

# Accelerate Access to Resources — Land, Clean Energy, Water, and Sanitation

Facts, Solutions, Case Studies, and Calls to Action

## OVERVIEW

When girls and women endure restricted access to resources such as land, energy, water, and sanitation, there are far-reaching implications. It can affect their health, education, housing, and livelihood, as well as the safety and sustainability of the environments in which they live. This brief explores six gender-responsive approaches to creating an enabling environment for effective and secure access to resources.

## SECTION 1: FRAMING THE ISSUE

The Sustainable Development Goals offer a framework for accelerating women's access to land, water, sanitation, energy, and other resources, which has the potential to alleviate poverty across the globe. Girls and women, in particular, will benefit from greater access to these resources through improved wealth, health, education, safety, and financial security. They will also gain time and opportunities to claim leadership roles in the public sphere and engage in decision-making. Several international agreements recognize the important link between access to resources and advancing economic prosperity.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights establishes the principle of non-discrimination on the basis of sex and guarantees women equality in accessing their rights to land and natural resources,<sup>1</sup> yet inheritance and land laws, policies, and practices generally favor men.<sup>2</sup> Globally, less than 15% of all landholders are women, ranging from 5% in the Middle East and North Africa to 18% in Latin America and the Caribbean.<sup>3</sup>

Traditional gender roles and social systems in many societies place the majority of household responsibilities on women. Women are responsible for securing household resources—food, water, and fuel for heating and cooking—and serve as the primary caregivers. However, they often lack the socio-political power, agency, and financial means to control access to these resources.<sup>4</sup> The time and energy women must expend to meet household needs and overcome barriers to accessing resources impedes their opportunities for education, income generation, and community engagement.<sup>5</sup> Such opportunities would enhance their wealth and wellbeing and that of their family, and extend their access to resources.

Increasingly, environmental stresses such as climate change disproportionately affect women's access to resources.<sup>6</sup> Experts predict that the global water demand will increase between 20% and 30% above current water-level use by 2050, further burdening women who are already tasked with securing already scarce water resources for their dependents.<sup>7</sup> Additionally, an estimated 52% of agricultural land worldwide is affected by land degradation annually, losing its arability and productivity.<sup>8</sup> As water, firewood, and land grow scarcer and women remain excluded from decisions about those resources, women's access to such resources decreases.

Women's inability to determine the use of natural resources often has a negative impact on their physical, emotional, and mental health. With increased competition for these scarce resources, gender-based violence (GBV) becomes an even greater risk, especially in humanitarian crises and disasters.<sup>9</sup> And as women are forced to travel greater distances to access resources, they face increased risk of sexual violence and animal attacks.<sup>10</sup>

The following global statistics highlight the challenges girls and women living in poverty face regarding access to resources, water, and sanitation:

- Women make up less than 15% of agricultural landholders globally.<sup>11</sup>
- Collecting fuel, fetching water, bathing in open water, and open defecation expose girls and women to sexual harassment and violence.<sup>12</sup>
- Women and children spend up to five hours per day gathering fuel for household needs due to a lack of access to clean cooking fuels and stoves.<sup>13</sup>
- In eight out of 10 households that do not have a water source on the premises, women and girls are responsible for water collection.<sup>14</sup> Collectively, girls and women around the world spend up to 200 million hours collecting water on a daily basis.<sup>15</sup>
- About half of schools in low- and middle-income countries have inadequate access to water and sanitation,<sup>16</sup> which increases the likelihood of absenteeism among adolescent girls.<sup>17,18</sup>

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**Accelerating access for girls and women to resources, water, and sanitation is linked to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and targets, including:**

**SDG 1: End poverty in all its forms everywhere**

- **1.3** Implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors, and by 2030 achieve substantial coverage of the poor and the vulnerable
- **1.4** By 2030, ensure that all men and women, in particular the poor and the vulnerable, have equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to basic services, ownership and control over land and other forms of property, inheritance, natural resources, appropriate new technology and financial services, including microfinance
- **1.5** By 2030, build the resilience of the poor and those in vulnerable situations and reduce their exposure and vulnerability to climate-related extreme events and other economic, social, and environmental shocks and disasters



