ministry of Education Malaysia, have developed a 'Resource Pack for Gender-Responsive STEM Education' in 2017. More recently, the Australian Government engaged several partners to develop a Girls in STEM Toolkit (the GiST) to encourage school-aged girls' participation in STEM activities, influence their subject selection and enable them to understand the diverse range of STEM careers available to them. To encourage the participation of people with disabilities in WASH-related courses, disability-inclusive education can be applied to support the independent learning of students with disabilities. CBM has developed a comprehensive resource on 'The Transformative Power of Disability-Inclusive Education'[27] to support education systems that can better meet both the general and specific learning needs of all children.[27]

Revising the curriculum

In addition to promoting inclusivity in mainstream education (schools and universities), WASH actors can also promote similar initiatives in WASH-related technical and vocational education and training courses (TVET).[7] TVET courses which have sought to create disability-inclusive programs and address barriers to inclusion have proven to be effective in improving employment outcomes for students with disabilities.[28]

WASH actors can also leverage their partner networks to develop **internship/apprenticeship programs** with various water and sanitation organisations (including private sector organisations) which will help to create exposure to the sector and tackle the stereotypes[29] around gendered and inclusive career options. For instance, Unitywater Australia encourages the participation of women in their apprenticeship programs and in 2019-20 they had women apprentices in their Mechanical and Electrical team. **Scholarship programs** and subsidies for tuition fees have been found to increase the uptake of WASH-related engineering courses in Lao PDR and Cambodia.[7, 30]

Apprenticeships and scholarships

Lastly, WASH actors can develop and support **youth networks** of women WASH professionals including those with disabilities, who can engage with schools and universities to share knowledge and information, provide mentoring, and break down the gender stereotypes in the sector. Australian Water Partnership has a youth engagement program to attract, engage and empower Australia's young water professionals through knowledge and experience sharing.

Youth networks

More activities related to attracting women, people with disabilities, marginalised groups, and other minorities to the WASH sector can be found in the GEDSI in the WASH workforce [database](#).

III. Recruitment

Continued efforts to attract diverse talent to the WASH sector will be inadequate unless there are enough roles available, and recruitment policies and processes at workplaces are conducive to hiring women, sexual and gender minorities, people with disabilities and other marginalised individuals and groups (including minorities based on racial or cultural backgrounds). This is evident as the increase in women STEM graduates over the years has not translated to an increase in their participation in the labour market for WASH-related jobs. A global survey across 28 countries revealed that water companies tend to hire more men than women on average.[8] Additionally, people with disabilities continue to face barriers to employment. Women with disabilities, in particular, are up to five times less likely to be employed in comparison to men with disabilities.[28] This section discusses the various barriers that women, people with disabilities, and other marginalised groups tend to encounter at the recruitment phase, and the role WASH actors can play in overcoming these barriers.

Examples of activities

→ Rephrasing job advertisements

→ Training on anonymous recruitment procedures

→ Inclusive hiring policies

→ Quotas or hiring incentives

For more examples of activities, please see the database.

Box 3 **Political and personal interests are part of recruitment processes, undermining diversity[20]**

In Indonesia, while recruitment for government positions (including the WASH workforce) are organised through a selection committee, the ultimate decision to appoint new civil servants lies with a 'Trustee Personnel Officer', which at the district level is the leader of the district (Bupati). Research found that this system had the potential to undermine the formal principles of transparency, non-discrimination, fairness and equality in recruitment processes, and allowed political and personal interests to interfere, as there was no requirement for the Bupati to base their final decision on the official ranking that candidates received.
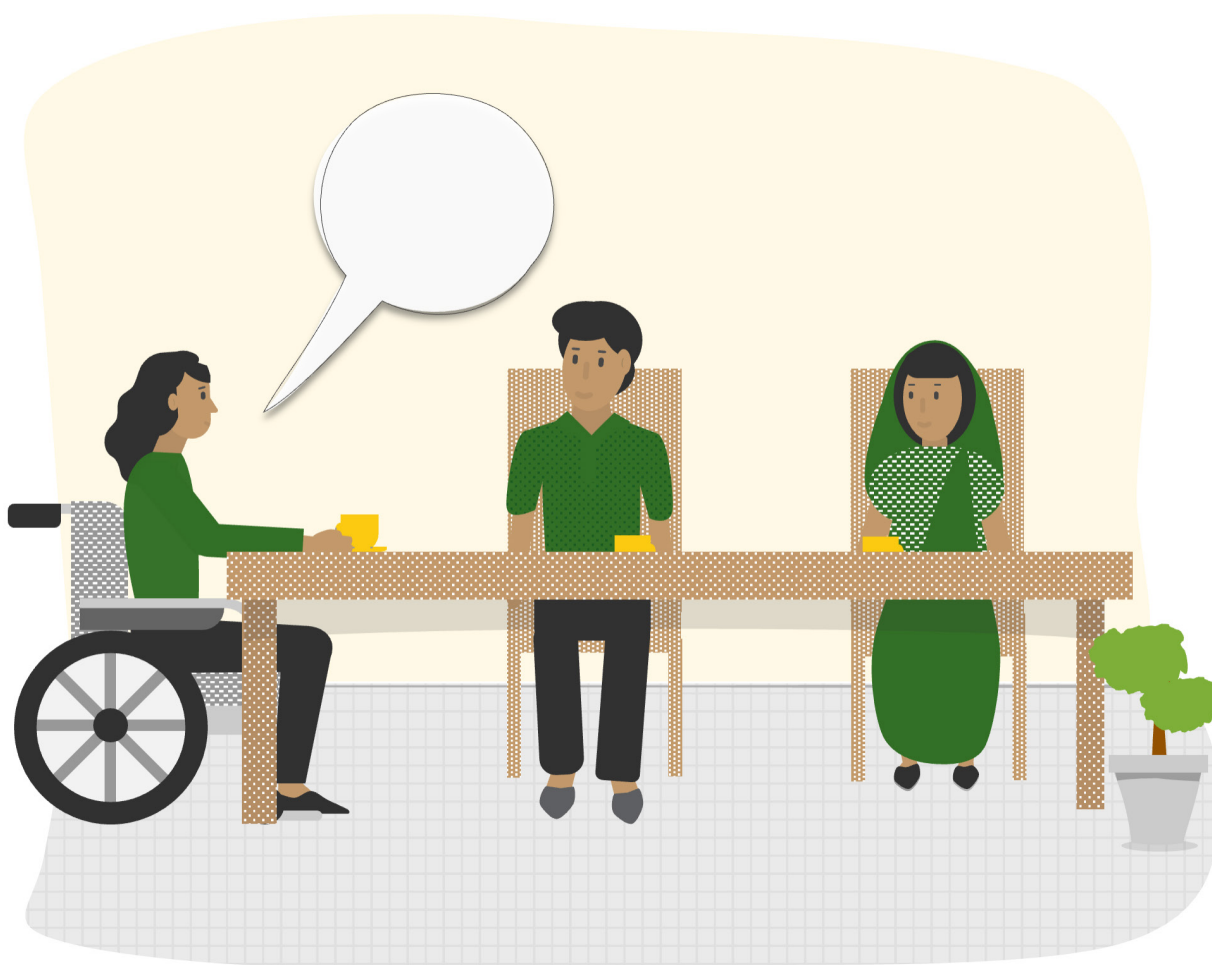
Recruitment processes in most WASH organisations reflect an **unconscious bias** towards men and able-bodied candidates in terms of hiring policies, the targeting of candidates, the language used in framing job descriptions, and various aspects of the interview process. Firstly, female graduates and people with disabilities are less likely to be targeted as potential candidates in the WASH sector, as is evident in the **gender-biased and ablest language** used in job descriptions for a lot of the technical roles that are traditionally seen as male-dominated. For instance, some job advertisements may have unrealistic expectations of minimum years of experience for a senior level role, and this disadvantages women (in all their diversity) who have had to take time off from paid work to have a family.[31] Other job descriptions may include discriminatory statements such as 'applicants must be of sound mind and body/good health' which can deter people with disabilities from applying, even though they may be perfectly capable of doing the job. Gender-coded wording in job descriptions may deter women and SGM from applying for some jobs as they may self-assess as not being suitable for the job, even though they may be qualified for it. Such practices further reinforce societal stereotypes that certain jobs are better suited to a particular gender. The BESIK program in Timor-Leste successfully managed to remove the requirement to have a driver's license from the job descriptions for WASH Community facilitators, which prompted more women and people with disabilities to apply ([Box 1]). Women also have to apply for a significantly higher number of jobs to receive the same number of **interview invitations** compared to equally qualified men, and this pattern is further compounded for women with children, older women, women with disabilities and women from racial and ethnic minorities.[32]

