



South Asia Dialogue Series on SDG 6

Universal Access to
Water and Sanitation by 2030

Introduction

South Asia has made good progress on basic sanitation in the last five years, and the rates of access to at least basic water services are also relatively high across the region ranging from 99% in Maldives to 75% in Afghanistan. However, the 2030 SDG target for 100% access to safely managed sanitation is a long way off as the 2020 JMP data suggests that more than half of the households in India, Bangladesh, Nepal are without access to safely managed sanitation. Similarly, the SDG target for 100% access to safely managed water is also off the mark, most notably in Nepal, Pakistan, Bhutan, and Afghanistan with three-fourths of households without access to safely managed water. The 2020 JMP data suggests a reasonably large variation in the rates of basic access to hygiene services across the South Asia region, with 80% of people in Pakistan able to wash their hands with soap and water at home, compared to 58% in Bangladesh with massive data gaps making it hard to provide a clear picture. For South Asia region to

successfully deliver on its commitment to provide safely managed water and sanitation by 2030 to all, would require a strong political will and adequate finances.

The South Asia Dialogue series on SDG 6 is a joint initiative by WaterAid, CPR SCI-FI, SWA, UNICEF, Athena Infonomics, FANSA and IRC to encourage evidence based cross-learning across the region to facilitate discussions and address the challenges that are hampering the progress towards achieving SDG 6 in South Asia. The 2021-22 webinar series focused on strengthening municipal finances, access to safe and affordable WASH services, impact of climate change on these services, data systems and monitoring progress and gender inclusion.

This series document summarizes the key learnings and takeaways from the webinars conducted as a part of the series, providing insights on the innovative solutions which can be scaled up across the region.

The following webinars were a part of this series:

Webinar 01

Municipal Financing for Sanitation in Small Towns

Webinar 02

Fostering robust local data ecosystems for sustainable sanitation service delivery in cities of South Asia

Webinar 03

Mobilizing Women's Leadership to Achieve SDG 6

Webinar 04

Water, Sanitation, Hygiene and Climate Action



Municipal Financing for Sanitation in Small Towns

The first webinar in the series focused on sustainable financing for sanitation service delivery in small towns of South Asia (i.e., population less than 300,000). They make up 96% of all urban settlements in the region and as South Asia urbanizes, their share of urban population is estimated to fall but would still constitute a whopping 40% of the total by 2035. As a result, any deficit in sanitation levels in these small cities and town will bear serious implications on South Asia's urban sanitation outcomes. These cities and towns are largely dependent on on-site sanitation systems and this dependency is likely to continue. The question is how improvements will be financed and how operation and maintenance will be funded in these Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) which have limited resources and autonomy, translating to lower ability to meet service standards. The key to solving South Asia's sanitation puzzle sustainably lies in strengthening municipal finance systems in these ULBs, while increasing policy attention to these settlements and increasing the flexibility with which they're governed could offer a promising start.

The objective of this webinar was to identify challenges in sanitation service delivery and document good practices in financing of sanitation services in small towns of Bangladesh, India, and Nepal. A few key challenges which are affecting sanitation service delivery that emerged during the discussion included overdependency on national and state governments for capital expenditure support, a limited revenue base for sustaining operational expenses, lack of predictability and transparency in intergovernmental transfers and a lack of adequate human resources, weak planning, and budgeting capacity.

In the webinar, city officials from four small towns (Birtamod, Nepal; Dhenkanal, India; Jhenaidah, Bangladesh; and Sircilla, India) came together to share how they have navigated challenges and presented innovative ways of financing sanitation services. These cities explored a range of solutions

such as multiple revenue streams to achieve operational sustainability, clustering of multiple small towns for faecal sludge management to optimize costs, raising awareness and demand for sanitation services to improve willingness to pay and revenue generation by building public trust. Other solutions included coordinating with agriculture and forestry departments for expanding economic opportunities in sanitation and developing robust city sanitation plans.

