

WASH Sector Gender Policy

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1. Rationale

The purpose of this policy is to **define the main approach for the WASH Sector on how to address gender issues**. It will also guide the WASH Sector and its partners to make gender equality and empowerment of women and girls a core principle of its humanitarian and long-term development directive. The rationale for integrating a gender equality into the activities of the WASH Sector in Cox's Bazar lies in the humanitarian mandate of the Sector, to **alleviate human suffering without discrimination**.

"Gender" refers to the socially constructed differences between females and males and the relationships between and among them throughout their life cycle¹. In every society, men, women, boys and girls play different roles and have different needs. A gender perspective is required to ensure that **men and women's specific needs, vulnerabilities and capacities are recognized and addressed**.

From the onset, **the Rohingya refugee crisis has had a particularly gendered nature**. Fifty one percent (51%) of the total population in need, including refugee and host community, are female². Girls (female refugee population from 5 to 17 y.o.), who represent a larger proportion (18%)³ of the vulnerable group, are particularly at risk of sexual exploitation, abuse and neglect. The facts on the ground present unique challenges as well as opportunities for saving lives, protecting the basic human rights of the affected populations and for gender transformative programming.

Whereas humanitarian actors are working to address gender and girls and women protection and empowerment issues, it is not yet sufficiently mainstreamed into every sector's activities, including in relation to the principle of "do no harm", empowerment and accountability. There are still gaps and challenges for which efforts need to continue example participation of women and girls in decision making especially regarding construction and use of WASH facilities and services. Women and girls with specific needs are facing even more difficulties. The recent COVID-19 scenarios have put even more burden on lives of women and girls, exacerbating already present gender inequalities⁴.

This policy offers a framework for translating into practice gender equality commitments endorsed by the Strategic Executive Group (SEG).

2. Scope

This policy is a framework that specifies **principles, standards and actions for the WASH Sector and individual Sector Partners to ensure gender differences and gender inequalities are taken into account and dealt with in relation to the implementation of the Joint Response Plans (JRP), including emergency preparedness and response**. This Policy should be used alongside the IASC⁵ Gender Handbook and the IASC Gender with Age Marker, Strategic Executive Group (SEG) endorsed Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women and Girls (GEEWG) Commitments and accompanied by an Accountability Framework⁶ to monitor implementation and progress.

3. Policy Statement

WASH sector commits to the goals of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in humanitarian action.

¹ The term "gender" is not intended to replace the term "sex" which refers specifically to biological differences.

² 2020 JRP, https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/jrp_2020_final_in-design_200422_12.2mb.pdf

³ UNHCR and GoB, Population factsheet, April 2020, <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/76154.pdf>

⁴ Please see relevant documents, studies and recommendations here:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/15tuC6jz2gdZiP1S5jGo3twavw2nWW0l0?usp=sharing>

⁵ Inter-agency standing committee

⁶ WASH partners have different Accountability mechanisms in place, more or less formal; in February 2020, the revision of Complaints and Referral mechanisms for the response started, led by the Complaints and Feedback Mechanism TWG, which is a joint initiative of both CwC and SMS sectors.

With regard to gender issues, the WASH Sector and Sector Partners in Cox's Bazar undertake to **ensure that men, women, boys, girls and persons with other gender identities will benefit equally, in accordance with their different needs and with the input and equal participation of people from all gender and age group at all levels of the response**; this while recognizing that displacement, disease outbreaks, landslides, flooding and cyclones can **affect men and women differently**.

The response will increasingly utilize inputs from all segments of the community to ensure that everyone benefits equally.

4. Key commitments on gender equality and empowerment of women and girls

- Collect, analyze and use **data disaggregated by gender, age and disability**⁷, as well as consult equally with women, girls and marginalized groups.
- Liaise and cooperate with **livelihood initiatives** and partners in support of WASH programming, that prioritize women and girl's engagement.
- Promote **leadership and meaningful equal representation of women and marginalized groups** in the overall response, including meetings, community consultations and decision-making processes.
- **Contribute to prevent, mitigate and respond to gender-based violence and sexual exploitation and abuse**, through systematic gender mainstreaming that addresses harmful societal and institutional gender norms/practices.
- Make **financial provisions to fully resource Gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls (GEEWG) programming** for both mainstreaming and targeted action, creating specific budget lines for the purpose.