Secondly, some employers may be reluctant to hire women of child-bearing age because they perceive a lack of attachment to the labour market or because they may not be willing to cover maternity responsibilities.[26] Moreover, government departments in some countries may not have the budget support for maternity replacements, and this can lead to resentment from other colleagues who must take up extra tasks on behalf of female staff on maternity leave. People with disabilities are less likely to be targeted as potential candidates due to the misconceptions and **attitudinal bias** towards people with disabilities and the assumptions made about their employability, such as the limited understanding or dismissal of a person's capacity, skills, and ability to perform in a workplace setting.[33] Such discriminatory attitudes on the part of recruitment teams and wider staff result in social and network isolation, and they are some of the notable barriers to participation in the workforce for people with disabilities.[34]

Box 4

Senior government staff need to know about laws and regulations to promote diversity[20]

Research among the WASH government workforce in Indonesia revealed a lack of awareness and understanding of the existing laws and regulations that support the recruitment of people with a disability. Moreover, even when recruitment complied with the regulations, it was a challenge to find successful candidates, demonstrating the need for specific outreach strategies to attract applicants.

Recruitment panels have been found to exhibit **implicit bias at the interview stage** by posing prejudiced and personal questions about whether the candidate is married or planning to start a family.[35] These attitudes continue in spite of research showing the value that part-time working parents bring to society and the economic benefits of retaining staff.[36,37] Moreover, women and men are often evaluated using different standards. For instance, women tend to have their qualifications and achievements more closely scrutinised. Similar discrimination is likely to be experienced by people with disabilities, SGM and people of minority racial backgrounds. Gender bias, and other forms of bias including homophobia, transphobia and ableism are also reflected in interviews, affecting perceptions of how likeable or competent a candidate is. For instance, women (in all their diversity) are more likely to be at a disadvantage while negotiating higher pay at the recruitment stage.[32] Additionally, when workplace interviews are conducted in **inaccessible environments** (physical structures and/or barriers to communication) they can prevent people with disabilities from having an equal opportunity to be recruited. Employers may not understand the barriers to inclusion for different types of disabilities, and thus, they may not implement accessible workplace environments.[38]

The barriers mentioned above are exacerbated by **discriminatory laws** in many countries that prohibit women from working in certain sectors or that enable employers to pay people with disabilities at rates below the minimum wage. A World Bank (2018) dataset from 189 countries revealed that 26 countries have legal restrictions on women working in the water sector as plumbers, working in sewers, working at night in water-related construction and maintenance jobs, etc. An ILO study on discrimination against SGM workers showed that legislation protecting the rights of SGM workers is absent in a majority of countries.[39] Global estimates suggest that up to 80 per cent of people with disabilities remain unemployed and excluded from entering the labour force.[40]

What can WASH actors do to make recruitment policies and processes more inclusive?

WASH actors have a key role to play in supporting their partners, including government organisations, to dismantle some of the traditional recruitment systems to make them more inclusive. There is also a need for training, for role modelling from leaders and for creating an inclusive organisational culture to influence the attitudes of those who will be recruiting new staff.

Rephrasing job ads to make them more inclusive and gender-neutral has proven to be a useful and efficient way to encourage diverse applicants for a position. For instance, City West Water in Melbourne, Australia found that the use of certain words/phrases such as "relationship management" instead of "stakeholder management" were likely to attract more women candidates. Highlighting benefits such as flexible working hours, reasonable accommodations[41] for people with disabilities, adding a commitment to inclusivity and diversity, and promoting job vacancies via existing women and SGM employees and people with disabilities in the organisation has also proven to be effective. Thames Water in the United Kingdom saw a surge in applicants for manual frontline jobs by women after removing gendered words from their job adverts. They used an online tool that identified words such as 'competitive', 'confident' and 'champion' as 'masculine coded'. Other similar tools include Textio, which can be used to review gender-coded language in job descriptions; and search engines with the Google Chrome extension S.H.E. (Search Human Equaliser) which can be used to avoid male-dominated results. Another strategy that can be used is including depictions of people with disabilities (particularly women with disabilities) in the images used in workplace job advertisements. This demonstrates to potential candidates with disability that they are welcome as well as promoting the value of people with disabilities as part of the community to challenge harmful attitudes towards disability.