These challenges are magnified in humanitarian contexts. Millions of girls and women risk being raped, beaten, or killed as they collect firewood.<sup>19</sup> Oftentimes, they must traverse rugged terrain harboring militia, armed groups, landmines, and other threats. Intimate partner violence often arises when women are unable to prepare a meal due to a lack of cooking fuel or other energy sources. In situations of armed conflict, the presence of peacekeepers or civilian police is often so limited that girls and women are more susceptible to physical attack the moment they leave the relative safety of camps for displaced persons.<sup>20</sup> Without lighting in camps, women and children become especially vulnerable to harassment, assault, and rape when they need to move about at night. The simple act of walking to and using latrines at night, without lighting, can expose them to major physical risks.

## SECTION 2: SOLUTIONS AND INTERVENTIONS

Restricted access to resources has cross-cutting implications, impacting the health, safety, education, housing, land tenure, self-determination, and human rights of individuals and communities. Within this multi-sectoral landscape, a one-size-fits-all approach does not suffice. This brief explores six gender-sensitive approaches to promoting intersectional, cross-issue, and cross-sector programs, policies, and investments. Scaled up, these solutions can make a real impact for girls and women:

- Engage women in efforts to advance universal access to affordable, safe, and sustainable sources of clean energy.
- Improve and enforce secure land and productive resource rights for women, including their equal rights to access, control, own, and inherit.
- Include women in decision-making related to land and resource management, humanitarian response planning, and displaced persons camp management.
- Improve quality and access to water services.
- Employ comprehensive approaches for water, sanitation, and hygiene, including provisions for menstrual health and hygiene management.
- Promote community-led total sanitation (CLTS).

### Engage Women in Efforts to Advance Universal Access to Affordable, Safe, and Sustainable Sources of Clean Energy

Every home needs a safe, reliable, environmentally sustainable, and clean source of energy for cooking, lighting, heating, and other uses. Access to cleaner and more affordable energy sources can save money, improve health, and contribute to livelihoods, as women are able to invest the time they save collecting fuel in more productive pursuits.<sup>21</sup> Access to clean and safe household lighting also allows women to reduce spending on lighting alternatives like kerosene, candles, and battery torches, channeling more financial resources to their household and children's needs.<sup>22</sup>

Though robust empirical data are not available to quantify the gains of rural electrification, experience suggests that when a household or community has access to electricity and cleaner and more efficient cookstoves and fuels, the economy and people's quality of life improve. Without household lighting, students are unable to practice their reading and writing skills at night. Data from the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) show that youth literacy rates tend to be lower in developing countries with electrification rates below 80% (based on a study in a 45 countries).<sup>23</sup>

The use of polluting fuels also poses a major threat to sustainable development. Globally, more than 3 billion people—more than 50% of households in 128 low- and middle-income countries surveyed—rely on biomass fuels (wood, animal dung, and crop waste) to cook, causing serious environmental and health impacts that disproportionately affect women and children.<sup>24</sup> The problem is exacerbated in rural areas, where more than 80% of households use biomass fuels, compared to 20% of urban homes.<sup>25</sup> According to the World Health Organization (WHO), household air pollution from cooking kills more than 4 million people every year and sickens millions more.<sup>26</sup> Increasing women's access to safe, affordable, clean cookstoves and fuels is one solution that can dramatically reduce fuel consumption and exposure to harmful cookstove smoke, as well as reduce the risks associated with fuel collection or acquisition.<sup>27</sup>

To accelerate the path to universal access to household energy, it is essential to integrate women's needs and opinions into every aspect of the value chain—from research, design, and production to marketing, sales, and distribution.<sup>28</sup> Experience shows that without women's opinions and input, products do not meet their needs and will not be used consistently.<sup>29</sup> Support should be provided to women-led enterprises that sell clean fuel, cook stoves, and clean technologies, and employ women as marketing agents, distributors, and after-sales service providers. As household energy providers and managers, women are in a unique position to connect with their communities, increase awareness, and deliver energy products and services.<sup>30</sup>