5. Principles

The principles below are from the IASC Gender Policy and all the Gender Sector Policy needs to be aligned on this principle:

- The **realization of human rights** is the prime motivation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in humanitarian action.
- Gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls is a critical component of **achieving effective and life-saving humanitarian action** and is a responsibility to be owned by all actors. It is not optional or additional. Gender is understood as beyond the man-woman binary to include persons who identify as LGBTI (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender, Intersex).
- The **knowledge, capacities and agency of women and girls, alongside those of men and boys, are recognized and strengthened in all humanitarian action**, with meaningful and equitable participation in planning and programming.
- Achieving sustainable change on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, and **strengthening resilience**, requires robust action through disaster risk reduction, humanitarian response and development, as well as conflict resolution and peace building.
- **Non-militarized solutions** to conflict are fundamental to realizing sustained peace and security as agreed in resolutions concerning Women, Peace and Security.

⁷ The International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) advanced the understanding and measurement of disability. In the ICF, problems with human functioning are categorized in three interconnected areas: 1. impairments are problems in body function or alterations in body structure – for example, paralysis or blindness; 2. activity limitations are difficulties in executing activities – for example, walking or eating; 3. participation restrictions are problems with involvement in any area of life – for example, facing discrimination in employment or transportation. Disability refers to difficulties encountered in any or all three areas of functioning. The ICF adopts neutral language and does not distinguish between the type and cause of disability – for instance, between “physical” and “mental” health. “Health conditions” are diseases, injuries, and disorders, while “impairments” are specific decrements in body functions and structures, often identified as symptoms or signs of health conditions. Disability arises from the interaction of health conditions with contextual factors – environmental and personal factors, WHO, [World report on disability](#).

6. Responsibilities of WASH Sector actors

The senior management of each WASH Sector partner commit to:

- **Increase awareness and skills of staff, volunteers and other relevant stakeholders in understanding the social and gender differences between men and women** when designing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating programs;
- Ensure a **safe working environment for all genders**, including provision of adequate gender segregated resources and services;
- Ensure **equal opportunities among female and male staff members and volunteers** during recruitment, promotion, benefits and training;
- Consider **gender analysis to improving existing and future programming**;
- Ensure **gender balance in the different levels of the structure within the organization**, in particular to involve women in decision making processes at all levels;
- Assess the implications of the **organization's policies and decision making** to ensure each project within the response is gender sensitive;
- Allocate specific **financial resources** for gender programming.

7. Recommendations for WASH Sector actors

- Use a **gender lens** while undertaking the needs assessment and situation analysis to identify gender related WASH barriers, bottlenecks and opportunities to overcome them. For all barriers and bottlenecks, it is important to make sure that the most marginalized are identified and their views into the program design, delivery, monitoring and evaluation;
- Ensure that **reporting and accountability mechanisms** for activities and results in gender mainstreaming are put in place. This includes performance evaluations, budget allocation analysis and actions to ensure the full participation of men women and others on an equal and meaningful basis in all WASH activities as all levels;
- Ensure enough **flexibility in the response** to cater for different circumstances and different needs of men, women and other groups;
- WASH Sector partners will ensure that **WASH facilities are well adapted to the needs of women and girls**, including menstrual hygiene management (MHM) services to new and existing WASH facilities, where space allows;
- **Communication materials** will be developed with input from women and girls to ensure they are culturally acceptable and appropriate;
- **Contribute to the prevention of Gender based violence (GBV) risks against women and girls** by improving WASH programming (participation, design, site selection etc.)
- **Ensure female participation and leadership** on WASH related issues and committee to improve the maintenance of water, sanitation systems and hygiene improvement.
- **Ensure disable male, female, and non-binary genders** voices are listened to and considered when planning for WASH infrastructure and services.

Please see **the Gender tip-sheet** (next page) for practical examples.