Inclusive job advertisements

Training organisations in the use of **anonymous recruitment procedures** is another way of reducing the covert biases that may be triggered at the hiring stage. De-identifying candidates by removing their names, genders or other identifiers can help to minimise stereotyping to some extent at the short-listing stage. However, once shortlisted candidates have to undergo an interview, and if there isn't a diverse panel, it is likely that the dominant unconscious bias will prevail. Hence, such efforts will be incomplete unless organisations ensure that they have diverse interview panels as part of their hiring processes. AURECON[42] and Icon Water in Canberra, Australia are piloting inclusive or anonymous recruitment actions to promote diversity in the organisation.

Box 5

Case study from WaterAid Timor-Leste[20]

Often, people with disabilities (particularly women and girls) may not be well represented in schools, universities and vocational training and education programs because of barriers to education. WaterAid Timor-Leste implemented a number of strategies to overcome barriers to the employment of people with disabilities in their organisation:

- Using purposeful advertising methods, for example, reducing the emphasis on tertiary education in the job advertisement and including 'people with disabilities are encouraged to apply'

- Advertising directly with the national umbrella organisation for people with disabilities to recruit a woman with disability into their WASH workforce

- Engaging the local Disability Employment Service and/or Organisations of People with Disabilities (DPOs/OPDs) to audit their office building and adapting it to make it more accessible

- When one of their staff acquired a disability, they sought technical advice from CBM Australia and OPDs to support implementation of reasonable accommodations for the staff member so that they could continue to be an effective worker.

The team has learnt a great deal about inclusion through having colleagues with disabilities, which has led to a better understanding of inclusion in their WASH work more broadly.

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Anonymous recruitment procedures

WASH actors can support their partners in drafting **inclusive hiring policies** which ensure a diverse recruitment panel and a structured interview process that steers clear of informal conversations on personal questions. Unitywater in Australia has a Diversity of Hire initiative that provides an opportunity to highlight diversity, including for SGM and people with disabilities, by tracking candidate diversity throughout the recruitment process and ensuring that job advertisements reflect diverse demographics and diverse interview panels. Additionally, WASH actors can organise/facilitate training of employees on the recruitment panel to overcome their implicit and unconscious bias. WASH actors can also partner with specialist recruitment services such as the Trans Employment Program Australia to improve recruitment of gender diverse people in the workplace, and Disability Employment Services to improve the recruitment process for candidates with disabilities. The Disability Services Commission, in partnership with the Public Sector Commission for Western Australian businesses, has designed a toolkit that helps to ensure recruitment and selection practices are inclusive and accessible to people with disabilities, dispels common myths and provides answers to frequently asked questions.[43]

Inclusive hiring policies

Engaging with Disability Employment Service and/or Organisations of People with Disabilities (DPOs/OPDs) and general disability service providers can help to gain general knowledge on how to make recruitment processes accessible. Other disability-inclusive recruitment tools include 'TalentWorks' Accessible eRecruiting for Employers[44] that was developed by the Partnership on Employment and Accessible Technology, and the Australian Network on Disability's 'Disability Confident Recruiter'[45] which supports recruitment processes to be accessible for people with disabilities. Another important aspect of recruitment is the accessibility of job advertisements and interview processes. Advertisements should be provided in a number of different modes and formats and there should be different ways to apply, including ensuring that web-based application portals are accessible. Including a question for applicants about whether they require reasonable accommodations to participate equally in interviews can help to avoid barriers at the interview stage.

Quotas (which are rules committing an organisation to putting forward women, or members of other marginalised groups, for a certain number or percentage of its positions) for certain roles, or hiring incentives are other ways in which WASH actors can guide their partners to promote an inclusive hiring process.[7,46] For example, Tajikistan's Dushanbe Vodokanal water and sanitation utility plans to put in place quotas for female interns and collect sex-disaggregated data on interns and interns that become employees.[47] The Chamber of Industries of Guayaquil, Ecuador, which has a WASH sectoral group, has sought to increase the employment of people with disabilities through a hiring quota.[48] In addition to this quota, a three-step program was created to enable meaningful employment of people with disabilities within the organisation.

More activities related to recruiting women (in all their diversity), people with disabilities, marginalised groups, and other minorities to the WASH sector can be found in the GEDSI in the WASH workforce database.

Partner with rights holder groups

Quotas

IV. Retention

This section talks about the interplay of workplace dynamics and the role that WASH actors can play in supporting organisations in the WASH sector to retain women and diverse talent, and foster an equal and inclusive culture in the workplace. Gender dynamics on the job are shaped by workplace culture, which is often driven by societal norms; formalised structures, policies and guidelines; and the interplay between these.

In many of the STEM-related fields, women (in all their diversity) are more likely to leave the workforce at a higher rate than men and this pattern has also been found in WASH organisations. The gap between men and women in their average tenures tenures, with women's tenures being much shorter, is particularly striking in technical positions such as engineers and managers.[8] Common reasons include but are not limited to: inflexible work arrangements that conflict with care responsibilities, violence or harassment at work, feelings of isolation in a male-dominated work environment, the unspoken responsibility put on women to take on the 'emotional load' for the team, discriminatory laws related to maternity leave, low and unequal wages, and lack of basic facilities such as hygienic and menstrual friendly toilets. Most of these reasons are applicable to SGM as well, who may additionally face discrimination in relation to gender-specific dress codes, access to toilets and lack of procedures around gender transitioning.[49]

Examples of activities

→ Equality, diversity and inclusion strategy, endorsed by the Executive level

→ Partnering with a Disability Employment Service and/or Organisations of People with Disabilities (DPOs/OPDs)

→ Policies and initiatives to redistribute care responsibilities

→ Formal and informal networks of women WASH professionals

For more examples of activities, please see the database.

Box 6

Gender norms and expectations within and outside work can restrict women's workforce participation[20]

Research among the government WASH workforce in Indonesia revealed bias against married female employees as they were not encouraged to conduct field activities, and instead were restricted to tasks at the office. The unequal burden of domestic responsibilities at home contributed to the manifestation of such biases. WASH-related roles at the sub-district level created their own set of gender-specific challenges and real and perceived security issues for women. Sanitarian workers are required to travel a lot for field inspections and latrine construction. The requirement of high mobility, the fact that few female sanitarians can ride a motor bike, as well as the distances involved and poor road conditions, were found to be challenging for female sanitarians. Due to social norms, it was not considered acceptable for women to travel to some remote locations by themselves, and this required female sanitarians to adjust their schedules to suit those of their male colleagues to ensure they had a chaperone.