#### Case Study: Alternatives to Biomass Fuel for Families Living in Poverty in India

In 2016, the Indian government launched the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY), a program aiming to protect women and children from the harmful effects of indoor air pollution by providing liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) connections to families living below the poverty line. The government aims to distribute a total of 50 million LPG connections, reducing India's dependency on biomass fuels, saving trees, and improving health conditions. As of August 2017, PMUY has provided 27.7 million Indian families with LPG connections, and



### SDG 2: End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture

- **2.3** By 2030, double the agricultural productivity and incomes of small-scale food producers, in particular women..., including through secure and equal access to land, other productive resources and inputs, knowledge, financial services, markets, and opportunities

### SDG 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

- **5.a** Undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance, and natural resources, in accordance with national laws

### SDG 6: Ensure access to water and sanitation for all

- **6.1** By 2030, achieve universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water for all
- **6.2** By 2030, achieve access to adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene for all and end open defecation, paying special attention to the needs of women and girls and those in vulnerable situations

### SDG 7: Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy for all

- **7.1** By 2030, ensure universal access to affordable, reliable, and modern energy services



as of September 2019, 10,000 new distributors of LPG have been appointed in rural India, specifically in the Marathwada region.<sup>31,32</sup>

## Improve and Enforce Secure Land and Productive Resource Rights for Women, Including Their Rights to Access, Control, Own, and Inherit

Promoting women's land rights is an effective, long-term solution to advancing opportunities for women and enhancing community health and wellbeing. When a woman has secure rights to land, her status and role in household decision-making improves, and she is better equipped to care for herself and her family and break out of poverty.<sup>33</sup> This can lead to better nutrition and food security, increased education for children, better health outcomes, decreased vulnerability to HIV, and less exposure to domestic violence.<sup>34</sup>

### Case Study: The Greatest Predictor of Poverty in India Is Landlessness<sup>35</sup>

An estimated 18 million families in rural India are landless and tens of millions more have insecure rights to the land they rely on. Their long-term insecurity and inability to protect and secure the land they depend on predicts poverty, seeds conflict, and hinders economic growth. Since 2000, Landesa has been working to change this reality. By partnering with state and central government leaders, Landesa strives to create opportunity, incentive, and security by strengthening land rights. To address the disparity in land rights between women and men, Landesa supports the creation of policies and programs that strengthen girls' and women's land rights, raise legal awareness, and grant homesteads and farmlands to rural women. By working with Indian state government officials and central government leaders, Landesa has reached more than 680,000 families with legal literacy programs. Increasingly, leaders in India's poorest states are recognizing that insecure land tenure is a significant hurdle to development and stability. Already, the governments of Bihar, West Bengal, Odisha, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, and Uttar Pradesh have launched programs to bolster women's and girls' land rights. In West Bengal, more than 48,000 girls participated in Landesa's Girls Project, which educates girls about their land rights and provides agricultural training and an opportunity to sell crops for school fees.

## Include Women in Decision-Making Related to Land and Resource Management, Humanitarian Response Planning, and Displaced Persons' Camp Management

To implement effective and sustainable resource management programs, women must be engaged in the decision-making process, as they are most affected by energy, land, and resource inequities. Gender plays a defining role in how individuals utilize and benefit from land and natural resources, which are closely linked to livelihoods for the vast majority of people.<sup>36</sup> Failing to recognize the unique challenges women face—especially in humanitarian settings—including the risk of physical harm as they collect natural resources or grow food for the family, can further perpetuate inequalities regarding land and natural resource rights, access, and control.<sup>37</sup>

There is strong evidence that women's leadership and inclusion in decision-making processes contributes to better emergency preparedness, more effective humanitarian response, and more inclusive and sustainable peace building.<sup>38</sup> Women's understanding and knowledge of their local environment and community uniquely positions them to be transformational agents in emergency response preparedness and resilience building. Therefore, when supporting displaced populations in humanitarian crises, it is essential to include women and adolescent girls in the planning, decision-making, and operations of camps and settlements.