8. WASH Sector Gender tip-sheet

The tip-sheet is a summary of possible key-recommendations, organized by each area of the WASH programming. It can be used as practical guidance on how to implement gender-sensitive programs

Area	Key-recommendations for a gender-sensitive programming
<p>Needs assessment and analysis</p>	<p>Collect and analyze sex, age and disability disaggregated data and conduct participatory gender analysis to understand different WASH needs, capacities, barriers and aspirations and identify populations with special WASH requirements. Possible aspects to analyze:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender roles and power dynamics. E.g. different gender roles in WASH (water collection, cleaning clothes, etc) and time required, women and men's decision-making power in WASH decisions (managing WASH facilities, select and setting up water point etc), gender roles in children's hygiene. • Gender-related cultural practices. E.g. separate bathing facilities, culturally appropriate hygiene materials, changes in practices since the crisis (handwashing, cleaning of religious place and ablution, burial and cremation etc). • Gender-specific needs. E.g. women's and girls' menstruation needs, impact of menstruation needs in accessing other services (i.e. girls skipping school if no separate toilet with proper water supply and sanitary disposal systems). • Protection needs. E.g. Potential GBV risk when accessing WASH facilities. • WASH knowledge and skills. E.g. handwashing, safe cleaning and disposal of sanitary materials, any other effective indigenous knowledge that is widely practiced and by whom (men and women). • Intersectional issues. E.g. any barriers for LGBTI individuals to use facilities, accessible WASH facilities for people with disabilities, elderly persons and pregnant women and for different cast and religion. • Conduct a participatory gender analysis to identify the gaps in the WASH response • WASH facilities. E.g. facilities are safe and well-lit and accessible, facilities have locks and ensure privacy, types of facilities are culturally appropriate. • Access. E.g. distance and safety of travelling to WASH facilities by women, men, girls and boys, accessible for persons with disabilities, queues and time required. • WASH materials. E.g. culturally appropriate hygiene materials, adequate amount of materials, appropriate water collection container. • WASH staff. E.g. specific training needs, knowledge of gender issues, existence of code of conduct for WASH staff/volunteers on PSEA, training/support for female staff. • Assess WASH policy/plan. E.g. specific gender considerations in the WASH policy/plan. • Ensure gender analysis is done by analyzing the SADDD, and by consulting with women, girls, men and boys in an inclusive and participatory way. E.g. Sex-disaggregated focus groups; time/location/facilities that allows participation from all (i.e. child-care facilities for women with young children).
<p>Strategic Planning</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflect gender analysis in the planning documents and situation reports, using SADDD. • Consult with women, men, girls, boys, and other at-risk groups (LGBTQI, elderly, persons with disabilities, etc) to design activities to ensure those meet their needs. <p>Ensure equal and inclusive access to WASH that address the specific needs of women, girls, men, boys and other at-risk populations (LGBTI, persons with disabilities, etc) as well as the socio-cultural context (Do No Harm); possible points to consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to WASH facilities. E.g. acceptable distance of facilities from shelters, safe and well-lit roads, accessible to persons with disabilities, convenient and safe timing of water being pumped.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender and disability friendly WASH facilities. E.g. gender-segregated latrines and bathing facilities clearly distinguishable (i.e. color coded), functional for persons with disabilities, availability of menstrual hygiene materials disposal/cleaning systems, LGBTQI sensitive facilities, water hand-pumps are women and girl-friendly. • Safety of WASH facilities. E.g. Locks, location (shared family facilities, blocks or sub-blocks managed WASH facilities or women-only wash services including laundry and showers in the same block), lighting (in proximity of latrines or via portable solar lights distribution), presence of idle men and boys, length/time of queues, creation of “women-only” wash services zones. • Materials. E.g. culturally appropriate, enough amounts, appropriate (i.e. water containers can be carried by main water collector), provisions to ensure access to assistance/materials by vulnerable groups, retrofitting of existing facilities, use of cyclone resistant designs. • Gender-balanced WASH staff/volunteers/ committees. E.g. recruit, train and retain female staff, set up women-led WASH committees. <p>Work with other sector to holistically plan interventions that address the barriers to quality WASH for women, girls, men and boys; possible points to consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Address barriers to women’s, girls’, men’s and boys’ participation in WASH. E.g. Equal participation of women and men in community WASH committee or separate committees; provisions to ensure women’s participation (i.e. childcare). • Community awareness and social norm changes. E.g. community awareness raising on sharing WASH related household chores; messaging and outreach on good practices in WASH (i.e. culturally sensitive menstrual hygiene management awareness initiatives, handwashing messages). <p>Develop indicators to measure change for women, girls, men and boys:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use sex, age and diversity disaggregated indicators so gaps between groups can be identified and assessed. <p>Develop qualitative indicators related to behavioral change related to WASH, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % of men are sharing the responsibility of water collection <p>Use the Gender with Age Marker (GAM) to assess program planning.</p>
<p>Resource mobilization</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide SADD, information and key messages on the specific needs of women, girls, men and boys in WASH to the sector so that priority areas are funded (Gender Hub can support in preparing or reviewing sex, age and disability disaggregated data (SADD), information and key messages from a gender perspective) • Advocate to donors and regularly report on the gender resource gaps in WASH. • Apply the GAM to WASH program design to assess and highlight its contribution to GEEWG.
<p>Implementation and monitoring</p>	<p>Involve women, girls, men and boys equally and meaningfully in decision-making, implementation and monitoring of the shelter programs/projects; possible points to consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure greater gender-balance in the implementation and monitoring of the project. E.g. involve community groups such as women’s rights, youth, and LGBTIQ organizations in program implementation and monitoring; ensure equal participation of women and girl-mothers by providing childcare services; support the recruitment, training and retention of female staff and volunteers. • Ensure the safety of staff and volunteers, especially female staff/volunteers. E.g. put measures in place to respond to potential threat/intimidation/harassment of female staff. • Ensure women, girls, men and boys are aware of the available services, how to access those, the agency providing them and ways to influence their design and delivery. E.g. provide information on WASH services to CWC’s info hubs in all camps.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and maintain feedback and complaint mechanisms that are child- and adolescent- friendly, gender-responsive, inclusive and confidential (including for SEA reporting). E.g. provide feedback and complaint boxes, provide hotline services, do gender and age segregated FGDs. • Regularly monitor for any changes, including in risks, access or social norms and roles, that may limit the participation of women, girls, men and boys in the program. E.g. through regular monitoring of indicators, through WASH sector led FGDs, through other gender assessments (from partners, GiHA WG, etc.). • Monitor access to WASH services by women, girls, men, and boys E.g. lead satisfaction surveys by age and gender to assess whether women, men, girls and boys are satisfied with the services provided, their quality and the way they are distributed. Are there any unintended negative consequences due to project? Or any spill-over effect due to the intervention? • Design programs to contribute to the Joint Response Plan's gender-specific outcomes. • Apply the GAM to assess and improve gender equality programming.
<p>Operational peer review and evaluation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share information, SADDD and key messages to others on the specific needs, capacities and aspirations of women, girls, men and boys in WASH. • Share good practices on using gender-responsive approaches in WASH. • Review project in the WASH sector and assess if all women and girls, men and boys, persons with disabilities, non-binary gender and other from affected populations were reached and identify possible gaps and unintended consequences. • Use the GAM to assess the program's contribution to GEEWG. • Assess the project against the Minimum Standards in WASH Promotion outlined in the Sphere Handbook and IASC gender guideline.