Unpaid care work and domestic roles are found to have a serious impact on women's labour force participation but these roles continue to be undervalued by the economy and society as they entail tasks that women have been traditionally performing without pay.[26] The nature of work in infrastructure-related industries including WASH organisations is often perceived as gendered as there is an expectation that employees will work longer hours, and flexible or part-time work is not encouraged. This kind of work culture puts women with families and care responsibilities at a disadvantage as they must juggle their job and domestic roles.[23,50] As a result, difficulties coping with demanding work commitments further reinforce employer bias against hiring women, fostering occupational and sectoral segregation and perpetuating gender pay gaps.[26] This bias affects every aspect of the women's work lives, perpetuates exclusion, shapes power dynamics and hinders women's ability to achieve their full potential on the job. Many women take on what is known as the triple burden of roles in society (home, employment, community work), and these three roles and the time and energy that they take, influence labour force participation.

Gendered roles within the household in some societies place most of the burden of unpaid care and domestic work on women, and place restrictions on their mobility after dark. This can inhibit women's capacity to participate in the workforce. The WASH sector can play an important role here in promoting shared care and labour roles in the household, and hence women's greater participation in the workforce. Sharing of domestic responsibilities links to the examination of parental leave policies for newborns, i.e. the 'use it or lose it' for paternal leave that has been implemented in Scandinavian countries, which has increased the number of fathers taking leave and has helped pave the way for their partners to return to work.[51] Further, lack of statutory rights to maternity protection affects 60 per cent of women worldwide who do not have access to maternity leave.[52]

Violence and harassment, including verbal and sexual harassment in the workplace is another major reason for women, SGM and people with disabilities to drop out of the workforce,[4,49] and again, this pattern is amplified in traditionally male-dominated industries. In many male-dominated sectors, sexual harassment is often normalised and therefore underreported, as women are hesitant to further stand out in an already isolated work environment. The WASH sector also remains weak in terms of anti-harassment policies, guidelines and reporting mechanisms as revealed in a World Bank (2019) study of water companies, which found only 28 per cent offer sexual harassment training for their employees and only 52 per cent have policies geared toward preventing sexual harassment.

Inadequate or inaccessible facilities that do not cater to the needs of marginalised groups is another factor that contributes to high turnover of a diverse workforce in the WASH sector. Many traditionally male-dominated workplaces, including many WASH organisations, lack inclusive facilities such as accessible toilets, gender-specific toilets, changing rooms, childcare and lactation facilities.[8] The lack of menstrual hygiene management infrastructure and services (bins, handwashing facilities) is another significant barrier to participation for all people in the workforce who menstruate. Additionally, many workplaces, including those in the WASH sector, are not accessible for people with disabilities. Physical barriers include stairs without ramps at entry points, narrow doorways, inaccessible car parking or long distances to accessible transport.[53] Reports show that people with disabilities may be excluded from employment due to inaccessible latrines.[54] Low-cost accommodations, such as accessible latrine facilities, are yet to be widely incorporated within WASH policies, workplaces and universal practices.

Box 7

Practices to support workplace flexibility in Indonesia[20]

Research investigating gender dynamics in the Indonesian WASH government workforce found that while breastfeeding facilities were mostly adequate within the national ministries, no facilities were available in district government offices. However, at the district level, support for women to return home to breastfeed, bring their babies to the workplace or leave work early for caring duties was provided.

What can WASH actors do to foster inclusive workplaces?

WASH actors can play an important role in transforming their own work cultures, and they can influence their partners and society at large, by recognising biases where they exist and supporting their partners to create a safe space to address power dynamics in the workplace.

Developing a **GEDSI strategy** with executive support, ownership and promotion can help in transforming the overall organisational culture. This can include training employees on addressing unconscious bias and facilitating conversations around diverse experiences and perspectives; ensuring a diverse and inclusive information, communication and decision-making process in the organisation; designing ways to overcome gender segregation in certain technical roles;[23] and ensuring meeting locations and timings are flexible to support caregiving responsibilities and to reasonably accommodate flexible working hours for people with disabilities, etc. Workplace adjustments and reasonable accommodations have been proven to maximise productivity, staff wellbeing and employee retention.[55] Diversity and inclusion policies can include guidelines to support people who are gender transitioning, focusing both on supporting the employee as well as on cultivating a work environment conducive to the transition process. USAID's Engendering Utilities Program, Baron Water and Sydney Water are some organisations that have long-term diversity, equality and inclusion strategies. The Diversity Council of Australia, in partnership with Google and Deloitte, has developed an evidence-based model for designing and implementing organisational change related to diversity and inclusion.

GEDSI Strategy

Another way in which WASH actors can support their partners to attract, recruit and retain candidates with a disability is by **partnering with disability employment services** and/or Organisations of People with Disabilities (DPOs/OPDs) where they exist. For instance, the Australian Network on Disability and Disability Employment have developed a guide to support employers to recruit from the entire talent pool and promote an inclusive workplace that attracts and retains people with disabilities. The guide also aims to create shared understanding and a shared language to assist disability employment services and employers to work effectively together to achieve mutually beneficial outcomes.[56] This is a useful resource as a report by the Equality and Human Rights Commission (2012)[57] found that, "27 per cent of disabled people who had left a job for reasons connected [with their disability] felt that they could have stayed with appropriate support".

Partner with disabled people's organisations

Accessible environments are key to supporting people with disabilities to access workforces in the WASH sector. It is estimated that when infrastructure is not accessible, it excludes people with disabilities from the labour force, and the resulting economic loss is as high as seven per cent of a nation's Gross Domestic Product. In Bangladesh, exclusion of people with disabilities from the labour market results in a total loss of US$891 million/year.[34] Embedding the Universal Design Guidelines[53] into workplaces, and consulting people with disabilities in WASH infrastructure planning, implementation and monitoring is an important step toward ensuring accessible workplaces. WASH actors can promote policies that support the provision of '**reasonable accommodation**' (also referred to as reasonable adjustments) in the workplace for employees with disabilities to ensure assistance or changes to a position or workplace that will enable an employee to do their job despite having a disability. Examples include allowing flexible work schedules, increasing accessibility within the workplace, adjusting work tasks, and providing training and other materials in different formats. Inaccessibility is related to a lack of inclusive cultural norms in the organisation and therefore, the more the organisation cultivates inclusive practice, the more likely accessibility issues will be identified and addressed.

