

Building resilience and recovery through WASH (How WaterAid could engage with recovery discussions)

Note: This document outlines how WASH could be promoted in discussions on post-COVID recovery. It is intended to be used as relevant depending on specific policy contexts. Each of the talking points may be appropriate at different moments and will be dependent on the context and target audience. This document provides a menu of options (on which messaging can be built) with arguments and data to back up each point. Policy asks will be further developed through a process of engaging country programmes and the Policy Team. Initial arguments will be further developed into broader messaging. See also the [background/rationale doc](#) for more on this opportunity.

UMBRELLA NARRATIVE

Ensuring access to safe water, adequate sanitation and good hygiene (WASH) is crucial to boost resilience against multiple global threats, including pandemics (current and future) and the impacts of climate change. WASH must be central to any healthy, green and just post-COVID-19 recovery package defined and implemented by governments and bilateral and multilateral donors.

POSITIONING STATEMENT

The COVID-19 pandemic is a global emergency that demands urgent collective action. During this time of crisis, which is putting many people's livelihoods at risk, it is essential that our leaders issue a strong response to address the immediate health, social and economic impacts and to protect especially the most vulnerable. Beyond this immediate response, public stimulus packages are being developed to relaunch and bolster economies, and crucial decisions will be taken on where these substantial financial flows should be directed. This is an unprecedented opportunity to ensure a shift towards an economy which is healthier, greener and more just – and which prioritises the wellbeing and rights of its people. Central to this transformation are WASH services, as they are a fundamental building block for resilience to the impacts of both COVID-19 and climate change, as well as to health, education, and livelihoods. To build back better from COVID-19, we are calling on governments and donors to scale-up investment and action towards universal sustainable WASH services and the systems required to support this, prioritising the poorest and most marginalised.

INITIAL POLICY ASKS (dependent on the context and audience)

- National, municipal and district governments must take **immediate steps towards universal access to WASH**, targeting the most vulnerable and marginalised.
- **Funding for WASH** must be substantially increased, through global commitments of a minimum of US \$9 billion to ensure hygiene in COVID-19 response, complemented by a doubling of ODA to WASH each year between now and 2030 to enable preparedness and resilience against future shocks.
- **Availability of services must be guaranteed** for people living in poverty and facing discrimination, regardless of ability to pay, the status of land or housing tenure, the status of citizenship, individual mobility or other barriers.
- WASH and health **systems must be strengthened** to deliver services and create mechanisms for community feedback to design policies, technology and financing that fulfil the rights of excluded people. This should include **increased participation of communities** in water governance (with priority to women and other groups facing discrimination), **effective accountability mechanisms**, and **monitoring systems with disaggregated data**.

SUPPORTING ARGUMENTS

<p>1. The problem</p> <p><i>Lack of access to safe water, proper sanitation and good hygiene makes people much more vulnerable to the impacts of disease outbreaks and climate change – without water and sanitation they cannot protect their health nor adapt to severe impacts of climate change.</i></p>	<p>2. WASH as the solution</p> <p><i>WASH promotes resilience to cascading disasters such as current and future pandemics and climate change, by promoting resilience especially amongst the most vulnerable and marginalised communities.</i></p>	<p>3. WASH is key to COVID recovery</p> <p><i>For the recovery from COVID-19 to be 'healthy', 'green' and 'just,' it needs to include an increased focus on ensuring access to WASH, especially for vulnerable and marginalised communities.</i></p>	<p>4. Investing in WASH delivers multiple benefits</p> <p><i>Prioritising investments in WASH in post COVID-19 recovery will yield multiple benefits, including:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>enabling improvements in health ('health systems' recovery'),</i> <i>creating resilience to climate change and promoting environmental benefits e.g. sustainable river basin/catchment management ('green and climate resilient recovery')</i> <i>enabling education and decent work and reduce inequalities especially along lines of gender ('just/fair recovery')</i>
<p>Without WASH in homes, communities, public places, schools and health care facilities, the impacts on health and wellbeing are devastating:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - People are at high risk of potentially fatal diseases, most of which are transmitted through water, hands, soil and food contaminated by human faeces, and spread because properly protected water sources, toilets and good hygiene habits are absent or inadequate. - Without WASH in health care facilities, staff cannot deliver quality, safe 	<p>For the world to become more just and resilient (to climate change and future pandemics), everyone must have access to sustainable WASH services. WASH improves both socio-economic resilience (the ability to cope with and recover from shocks) and adaptive capacity (the ability to reduce negative impacts). Efforts to fund and implement universal access to basic services such as safely managed water and sanitation and good hygiene will set foundations for billions of people to thrive and prosper in the face of both health and climate crises:</p>	<p>COVID-19 recovery stimulus packages provide an opportunity to reset our economy and ensure it is set on a healthier, greener and more just path. This needs to include making sure everyone, everywhere has access to safe water, adequate sanitation and good hygiene.</p> <p>Global and national leaders have not yet sufficiently recognised the role of WASH in building resilience, both in terms of strengthened health systems and resilience from devastating</p>	<p>No other intervention for COVID-19 recovery or climate change has the potential to simultaneously address so many societal threats and deliver so many benefits.</p> <p>It is important not to wait for disasters to strike to deliver support to communities who desperately need financial support, expertise and strong systems to deliver basic services which are fit for the future and will allow these communities to become more resilient to any future threats and crises. Investing in clean water</p>

