



Manifesto for Water 2024



A manifesto for water: investing in water, sanitation and hygiene for global health, climate resilience, peace and prosperity

WaterAid is one of the world's leading international non-governmental organisations, dedicated exclusively to water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH). Today's global WASH crisis is a critical threat to public health, climate resilience, peace and prosperity. The UK Government has a major role to play on the world stage by raising WASH to the top of the international agenda.

This is our manifesto for the 2024 General Election. We call on the next UK Government to deliver on its global WASH responsibilities through greater investment, leadership and empowerment.

Why is WASH vital?

Clean water, decent toilets and good hygiene are fundamental to people's health and livelihoods. Without these services, communities are trapped in a cycle of disease and poverty.

Safely-managed, resilient water supplies are also critical for food production and energy generation, and for protecting ecosystems essential for human survival.

What is the global WASH crisis?

2.2 billion people – more than 1 in 4 – don't have safe water.

This dire situation is getting worse. In 2023, for the first time, global warming exceeded 1.5°C for an entire year, according to the EU's climate service.

3.5 billion people – almost 1 in 2 – don't have a decent toilet of their own where waste is safely managed.

Weather patterns are becoming more extreme and unpredictable, increasing water scarcity and decreasing water security. The UN predicts that 5 billion people could be living without clean drinking water by 2050.

2/3 of healthcare facilities in the 46 least developed countries do not have access to basic hand washing facilities.

The climate crisis is a water crisis. To leave billions of people without WASH services, at a time of climate change and rapid population growth, is a major threat to global health, peace and prosperity.

The UK public and WaterAid have a shared vision for the future

In the next parliament, UK Government investment in WASH will be essential to build resilience and speed up progress towards a safer, sustainable future for all.

WaterAid shares the UK public's view. We have a vision of a world where:

A quarter (25%) of the UK public think WASH is the most important issue to spend overseas aid on and over half (53%) rank it in their top 3.*

- **No woman** is forced to walk and queue for hours to collect water.
- **No girl** is excluded from a better future because her school doesn't have decent toilets.
- **No community** is held back by an endless cycle of sickness from broken and dirty water supplies and poor hygiene.
- **No one** lives in fear that a changing climate will impact upon their human rights to water and sanitation.

* All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 2,112 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 27th - 28th February 2024. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all UK adults (aged 18+).

The role of the UK Government

In 2015, the UK signed up to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which includes SDG 6: to get water, sanitation and hygiene to everyone, everywhere, by 2030.

With just six years until the 2030 deadline, the next UK Government is the last UK Government that can make a major impact on the SDGs.

Global progress towards that goal is seriously off track. This puts all the other SDGs at risk – particularly the targets on health, education, gender equality, sustainability, and the environment.

Deliver on WASH: Invest, lead, empower

WaterAid is calling on the UK to fulfil its global WASH responsibilities through greater investment, leadership and empowerment.

- **Universal access to WASH** as fundamental to an inclusive and climate-resilient future; and
- **Water security as critical to tackling the global challenges** of climate change, global health threats and future pandemics, as well as underpinning food, energy, and national security.

We need the next UK Government to deliver an international development plan that recognises:

1 Investment in WASH

Since 2018, the UK’s annual budget for WASH has been cut by approximately 77%, down to a critical low of just £46 million in 2022. It is vital that the next Government increases the UK’s investment in WASH to reflect its importance to people’s lives and to sustainable development more broadly.

WaterAid is calling on the next Government to:

Increase investment in WASH by calculating a bilateral Official Development Assistance (ODA) percentage that the UK Government must spend on WASH. This budget should have a minimum floor of 10% per annum and prioritise delivery through grant financing for the poorest and countries most off-track in achieving SDG 6.

2 Leadership on WASH

The global WASH crisis is not going to be solved by the UK alone, but through collaborative action taken across the international community. We believe that if the UK invests in WASH it will demonstrate the UK’s solidarity with communities living in poverty and its commitment to delivering the SDGs.

WaterAid is calling on the next Government to:

Be a global champion for WASH, using its position within the UN, international financial institutions, G20, multi-lateral forums and G7, and its leverage with the UK financial sector, to accelerate financing, global cooperation and action in delivery of SDG 6. This should include:

- Raising water as central to climate change at key international climate platforms, including COP29, and facilitating global donors to mobilise innovative and collaborative financing for climate adaptation that supports delivery of water services for communities

vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.

- Building consensus with other global donors to finance the \$9.6bn required by 2030 to provide universal access to WASH in healthcare facilities in the 46 least developed countries.
- Harnessing the innovation and capital of the UK financial sector to establish the UK as the leading centre of water investment for developing countries in service of global climate objectives and SDG 6.
- Using the UK’s role as a shareholder of the World Bank to ensure that available financing reaches those that are most excluded, goes further and moves faster in supporting countries to meet SDG 6 targets, and does so on terms which do not add to unsustainable debt burdens.

3 Empowerment through WASH

Inadequate WASH disempowers and endangers people. Women and girls are disproportionately affected by a lack of WASH, yet are often excluded from the planning, delivery and monitoring of these services. The UK Government's approach to WASH can be more empowering, efficient and effective by tackling inequality and lack of representation all along the intervention chain.

WaterAid is calling on the next Government to:

Ringfence investment in the provision of WASH facilities that meet the specific needs of women and girls and ensure that they are included in decision-making forums about planning, delivery and monitoring of development programming including WASH services.

Increase the number and effectiveness of WASH system strengthening approaches, ensuring

its inclusion as a central part of any climate adaptation or resilience building programming, public health programming and programming aimed at improving the lives of women and girls.

Investment in dedicated personnel, including a Senior Water Lead for the FCDO, and greater technical expertise both in the UK and in-country to develop, deliver and monitor WASH programming.

In the first 100 days

As early as possible in the next parliament, the new Government must reverse the decline that WASH has experienced over the course of successive governments.

The de-prioritisation of WASH as a strategic priority for both DFID and the FCDO has undermined the efficacy and sustainability of UK aid and the achievement of its overarching aims, particularly on climate, environment, health, and women and girls.

Two quick actions for the next UK Government:

Invest at least one third of the UK International Climate Finance

(ICF) adaptation budget in water, to support communities on the front lines of climate change with climate-resilient WASH services, and assistance to adapt to the impacts of extreme and erratic weather events and rising sea levels.

Provide the UK's fair share (approximately £27.5 million) of external financing required annually through to 2030 to deliver universal access to WASH in healthcare facilities (HCFs) for the 46 least developed countries, and take a 'WASH in all policies' approach to maximise the impact of FCDO's broader programmes.

Time is running out

Clean water, decent toilets and good hygiene for everyone, everywhere, are vital to global health, climate resilience, peace and prosperity.

The world cannot continue to drag its feet over investing in these human rights.

Inadequate WASH services for billions of people, at a time of growing water insecurity and rising populations, is a recipe for disease, disaster and destitution on an epic scale.

Time is running out for the UK to fulfil its promises. Therefore, we are calling on the next UK Government to urgently deliver increased investment and action on WASH to protect sustainable development, build climate resilience in communities living in poverty, and lead the world towards a safer, fairer and more sustainable future.

For more information please visit our website at wateraid.org

WaterAid

WaterAid is an international not-for-profit organisation, determined to make clean water, decent toilets and good hygiene normal for everyone, everywhere. Since 1981, we've reached 28.5 million people with clean water and 29 million with decent toilets.

Registered charity numbers: 288701 (England and Wales) and SC039479 (Scotland)