Reasonable accommodation

Policies and activities that aim at **redistributing care responsibilities** contribute to promoting a gender sensitive work culture and they also address societal norms (such as dynamics within the family and expected roles and responsibilities).[58] This can include advocating for laws that prevent employers from firing pregnant women and which guarantee their return to the same or an equivalent position after maternity leave. They can also include supporting young parents by introducing diverse family-friendly policies, practices and facilities in the workplace such as paid maternity and paternity leave;[52] ensuring that parental leave policies recognise sexual and gender minorities and all types of families/parenting situations; on-site clean, private and comfortable lactation rooms and flexible work arrangements for all caregivers. Measures such as these can contribute significantly to retaining staff. AySA (Argentine Water and Sanitation company) and Malindi Water and Sewerage Company, Kenya, provide lactation/ nursing rooms in the workplace for their female workers. USAID has a program that builds the capacity of Kenyan water utilities to mainstream gender equality in service delivery and institutional operations.[23] Such initiatives recognise, value and support the multiple roles that people play, as well as attempt to change societal norms related to traditional gender roles and the burdens that they bring to a range of people.

> Policies to redistribute care responsibilities

Another way in which WASH actors can support the retention of women employees in WASH workplaces is by creating **formal and informal networks** in the sector which can provide a platform for sharing experiences, learnings and peer-to-peer mentoring. For example, the African Water Association fosters networks of women professionals in the WASH sector. The Association of Women in Water, Energy and Environment has a mentoring program to bring together professional women working in the sector to share experiences and knowledge. The Stonewall programme has a webinar on supporting inclusive LGBTQI+ employee network groups.

> Networks

Many of the constraints faced by women, SGM and people with disabilities at the workplace arise as a result of organisational leadership and culture. The lack of inclusive policies, facilities and dynamics arises because of limited diversity among decision-makers in an organisation and this highlights the importance of supporting and encouraging women's (in all their diversity) career advancement. This will be discussed in the next section. What is also needed is reimagining how decisions are made within the organisation i.e. by inclusive consultation and consensus building, so that decision-making is informed by the broadest diversity of perspectives possible.

Box 8

WEwork collective[59] – Cambodia and SHE Investments[60]

WaterSHED has developed a mentorship and capacity-building network to support female entrepreneurs in the market for WASH products and services where they receive support and training on personal, professional, and community leadership; business planning; and financial literacy.

Similarly, SHE Investments is a business incubator that supports female entrepreneurs in Cambodia. They provide business training, mentoring, financing, and networking opportunities, for women from all business sizes and sectors, including WASH.

Box 9

Changing gender norms while doing no harm[61]

Changing long-held social norms can provoke strong feelings and often resistance from those who hold power, and can even result in backlash and violence. Gender norms relate to the socially constructed expectations of how women, men, girls and boys act, and the roles that they play in society as well as their expected relationships with each other. Gender norms vary between contexts and societies, and they change over time, but when they are challenged, or when people call for them to change, other people can have strong reactions.

A 'do no harm' approach looks deeply at how to avoid unintentionally increasing disadvantaged people's exposure to violence through programs that are intended to support them. For example, the NGO SNV explain in their practice brief (Developing approaches to 'Do No Harm') that there are a range of ways that poor institutional practices can cause unintentional harm. For example: '*Female staff may be subject to suspicion, violence, and family backlash if sent to work alone with male colleagues without the presence of another woman; and people who may be marginalised (e.g. due to gender, sexuality, ethnicity or disability) and take on leadership positions, may be sexually harassed, bullied or abused in the workplace or in their leadership roles or pro-actively undermined.*'[61] A 'do no harm' approach will consider and anticipate these reactions and put in place measures to mitigate them, informed by rights holder organisations (women's, sexual and gender minorities, disabled people's organisations). It may also involve educating and bringing men and power holders along with the process so that they understand the changes that are being pursued, and can be part of creating positive changes for all.

More activities related to supporting women, people with disabilities, marginalised groups, and other minorities in the WASH sector can be found in the GEDSI in the WASH workforce database.

V. Advancement

Supporting women (in all their diversity), SGM and people with disabilities and marginalised groups in the workplace involves ensuring there are facilitated opportunities for them to be in positions of leadership, and that there is a nuanced understanding of any systemic barriers to them becoming leaders. This section discusses the various barriers that accompany career progression, and which need to be navigated to reach senior positions, and the role that WASH actors can play in supporting more diverse representation in leadership roles.

In the WASH sector, enabling women's leadership is important because women have extensive knowledge of water resources, sanitation and hygiene management and behaviours, and are typically highly engaged as users and managers of WASH. The need to strengthen women's leadership goes well beyond appointing women to token positions and includes enabling women's voices and perspectives to influence decision-making, which will in turn help to change gender norms and cultural attitudes.

Women's career advancement is often hindered by various factors, the most common ones being societal norms and perceptions (which affect women's perceptions about their own capabilities) and the systems and structures at the workplace that are not conducive to supporting women in senior roles (Box 10).

Examples of activities

→ Formal and informal networks

→ Training and professional development opportunities

→ Training staff on gender mainstreaming

→ Role models

For more examples of activities, please see the database.

Societal norms around **gender stereotypes** are so deeply ingrained that even with many women breaking the 'glass ceiling' and reaching leadership positions, these norms continue to exist and often burden women with the dual roles they have to play at work and at home. It is also important to note that gender norms intersect with other forms of identity-based discrimination, creating additional obstacles for women and gender non-binary people. Moreover, social and economic systems are structured around social and economic models that normalise women's caring roles. Hence, the issue is to do with norms and with the structures and systems that have been built around these norms and which help reproduce them over time even as norms are evolving. Norms and systems are mutually reinforcing, and both function as effective brakes on change.

An ILO Company Survey in 2013 revealed women's and men's **gendered social and reproductive roles** were a significant barrier to women's leadership. These roles, which are assigned by society, further manifest in workplace structures and culture in various forms, for example, women not gaining sufficient management experience to position themselves for promotions; men not being encouraged to take parental leave which makes it difficult to share the burden of childcare and other responsibilities; and constraints on women's time due to their assigned care responsibilities which make it difficult for them to devote time to the networking activities needed to build support for their leadership.[7] All these challenges are present in the WASH workforce as well, though little is known about SGM in the WASH workforce given the lack of research and focus in this area to date. Emerging research in the Indonesia WASH government sector revealed the complex "labyrinth" that women navigated to reach leadership positions which involved individual, family, community, and institutional domains and the intertwined gender norms and expectations within each of these domains.[62]

Box 10

Key constraints: limited financial, mobility and time resources[20]

Research among the WASH government workforce in Indonesia found that while many formal Government of Indonesia rules and policies supported the career progression of women and people with disabilities, limited financial, mobility and time resources meant that the training and education required for promotion were difficult to obtain. Social norms and deep structures, which view men as superior to women, were also found to limit women's career progression, yet exceptions in which men actively supported women's career ambitions were also identified. Moreover, often women's self-perceptions and dilemmas in prioritising their careers over their reproductive roles were found to act as a barrier to pursuing promotions or professional development opportunities.