<p>healthcare, putting the lives of patients in danger.</p> <p>Climate change means greater uncertain future and hardship, with the poorest and most marginalised suffering the worst consequences - as they lack access to resources to support their response and recovery. For example, extreme weather events may contaminate or submerge water sources, forcing communities (especially women) to travel further and queue longer for water. This increases their susceptibility to infection by COVID-19 (as they are unable to physically distance) and makes vital hygiene practises such as handwashing, (a first line of defence against Covid-19) beyond reach.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Access to resilient WASH services will prevent the spread of diseases and enable improvements in health and health systems. - Access to resilient WASH services will enable communities to cope with the impacts of extreme weather events, such as droughts or floods. <p>As climate vulnerable people experience changing weather patterns, less predictable rainfall, salt-water intrusion and increased exposure to disease, access to climate resilient and inclusive WASH is a critical line of defence for these communities. Without a major push to support basic services, like WASH these communities will always be on the edge of catastrophe.</p>	<p>impacts of climate change. For example, investment in hygiene or WASH more broadly as announced by donor countries and institutions is nearly absent from the trillions of US dollars so far dedicated to COVID-19 response and addressing economic recession due to the pandemic.</p> <p>As the international community begins to envision collective efforts to “build back better,” redressing the impacts of COVID-19 must include a recommitment to the original roadmap for global progress enshrined in the 2030 Agenda. This must include a massive increase in investment, both from donors and national governments, to extend WASH services to all. Rather than positioning COVID-19 as an excuse to defund public services or postpone action on sustainable development, governments and donors should renew their commitment to ensuring access to WASH for all, including by committing at least USD \$9 billion to advance efforts to achieve SDG6 on water and sanitation.</p>	<p>infrastructure saves lives and ensures a greater equality across societies. Therefore, it is not just the right thing to do, but also the smart thing to do.</p> <p>Investing in WASH systems will enable the benefits of WASH services to be maintained throughout an emergency (e.g. floods, droughts and any future pandemic).</p> <p>Equitable, universal access to WASH is a critical enabler of the improvements in wellbeing that advance development objectives and fulfil human rights. Urgent collective action to finance and implement extension of WASH services in households, schools, healthcare facilities, and public spaces will serve as a ‘transformative pathway’ to both the 2030 Agenda and global efforts to respond to and recover from COVID-19.</p> <p>Quality, gender-responsive public services provide an important route to better lives for women living in poverty and for their communities. As the COVID-19 pandemic has made clear, gender-responsive water and sanitation services are required to decrease women’s and girls’ burden of unpaid care and domestic work and ensure all women and girls can enjoy their rights to</p>
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Facts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Globally, 3 billion people lack soap and water at home. (WHO/UNICEF JMP) - Nearly half (45%) of healthcare facilities in least-developed countries, and one in four globally (26%), do not have clean water on site. (WHO/UNICEF JMP) - Almost half (47%) of schools globally do not have soap and water available to students. - 785 million people in the world – one in ten – do not have clean water close to home; 2 billion people in the world – one in four – do not have a decent toilet of their own. (WHO/UNICEF JMP) This puts them at risk of water-borne disease and death. These people are already struggling to cope and are unable to respond to emerging challenges, such as disease outbreaks or increasing impacts of climate change. - A recent study suggests that even if the world does meet the Paris Agreement’s temperature target of limiting warming to below 2C, the number of people exposed to water stress could still rise by 50% by 2050, when compared to 2010. 	Facts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Handwashing with soap is the most cost-effective public health intervention and life-saving. It is the first line of defence against Covid-19 and a vast range of other diseases. Evidence suggests that it can reduce cases of pneumonia by 50% and acute respiratory infection by 16–23%, while reducing risk of endemic diarrhoea by 48%. - Effective adaptation to impacts of climate change is only possible if access to climate resilient, inclusive, sustainable WASH is ensured. As climate vulnerable people experience impacts such as changing weather patterns, less predictable rainfall, salt-water intrusion and increased exposure to disease, access to water represents a critical line of defence. 	Facts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - According to Devex, until the end of May there have been 1,714 funding activities announced to respond to COVID-19, adding up to more than \$15.9 trillion (both domestic and internationally). - WaterAid analysis of funding announcements notes that only nine out of 68 major donor commitments to COVID-19 so far even mention hygiene/WASH, and most of this is not new additional financing. These trends will shape donors’ financing priorities for the next few years, including and beyond COVID-19 response and recovery. 	Facts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Importance of access to WASH for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • good health and strong health systems • enabling education and decent work • reducing inequalities (here, here) • creating resilience to climate crisis - The World Resources Institute estimates that it would cost just over 1% of global GDP to invest in the infrastructure required to provide clean water for all countries by 2030. By contrast, diseases linked to contaminated water cost many countries up to 5% of GDP due to poor health and lost productivity. - Women and girls are responsible for water collection in 80% of households without access to water on premises, according to data from 61 developing countries. A study of time and water poverty in 25 Sub-Saharan African countries estimated that women spend at least 16 million hours a day collecting drinking water, while men spend 6 million hours, and children 4 million hours on the task.