Girls and women walk long distances, often at night, to procure food, water, and cooking fuel for their families, as well as to access hygiene facilities, risking their safety and wellbeing.<sup>39,40</sup> Girls and women are also uniquely susceptible to an increased risk of gender-based violence in humanitarian settings. Including women in the camp administration, coordination, and management processes will allow gender-responsive humanitarian planning and management that takes into account the different needs and experiences of girls and women. Far too often, national governments and international agencies fail to apply a gender lens to the needs of affected populations and, consequently, under-invest in gender-responsive humanitarian assistance.<sup>41</sup> Camps and settlements that include women in decision-making bodies are more likely to be well-designed, reducing the risk of gender-based violence, improving quality of life, and protecting the dignity of vulnerable populations.<sup>42</sup>

### Case Study: Bringing Women to the Table in South Sudan<sup>43</sup>

Following the establishment of the Republic of South Sudan in 2011, SOS Sahel, an international non-governmental organization (NGO) working in partnership with local groups, implemented a resource-based conflict reduction program providing women and youth with natural resource management and conflict resolution skills. Women pastoralists in the region have a reputation for being extremely influential as peacebuilders, but they had been excluded from decision-making processes. SOS Sahel engages women and marginalized groups, encouraging traditional leaders to incorporate them into formal decision-making processes. Through educational tools and sessions provided to women in the communities, steering groups with women representatives were developed and community structures were registered as legal bodies in accordance with Sudanese regulations.

## Improve Quality and Access to Water Services

When women spend less time fetching water, they have more time to dedicate to their children, growing food, or pursuing educational and economic opportunities.<sup>44</sup> There are also multiple health benefits linked to reducing the time spent fetching water. According to a 2012 study in sub-Saharan



### SDG 11: Make cities inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable

- **11.1** By 2030, ensure access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services and upgrade slums

### SDG 13: Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts

- **13.b** Promote mechanisms for raising capacity for effective climate change-related planning and management in least developed countries and small island developing States, including focusing on women, youth and local and marginalized communities

### SDG 15: Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss

- **15.6** Promote fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising from the utilization of genetic resources and promote appropriate access to such resources, as internationally agreed

### SDG 16: Good Governance

- **16.7** Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels



Africa, a 15-minute decrease in time spent walking to a water source is associated with a 41% average reduction in diarrhea prevalence, an 11% reduction in under-5 mortality, and improvements in the nutritional status of children. These improvements are likely the result of more water being available in the household.<sup>45</sup>

Comprehensive national water strategies should be developed to include the construction, operation, maintenance, and rehabilitation of water points.<sup>46</sup> The optimal number of beneficiaries and optimal distance from households within the service area must be explicit. Based on past recommendations, reasonable access is defined as being within the dwelling, yard, or plot.<sup>47</sup> Water strategies should clearly address safe access in informal settlements and peri-urban and rural areas, where safe drinking water may be less common,<sup>48</sup> and develop an acceptable definition at the country level for time invested in fetching water outside the dwelling. They must discourage any stigma or discrimination regarding menstruation or minority groups and avoid other disempowering social norms or community practices.<sup>49</sup> The role of women in irrigating, fetching, and treating water should be systematically tracked to monitor changes and improvements and to better understand how improved water services change a woman's status in the household and in society.

Empowering women is an important part of service delivery. Women must be involved in planning water service provision and be meaningfully represented and able to participate in governing bodies. Furthermore, women should be supported to become involved in WASH service delivery, which would provide them income generating opportunities. Evidence suggests that communities with water and sanitation user groups that include women function more effectively and sustainably.<sup>50</sup>

#### Case Study: Finance Clean Water and Sanitation Through WaterCredit Loans

Many low-income households in developing countries have limited access to credit. WaterCredit builds communities' capacity to construct clean toilets and water supply connections by helping local financial institutions provide loans. To date, WaterCredit has disbursed 2.9 million loans totaling \$983 million, 90% of which went to women, most of whom were rural borrowers earning \$2 or less per day.<sup>51, 52</sup> In total, 12 million people have benefited across 12 countries.<sup>53</sup> Evidence shows that as access to water and sanitation credit becomes available, low-income clients choose to take out loans, and 99% of borrowers are able to pay them back.<sup>54</sup>

#### Employ Comprehensive Approaches for Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene, Including Provisions for Menstrual Health and Hygiene Management

Sustainable solutions for girls and women require comprehensive approaches that facilitate access to water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) services. Decades of WASH programming experience show that the first steps to success involve conducting an explicit analysis of the needs on the ground and identifying a hypothesis of change before any action is taken.<sup>55</sup> Many major development organizations working in WASH agree on factors that should be considered when designing an appropriate intervention that meets the needs of the community,<sup>56</sup> including menstrual health and hygiene management systems and provisions. Such comprehensive frameworks are vital to ensuring sustainable gains over the long term.