Stereotypes about the qualities of good leaders systemically place women in all their diversity at a disadvantage, as the qualities traditionally associated with a good leader often intrinsically favour the able-bodied, cisgender, heterosexual male (ambitious, assertive, aggressive). On the other hand, women who do manage to reach leadership positions and conform to these traits are seen in a negative light, as they go against the prevalent norms of communal and feminine traits, thus placing women in a double bind.[8] Even with more and more women reaching leadership positions, the lack of trust of women leaders seems to persist because of deep-seated entrenched biases.[63] Additionally, the World Bank Group's Water Global Practice reports that people with disabilities are rarely seen in leadership and management roles throughout the WASH sector, due to institutional and attitudinal barriers towards disability.[16] Therefore, as a key strategy there is a need to broaden and shift ideas of leadership.

Box 11

Lack of leadership training – the #1 barrier identified by female WASH officers at commune level in Cambodia[24]

Research conducted by East Meets West and ISF–UTS through the Water for Women Fund found that Commune Committee for Women and Children(CCWC) Chairs at the commune level, who are responsible for WASH and women's and children's affairs, perceived a lack of leadership training for women as a significant barrier to leadership, with many expressing a desire for more training or training tailored to women's realities and needs.

Some interviewees mentioned that while in some cases training is available, access to it is inconsistent, as it is delivered by a range of organisations and is not always available. For example, one CCWC Chair stated that they: "receive a two-day leadership training per year for women, which is not enough" and another CCWC Chair stated that they "do not have new training courses related to leadership".

Mobility issues and a lack of tailored training options were also outlined: "Women have difficulty in travelling far from home and cannot go away long from the house for the training".

While these respondents identified a lack of leadership training as being a key barrier, they may also be experiencing a phenomenon related to low confidence, and a belief that a deficit in skills and confidence underlies inequalities in the workplace, as opposed to discriminatory practices and societal norms. There also may be an issue with the limitations of standalone training when not accompanied by an enabling context and opportunities to apply the skills and behaviours they have learned, and to have them valued in the workplace.

What can WASH actors do to enable equal opportunities for career advancement?

In traditionally male-dominated work environments including WASH organisations, **formal or informal networks** of WASH professionals can provide a supportive space to share experiences and challenges, and provide access to mentoring and leadership support. Such platforms provide the confidence women need to overcome their inhibitions in pursuing career advancement opportunities, and enable them to see themselves in leadership and decision-making roles. These platforms can be the basis for collective action and collective advocacy for policy and other changes within the WASH sector. The African Women Sanitation Professionals Network is one such platform for women working in sanitation. It helps to identify and address the barriers encountered by women sanitation professionals. The Women in Water Leadership Circle is a leadership program for female decision makers in Kenyan water services providers. This World Bank-supported program is aimed at tackling barriers related to work-life integration, power and influence, negotiation styles, and strategic networking, among others. There is often no SGM or disability equivalent of such groups and networks, though some global organisations have established active networks for a wider range of diverse groups.

Networks

Increased visibility of women in senior and leadership positions can have a catalytic effect on the work culture and gender diversity outcomes in an organisation. Such women are viewed as **role models** and empower women across the organisation to aspire to and pursue career advancement opportunities. Moreover, when organisations engage with rights holder organisations (RHOs) they gain a better understanding of the lived experiences of women, girls and the marginalised. This puts them in a more informed position to promote their leadership credentials.

Role models

Along with peer networks, training and professional development opportunities can support women, SGM and people with disabilities to upskill themselves in areas that are useful in leadership roles. Often, it has been found that where such opportunities exist, they are not equally accessible due to a host of reasons including timing, duration, accessibility, and the location of workshops and trainings, as well as costs and accommodations to enable a support person to attend (required by some women with disabilities).

When it comes to designing the content of leadership programs, it is important to note that often women don't recognise when they are already engaged in leadership, and that they tend to focus on their deficits more than on male-defined leadership traits and behaviours.[64] In such cases, these programs need to be partnered with efforts to broaden ideas about leadership, and they need to recognise that the leadership qualities and behaviours that are more typically displayed by women are also ones that are particularly important for success in 21st century organisations. All these factors should be considered when designing leadership development programmes. Leadership pathways and professional development programs, such as the one offered via the Disability Leadership Institute,[65] can support people with disabilities as they "are necessary for disabled people to contribute effectively and realise their career aspirations". Despite the limited number of people with disabilities in workforce leadership positions, they "possess characteristics associated with effective leadership", such as, "empathising with colleagues and encouraging them to progress, valuing teamwork and consciously striving to develop diverse, cohesive, organised teams with shared goals".[66]

Training and development

> **Women's Leadership Program**[67]
>
> WaterAid Cambodia has a leadership program which aims at empowering women WASH workers at the district and provincial levels with improved skills, knowledge and self-confidence. This is a comprehensive program which starts by identifying the challenges to women's participation in decision-making, followed by training on practical leadership styles, communication, listening and advocacy skills. It also provides an opportunity for knowledge-sharing, peer mentoring and strengthening the network of women in WASH.

Box 12

Another way WASH actors can support their partners in tackling social norms and promoting a work culture that enables the career development of women and other marginalised individuals and groups is by **training employees**, including managers, on gender sensitivity, disability awareness, diversity and gender mainstreaming. Such initiatives help to create awareness and increase the acceptability of flexible work cultures. They challenge assumptions about stereotypical gender roles and reduce bias to increase opportunities for career advancement. The Egypt Sustainable Rural Sanitation Services Program for Results is supporting water and sanitation companies to promote equal recruitment and promotion practices by reviewing their HR policies, promotion procedures and guidelines to ensure inclusion of gender neutral language for selecting people for top management positions.[8]

Sensitising employees

Box 13

Support from family is critical to career advancement – research findings from Indonesia[20]

Research among the WASH government workforce in Indonesia revealed that support (and even approval) from the husband and family plays a crucial role in enabling the career advancement of women, as this has implications for the division of household responsibilities including childcare. Such informal support from families and husbands in the form of household, childcare and emotional support enables women to continue their education, attend training and manage workloads. It was found to be almost as important as institutional support. This research did not specifically look at diverse women (single women or LGBTIQ+) which is why the findings are limited to those with husbands and families.