The panel discussion consisted of experts from government institutions such as Ms. Bhawana Sharma of Environment and Public Health Organization, Nepal and Mr. Md Emdadul Hoq Chowdhury from the Local Government Division, Government of Bangladesh. Along with Ms. Neeta Pokhrel from Asian Development Bank and Mr. Muyatwa Sitali from Sanitation and Water for All. It was moderated by Vanita Suneja from WaterAid.

Ms. Bhawana spoke on how municipal financing in Nepal can be strengthened by mapping of resources and the taxation base, enhancing institutional capacity for tax administration and mobilization of revenue along with a robust framework for fiscal oversight and accountability. Ms. Neeta deliberated on the need for predictable funds with minimal transaction hassles, ease of availing financing, along with more municipal autonomy while consistently increasing institutional capacity. Mr. Muyatwa suggested recommendations broken down into 3 Ps – politics, partnerships, and programs, with politics geared towards service delivery, partnerships for financing, and programs to address the gaps in the sector. He also elaborated on creating spaces for municipalities to be able to collect taxes for strengthen their own revenue source. Mr. Emdadul Hoq emphasized on the need for policy measures to plan resources efficiently and allocate finances for WASH services. He elaborated on the various strategies formulated regarding sanitation. He also spoke of specific guidelines for municipalities to undertake sanitation service delivery initiatives such as a pro-poor policy.

To access the video recordings of this webinar, kindly click the links below

Webinar 1



02

Fostering robust local data ecosystems for sustainable sanitation service delivery in cities of South Asia

Local governments across South Asia are developing city-level infrastructure to enable safely managed sanitation. As service levels increase, their sustainability would depend on reliable and efficient operation of supporting systems. But how data-empowered are local governments to diagnose and solve performance challenges? This webinar sought to answer the question by bringing together partners from government, non-profits, and developmental agencies for a vibrant deliberation.

The webinar focused on the imperatives and challenges that shape the local data ecosystem, how these systems can be leveraged to enhance citizen participation and accountability for equitable citizen centric service delivery and how government and development partners can incentivize scaling up of local data ecosystems. Initiatives attempting to address sanitation data gaps in the South Asia Region were presented. It included the SCIFI City Platform and FSM platform implemented in Odisha, India; the Integrated Municipal Information Systems (IMIS) implemented in selected cities in Bangladesh; Sanboard implemented

in 53 district towns and 8 city corporations in Bangladesh and the N-WASH portal in Nepal.

Addressing the issue of sustainability, Ms. Sharmistha Debnath, Executive Engineer, DPHE, Government of Bangladesh and Ms. Sudha Shrestha, WASH National Professional Officer from UN-HABITAT supporting the N-WASH program, mentioned that building capacity of municipal officials is an imperative to sustain national data initiatives. Further, Ms. Na Won Kim from Asian Development Bank, mentioned that financial institutions can use grant money and project loans as incentives for local municipalities to take up digitalisation of service delivery, which can also help ensure sustainability of infrastructure. Ms. Sarayu Natarajan of Aapti Institute mentioned that often, last-mile governance problems are solved by groups of citizens through intermediation using private channels to communicate with local leadership/bureaucrats. As a result, there is a certain capture of citizen voice in decision-making and framing of accountability in delivering services to the community.

To access the video recordings of this webinar, kindly click the links below

[Webinar 2](#)



03

Mobilizing Women's Leadership to Achieve SDG 6

Over the years the connection between gender and WASH services has become increasingly evident and the sector has started exploring the integration of gender-transformative principles into WASH programming and research. This webinar deliberated on how these gender-transformative approaches question existing inequalities and moving beyond provisioning gender responsive infrastructure. The webinar developed on the potential impact of WASH programming on Women's Empowerment in communities and the need for inclusive and equitable WASH sector participation and leadership leading towards more impactful programming.