Interventions should be developed and implemented around the following three domains: access to supplies and services (e.g., water, sanitation, water treatment supplies, menstrual hygiene products); creating an enabling environment (e.g., supportive policies, strengthened institutional capacities for government and other sectors, and financing); and establishing hygiene-promotion activities for social and behavior change through communications and media.<sup>57</sup>

When implemented together, interventions along these domains promote healthy and sustainable changes in behavior. For example, menstrual hygiene management (MHM) requires access to products and services, including pads, adequate supplies of water for washing, and a private place to change and bathe. Improved sanitation behaviors call for access to sanitation facilities, but they may also require microfinance loans for households for sanitation improvements, including to purchase latrines and fecal sludge management services to sustainably maintain the facilities.<sup>58, 59</sup> Similarly, a comprehensive school WASH program includes access to water, sanitation, and hygiene facilities, as well as hygiene education, and menstrual health and hygiene management.<sup>60</sup>

Ensuring that MHM programs are effective requires more than building girl-friendly facilities. Schools should also integrate puberty education for girls and boys, educating teachers, families, and communities about menstrual hygiene to break taboos and cultural constraints.<sup>61</sup> It could also include school policies that budget for soap and menstrual supplies, and allow girls to use sanitation facilities as needed. Girls should have a say in the types of facilities and menstrual products that would best serve their needs at school, leading to a more girl-friendly school that is a source of empowerment and pride.<sup>62</sup> The positive impact in schools may spill over to communities. A school WASH program in Zambia, for example, led to households installing latrines and handwashing facilities, children teaching parents better hygiene, and former taboo topics such as open defecation and menstruation being discussed openly.<sup>63</sup>

Establishing an enabling environment requires governments to enact policies that focus on providing sanitation and water services for communities and ensure that WASH services are included in the education budget.<sup>64, 65</sup> Best practices around community water and sanitation services include strengthening community governance and calling for fair representation and meaningful participation of women in the planning, designing, and monitoring of services.<sup>66</sup> Going back to the menstrual hygiene



#### Relevant International Agreements:

- UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) (1979)
- United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (Earth Summit) (1992)
- Millennium Development Goals (2000–2015)
- International Decade for Action “Water for Life” (2005–2015)
- United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007)
- Sanitation and Water for All Partnership (2010)
- Sustainable Energy for All (2011)
- Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests (2012)
- Sustainable Development Goals (2015–2030)
- The New Urban Agenda (2016)
- United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas (2018)



management example, an enabling environment might include eliminating taxes on feminine hygiene products.<sup>67</sup> It is critical to change behavior by creating demand. Particularly in humanitarian settings, WASH standards must take into consideration the increased risks women and girls face—specifically, gender-based violence—and must work collaboratively to prevent and mitigate these risks.<sup>68</sup> A UN Women study measuring the effect of gender equality programming on humanitarian outcomes determined that including women in humanitarian programming is associated with improved access to water, sanitation, and hygiene and improved food security, particularly for women and children.<sup>69,70</sup>

#### **Case Study: Multi-Sector Approach to Reducing Malnutrition<sup>71</sup>**

In Bangladesh, the Strengthening Household Ability to Respond to Development Opportunities program, launched in 2004, adopted a multi-sectoral approach to improving the nutritional status of mothers and children in four remote, rural areas. The framework focused on enhancing the literacy and leadership skills of girls and women, educating them about sound health and nutrition practices, and installing wells for access to safe drinking water. These interventions led to better health within the communities and a reduction in malnutrition. And by incorporating the importance of proper WASH practices, over three years the percentage of mothers who wash their hands before food preparation rose from 60% to 94%; households with access to safe, clean water rose from 57% to 71%; and the percentage of people with access to a sanitary latrine rose from 13% to 54%.