More activities related to advancing the careers of women, people with disabilities, marginalised groups, and other minorities to the WASH sector can be found in the GEDSI in the WASH workforce [database](#).
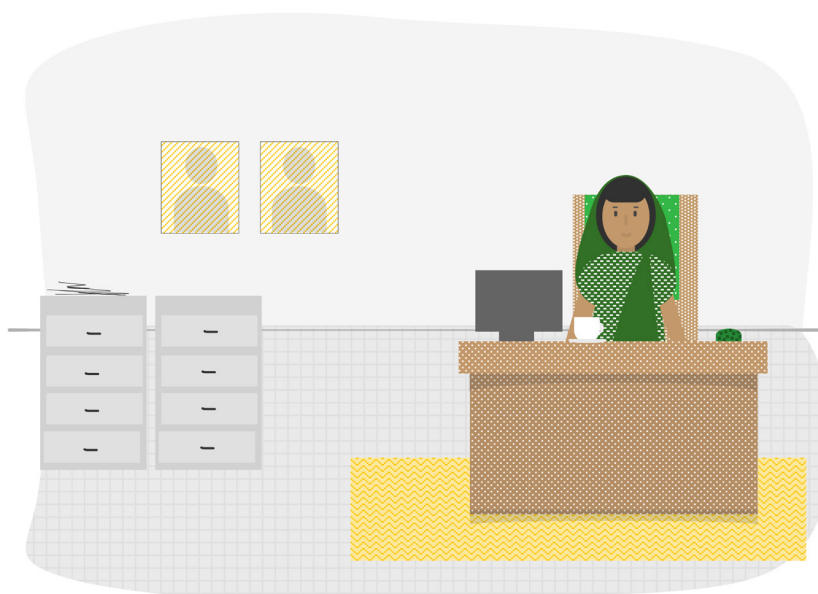
VI. Societal Expectations

This section looks beyond the workplace to examine the various stereotypes and norms that restrict people from participating in the WASH workforce. Taking a systems approach requires us to move beyond seeing the issue as an individual or organisational problem, to seeing it as a structural issue. This is the relatively invisible realm that permeates culture and organisations and influences decision-making subtly and in a generally socially accepted way. Diehl and Dzubinski argue that "most current efforts to promote women into leadership focus one by one on only a few barriers, primarily those within organisations, while failing to take into account the wide variety of barriers and their prevalence across all societal levels."[68] One way to consider the wide variety of barriers is in levels: macro, meso and micro levels as shown in Figure 3. This section focuses on the macro level, the invisible gender norms and dynamics that place constraints on people's choices.

> **Examples of activities**
>
> → Engage men to take the lead as agents of change.
>
> → Partner with community groups to draw on their experience in shifting norms.
>
> → Adopt trans-inclusive policies in the workplace.
>
> For more examples of activities, please see the database.

Box 14

Gendered norms maintaining inequality[20]

Research from the WASH government workforce in Indonesia revealed the prevalence of various norms that lead to women having to prioritise their reproductive and caring roles. Moreover, norms that maintain unequal gender relations were also identified. These related to men being considered superior, being served by women, and feeling shame if their wives had higher professional positions than they had. All these norms collectively contributed to the limiting of women's career ambitions as they meant they were unable to pursue further education and training. Nevertheless, there was also evidence of younger couples breaking such gendered norms, with husbands taking on care and household responsibilities, and encouraging and supporting their wives' professional advancement.

Macro
- Gender stereotypes
- Constraints on people's choices

Meso
- Exclusion from informal networks
- Salary inequity
- Tokenism
- Unequal standards
- Workplace harassment

Micro
- Work-life conflict
- Communication style constraints
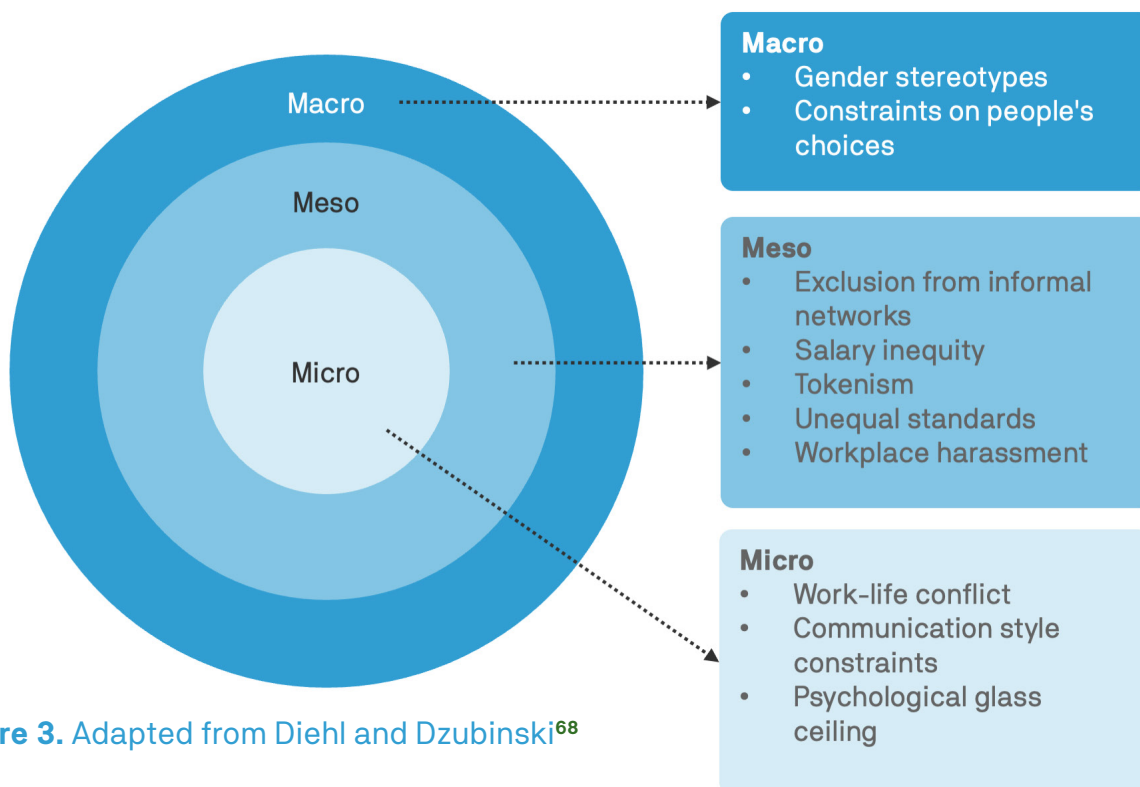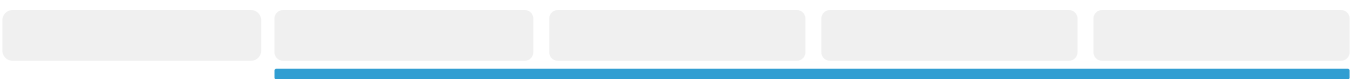- Psychological glass ceiling