The Webinar featured two presentations. The first presentation on 'Gender in WASH: Measuring What Matters' deliberated on the extent WASH conditions, interventions, and policies impact women's empowerment and vice versa. The second on 'Gender and SDG 6: A comprehensive overview from Pakistan' details out the plans and guidelines that have been put in place to achieve Pakistan's gender targets. It also deliberated on the need for context specific approaches where solutions change depending on geography and culture.

The panel discussion on 'Mobilizing women's leadership to achieve SDG 6' included Ms. Sohana Reza Urmi from Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC), Ms. Meena Shrestha from the Ministry of Water Supply, Nepal and Mr. Anjal Prakash from Bharti Institute of Public Policy, Indian School of Business (ISB).

Ms. Sohana highlighted the importance of empowerment and reflected on how the sectoral discourse focused on installing inclusive infrastructure for women and girls but not on measuring empowerment. She also brought out the need for WASH agencies to budget for research and evaluation on gender inclusion along with infrastructure development. Ms. Meena remarked on how the status of women empowerment in WASH must be measured to change policies and guidelines as it is pertinent to achieving SDGs. She also detailed out how the Government of Nepal has inculcated policies focusing on gender and inclusion and has implemented an MIS system to measure the same in project planning and budgeting. Mr. Anjal focused on paying attention to women's agency and empowerment considering differential vulnerabilities and the need for climate policies to be gender and equity sensitive to climate proof livelihoods.

To access the video recordings of this webinar, kindly click the links below

Webinar 3



04

Water, Sanitation, Hygiene and Climate Action

Climate resilience is the key to a sustainable future, and it is self-evident that climate resilience can't be built without ensuring resilient access to clean water for basic human needs such as drinking, sanitation and hygiene (WASH). Water and climate change are inextricably linked, and climate change has led to serious repercussions on the hydrological cycle. This has led to increasing droughts, floods, melting ice and rising sea-levels along with increase in frequency and intensity of extreme weather events affecting not only water availability but also destroying the water and sanitation infrastructure. The focus of this webinar is on adaptation to climate change and resilient WASH programming.

The webinar comprised of two framing presentations. The first presentation by Peter Harvey, Regional WASH Advisor, UNICEF South Asia, focused on the need for WASH infrastructure and services to be sustainable, safe, and resilient to climate-related risks and how it can be ensured. The second presentation by Jose Gesti, Climate Advisor, SWA reflected on the importance of how resilient WASH programs must contribute to building community resilience to the impacts of climate change. It elaborated on how achieving resilience would be possible only if attention is given to those who are disproportionately vulnerable to climate threats.

The panel discussion was moderated by Reis Lopez from UNICEF and the panel consisted of Professor K. Matin Ahmed, from the University of Dhaka, Ms. Pritha Hariram, Head of the Water Infrastructure and Climate Adaptation department at Ramboll and Mr. Syed Zahid Aziz, Punjab Aab-e-Pak Authority in Lahore (Pakistan).

Professor Matin elaborated on how managed aquifer recharge is being used in the coastal areas of Bangladesh to ensure year-round water supply, otherwise threatened by sea level rise and intrusion. Ms. Pritha focused on need for climate resilient water and sanitation utilities and explained among other things, successful initiatives on retrofitting existing services while enhancing service delivery by looking at urban design and nature-based solutions to increase water storage. Mr. Syed further deliberated on the need to integrate climate resilience planning in water and sanitation utilities. He emphasized on the challenges faced in Pakistan due to depletion of water resources and how policy change is fostering sustainable management of surface water, increasing water efficiency and reuse to tackle these challenges. In his concluding remarks, Dr. Khairul Islam, WaterAid's Regional Director of South Asia, highlighted the need to change the language and narrative to embrace climate resilience in relation to WASH and particularly with respect to climate financing.

To access the video recordings of this webinar, kindly click the links below

[Webinar 4](#)



In Summary,

Over the course of this webinar series key challenges and various solutions in achieving universal access to safe water and sanitation by 2030 and SDG 6 in South Asia were given emphasis. As the sector is evolving, innovative solutions are helping address some of the most pertinent issues. We look forward to facilitating further discussions on the same.