#### **Promote Community-Led Total Sanitation (CLTS)**

Community-led total sanitation is a facilitated participatory process to inspire rural communities to abandon the accepted practice of open defecation, without reliance on external subsidies to build toilets. When facilitated effectively, CLTS supports communities in understanding the health implications of open defecation by promoting community awareness and igniting a sense of ownership to find the needed solutions to the problem.<sup>72</sup> This often leads to the spontaneous decision by most households to build or improve latrines, and spurs communities to shame violators and sustain improvements in latrine use and sanitation practice.<sup>73</sup>

Bringing sanitation options closer to or within the home is a critical improvement for women in the community. It means they won't have to walk long distances to find a site that is private, which decreases the risk of gender-based violence.<sup>74</sup> It saves them time and energy, reduces their exposure to violence, and improves their nutritional status, which in turn has a positive impact on their reproductive health and pregnancy outcomes.<sup>75,76</sup>

Over time, implementers have expanded the concept of CLTS to incorporate a range of actions for improving health outcomes, including the promotion of handwashing with soap and supporting sanitation marketing to engage private-sector contributions.<sup>77</sup> CLTS also opens the door to conversations about topics once considered taboo. Women can discuss health risks related to unsafe MHM. And once they understand the issues and potential pitfalls, men and boys want to assist their wives and sisters. By starting these conversations in the home, it becomes easier for women to participate in community discussions and in decisions that will impact their health, instill dignity, and help change social and cultural norms.<sup>78</sup>

#### **Case Study: WASHplus Program in Mali<sup>79</sup>**

Between 2014 and 2016, WASHplus integrated a WASH/nutrition program to reach Malian women of reproductive age and their children in 180 villages in three districts with high rates of stunting. In addition to motivating villages to collectively abandon open defecation and increasing demand for low-cost sanitation, the program places a strong emphasis on improving nutrition and hygiene practices, including handwashing, water treatment, exclusive breastfeeding, and dietary diversity, through a range of behavior change approaches. Trained community health workers visit communities to educate women on WASH and screen for undernourished children who are referred to the community or district-level rehabilitation centers for treatment. WASHplus trained more than 400 community extension workers, constructed or upgraded 10,000 latrines in the targeted communities, and rehabilitated water points that provided improved access to water for more than 50,000 people. The program also helped drastically decrease the number of children referred for malnutrition in the target areas from 2,050 moderately malnourished children over a three-month period in 2014 to 334 over the same period in 2015, and from 269 severely malnourished to 38.

#### **Case Study: A Gender-Sensitive Design Approach to Toilets**

Access to a private, comfortable, and accessible toilet remains a critical challenge for many girls and women around the world. This challenge is exacerbated in areas such as slums and informal settlements, where WASH facilities are often built in a gender-blind manner and misaligned with users' personal and cultural beliefs.<sup>80</sup> In 2018, WaterAid, Water & Sanitation for the Urban Poor (WSUP), and UNICEF published a guide for planners and decision-makers on building female-friendly public and community toilets that identifies certain critical requirements. According to the guide, toilets should: 1) Be safe and private; 2) Cater for menstrual hygiene management and other hygiene requirements; 3) Be accessible to all users; 4) Be affordable and available when needed; 5) Be well maintained and managed; and 6) Meet the requirements of caregivers and parents.<sup>81</sup>

Through this model, WaterAid has assisted in the construction of female-friendly and accessible public toilets across regions. For example, in Dhaka, Bangladesh, a partnership between city municipalities and WaterAid, along with other non-governmental organizations, led to a commitment to build 100 new public toilets. The goal was to address the fact that, on average, 75% of the toilet blocks did not have female-friendly and child-friendly features, and more than 30% were in very unsafe locations. Therefore, the new toilets have separate male and female sections, hand basins with soap, showers, safe drinking water, reliable water and electricity supplies, CCTV cameras, and professional male and female caretakers. The toilet use fee is waived for people who say that they cannot pay.<sup>82</sup>