Figure 3. Adapted from Diehl and Dzubinski[68]

Workplaces are reflections of society at large, and as such, they may repeat and embed existing inequalities, and discriminatory practices, or pay no attention to gender-based violence. For example, workforces in all countries include people who have experienced gender-based violence, and return home to unsafe contexts. The impacts of gender-based violence on women, SGM and people with disabilities is well documented, and it affects wellbeing and productivity. Some workplaces are actively supporting their staff in this respect, and training all staff on sexual harassment and prevention, and how to report it in the workplace. For example, Unitywater in Australia partners with organisations fighting domestic violence and The Solomon Islands Water Authority offers training in respectful workplaces. Some organisations have recognised the prevalence of violence against women outside of the workplace and have instituted policies such as family violence leave.[69]

Attitudinal barriers also reinforce the stereotyping of people with disabilities. The Victorian Department of Justice and Community Safety in Australia highlights that, "for many people with a disability, the greatest barrier is not their disability but confronting negative attitudes, overcoming outdated stereotypes and challenging the limitations placed on them by others. What they lack is not ability but opportunity".[33]

WaterAid Timor-Leste has taken a whole of community approach to challenging gender norms, which is having a flow-on effect on the paid and unpaid WASH roles that people take up in the community (Box 16). The International Women's Development Agency and their partners have developed a toolkit called 'Monitoring Gender and Economy in Melanesian Communities' for making visible community norms regarding gendered divisions of labour and gendered patterns of decision-making.

Box 15

Case study – WASH and gender-focused CSO collaboration[70,71]

There is emerging evidence that WASH sector engagement/collaborations with women's and gender equality organisations (including those that support sexual and gender minorities) can lead to mutually beneficial outcomes. However, there is a need to identify which models are best for individual and combined CSO work to support shifts in gender norms, increase diversity in leadership and improve WASH outcomes, particularly considering aspects of intersectionality. Engagement between WASH and women's right's organisations is at a nascent stage, yet there is a vibrant civil society engagement on gender issues, including SGM, women's voice and leadership, women and girls with disabilities, and violence against women (including non-heterosexual women), as well as WASH, and interest to facilitate greater interaction. Some WASH CSOs (for example WaterAid, SNV and Plan International in Indonesia) are pursuing partnerships with gender-focused organisations in an effort to support mutually beneficial outcomes (including gender-transformative practices at the individual and organisational level), and draw on the reach and skill-sets of the other organisation. Partnerships between WASH CSOs and OPDs/DPOs have been formalised for possibly a longer period, and these partnerships have been a source of information on attitude change but are also resources for making workplaces more inclusive.

Box 16

Educating and engaging the whole community[72]

In Timor-Leste, WaterAid led facilitated discussions with communities on gender issues for over two years (2016–2018) as part of its rural integrated WASH program. ISF-UTS partnered with WaterAid to conduct a strengths-based review of the program, and found that women and men in communities said that community gender awareness sessions led to positive changes such as women taking up new roles including in the Grupu Maneja Fasilidade (GMF) structure, and technical and construction roles in WASH projects. Communities also reported increased decision-making opportunities for women, with men and women from eight out of ten communities reporting that women were more involved in household level decision-making. The research also indicated that more women now shared responsibility for controlling resources with men (such as financial and property resources), and/or had control of household finances and livestock. This research did not investigate non-binary identities or expressions of gender.

What can WASH actors do to improve workplace cultures and societal norms?

WASH NGOs can collaborate with **women's groups, DPOs/OPDs, and SGM representative organisations** to raise awareness of gender and disability stereotypes in WASH and help change attitudes. This could include engaging more with groups who are focused on improving education, or with groups focusing on promoting the economic empowerment of women, people with disabilities and other marginalised groups.

Discriminatory attitudes affecting women, SGM and people with disabilities can be addressed through capacity building processes in the workplace (diversity and inclusion training, leadership support for managers, budgeting for inclusion in WASH programs). Other actions can include educating staff members about disability through disability awareness training and identifying champions within the workplace to help change attitudes.[42] WASH actors can help foster **inclusive workplaces for sexual and gender minorities** by encouraging leaders to consistently model policies, and reflect them in inclusive language and actions. Examples of how workplaces can support trans-inclusive policies and practices, and foster LGBTQI+ inclusive workplaces include having visible signs such as rainbow flags, employee resource groups (pride groups) and events to mark days of LGBTIQ+ significance, diverse family benefits, zero tolerance to inappropriate language and comments about LGBTQI+ people and having non-LGBTIQ+ people advocate for and support LGBTIQ+ rights and inclusion work. The Rainbow Tick Guide to LGBTI-inclusive practice is a good resource to assist organisations to incorporate an inclusive culture in the workplace.[73]

Collaboration

Inclusive language

THIS IS A SAFE SPACE

WE WELCOME ALL PEOPLE, REGARDLESS OF GENDER OR SEXUALITY WE DO NOT TOLERATE DISCRIMINATORY LANGUAGE OR BEHAVIOUR

Figure 4. Safe Space poster hanging at the ISF–UTS office.[74]

Involving men as change makers is another strategy by which WASH actors can adopt. The Champions of Change Coalition is one such example which engages men in influential positions to drive progress on gender equality. The Coalition works towards advancing women, including diverse women into leadership positions, and building respectful and inclusive workplaces, including sustainable gender balances at the board level and in executive teams through a long-term focus on achieving gender balance across the organisation. By recognising that gender inequality is a business, economic, social and human rights issue, the Coalition plays a critical role to address the systemic and societal issues related to gender equality.

More activities related to making workplace cultures more equitable and inclusive can be found in the Gender Equality in the WASH workforce database.

Involve men

The way forward

This guidance has highlighted practical and strategic changes and approaches that organisations in the WASH sector can undertake to strengthen and support the workplace participation and leadership of women in all their diversity. The aim is to stimulate ideas within organisations as to how they could develop more equitable and inclusive workplaces, and support partner organisations to do the same. The next steps in this process would be to evaluate the impact of the various initiatives and identify the enabling environment required for each initiative, and better understand what constitutes a leading and more inclusive organisation. Such evidence can also be useful for developing a business case in favour of efforts to promote gender equality and social inclusion, and for gaining management support. We hope that relevant communities of practice will engage in this as an area of further research, and will update the database to maintain it as a live and evolving resource.

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Water for Women is Australia's flagship water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) program supporting improved health, equality and wellbeing in Asian and Pacific communities through socially inclusive and sustainable WASH projects. Water for Women is delivering 18 WASH projects in 15 countries together with 11 research projects over five years (2018-2022).

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