9. List of acronyms

GAM Gender with Age Marker

GBV: Gender based violence

GiHA: Gender in humanitarian action

GEEWG: Gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls

LGBTQI: Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex

MHM: Menstrual hygiene management

PSEA: Prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse

SADDD: sex, age and disability disaggregated data

10. Background information

Gender profiles and definitions

- Gender profiles [1](#) (December 2017) and [2](#) (March 2019)
- Gender briefs [1](#) (March 2018), [2](#) (March 2018), [3](#) (April 2018), [4](#) (June 2018), and [5](#) (July 2018)
- [Review](#) of gender mainstreaming
- [Definition](#) of gender-related terms
- March 2019, *Strengthening the humanity in humanitarian action in the work of the WASH sector in the Rohingya response - Gender, GBV and inclusion audit of the work of the WASH sector and capacity development assessment*, S. House, available [here](#).
- 2019, *A new gender (AGD) focused hygiene and sanitation infrastructure policy. A policy for inclusion*, UNHCR WASH unit, Rohingya crisis response, Cox's Bazar, [draft], available [here](#).

Key resource persons

Gender Focal Point for WASH (Sector) – Mariangela D'Adamo (mdadamo@unicef.org)

Gender Focal Point for WASH (Implementing partner) Iffat Fatema (ifatema@oxfam.org.uk)

Gender Hub – Sabila E Rabbi (sabila.rabbi@unwomen.org)