### **SECTION 3: THE BENEFITS OF INVESTMENT**

The results of a global cost-benefit analysis of water supply and sanitation depict the costs and benefits of investing in all water and sanitation improvements.<sup>83</sup> In developing regions, the return on a \$1 investment ranged from \$2 to \$5.50, depending on the intervention.<sup>84,85</sup> The main contributor to these economic benefits was the time saved through better access to water and sanitation services, which accounted for more than 70% of the overall economic benefits.<sup>86</sup> Globally, for every \$1 invested in water and sanitation, there is a \$4.30 return in the form of reduced healthcare costs.<sup>87,88</sup>

Though comparable data for household energy has not yet been calculated, an analysis by the World Health Organization suggests an average of \$60 billion in annual economic benefits could be accrued if half the people cooking with solid fuels switched to liquefied





petroleum gas.<sup>89</sup> Societal benefits would take the form of improvements in health and social status, as well as reductions in drudgery, time spent collecting fuel, and risk of attack or assault while collecting fuel.<sup>90</sup> These gains would bring about additional economic benefits that are necessary for inclusive and sustainable development.

Investing in efforts to improve women's access to and use of land also leads to positive impacts on local economies.<sup>91</sup> When women have secure land rights, their earnings can increase significantly, impacting their ability to open bank accounts, save money, build credit, and make investments.<sup>92</sup> Furthermore, when women are empowered, their children are empowered too—a ripple effect that contributes to breaking cycles of poverty.<sup>93</sup> Women face a serious gender gap in accessing productive resources such as land, credit, water, energy, and technologies.<sup>94</sup> Closing this gap could lead to increasing agricultural yields on women's farms by 20% to 30%, lifting 100 million to 150 million people out of hunger.<sup>95,96</sup> Similarly, when women are able to take leadership roles in energy planning and management, not only are they able to access additional forms of employment and skills building, they are able to influence the implementation of social policies and reinforce their existence.<sup>97</sup>

If done effectively, investing in safe access to water, sanitation, and household energy can better engage half the population and spur economic productivity. A gender lens approach can augment the positive impact of access to resources that benefit everyone—women, local communities, and low- and middle-income countries.

## SECTION 4: CALLS TO ACTION

There is ample evidence to verify that the cross-cutting strategies outlined above have the potential to increase women's access to resources. When adapted to address the specific contexts of each community, these approaches not only empower women, they also improve the health and wealth of societies as a whole.

In order to power progress for all, many different constituencies must work together—governments, civil society, academia, media, affected populations, the private sector, the United Nations, and other bilateral and multi-lateral organizations—to take the following actions for girls and women:

- Engage women in efforts to advance universal access to affordable, safe, and sustainable sources of clean energy, including clean cookstoves, throughout homes and communities. (Most relevant for: governments, civil society, academia, affected populations, the United Nations, and the private sector)
- In humanitarian settings, implement the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Guidelines on Safe Access to Firewood and Alternative Energy. (Most relevant for governments, United Nations, and civil society)
- Establish clear legal and regulatory frameworks and gender-disaggregated data-gathering measures to guarantee women's secure rights to land, including the right to inherit, own, access, control, and participate in land governance. (Most relevant for: governments, civil society, and the United Nations)
- Improve safe access to water, sanitation, and hygiene, and work with rural and urban communities and schools to become open defecation free, and girl friendly. (Most relevant for: governments, civil society, the United Nations, and the private sector)
- Ensure schools have adequate WASH facilities and supplies, and provide education on menstrual health and hygiene management. (Most relevant for: governments, civil society, and the private sector)
- Focus efforts toward more integrated, gender-centered design to strengthen access to natural resources, land, water, sanitation, and affordable and clean energy. (Most relevant for: governments, civil society, the United Nations, and the private sector)
- Invest in research and program evaluations to better understand the links between cookstove and/or clean energy interventions and prevention of gender-based violence, particularly in humanitarian settings. (Most relevant for: the United Nations, academic institutions, and NGOs)
- Support women's development of, access to, ownership of, benefit from, and inheritance of assets, such as land, productive resources, capital, and technology. (Most relevant for: civil society, governments, and the private sector)
- Undertake gender-responsive and women-led resource and land management initiatives and provide strong legal and socially legitimate land tenure rights for women. (Most relevant for: civil society, governments, and the private sector)

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➔ **Learn more about the Deliver for Good campaign.**



## ENDNOTES

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