

5 LESSONS EVERY WASH PROFESSIONAL SHOULD LEARN

Without a doubt the Sustainable Development Goals should be on top of the agendas of business, governmental and societal leaders all over the world. Now the first hurdle of formulating these 17 highly ambitious goals has been taken, a new challenge arises: how are we going to realise them?

For the WASH Alliance International, achieving SDG6 “Universal access to water and sanitation”, means making sure that:

1. Everybody has access to safe water and sanitation **before 2030**
2. **We take into account the environment** while making sure everybody has access to water and sanitation
3. Everybody has access to safe water sources and sanitation **locally financed**
4. **Really everybody** has access to safe water and sanitation
5. Everybody **remains to have** access to safe water and sanitation after 2030

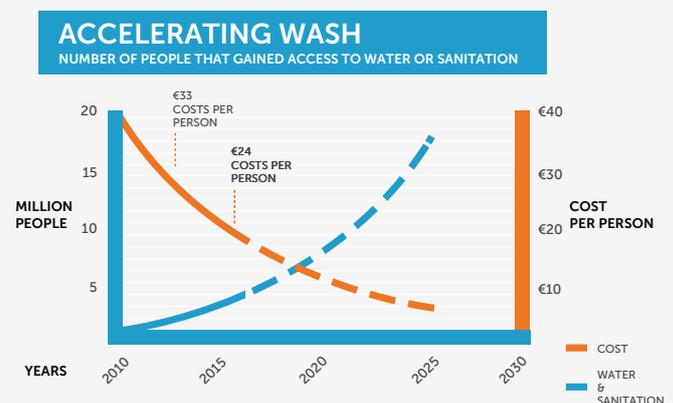
We believe that only by working together we will be able to achieve this goal. We need to learn and innovate together and share everything we have learned to realise WASH for everyone, forever. So, to contribute to the world’s joint effort to achieve SDG6, we want to share with you 5 key lessons we believe every WASH professional should learn.

#1 REACHING EVERYONE *BEFORE 2030* REQUIRES “ACCELERATION-THINKING”

Our wake-up call came during one of our annual international WASH Alliance weeks a couple of years ago: if we kept working at our current pace, it would take us over 232 years to reach full coverage. And in this calculation we did not even take into account population growth! It was then that we realised we need to drastically change our approach. We need to innovate and focus on facilitating the development of a sustainable WASH sector to reach scale.

Acceleration is a mind-set focused on realising faster growth of sustainable access to and usage of WASH services. It is a way of thinking about scale and institutionalising the WASH sector, so that NGOs (as facilitators) can phase-out while local stakeholders take over the sustainable provision of WASH services. Check out our [Acceleration Manual](#) and learn more about how you can accelerate access to WASH.

We developed a method to accelerate. With this method we can realise scale in WASH service delivery, services that are locally managed and financed. Successful acceleration means that everyday more and more people will be able to use sustainable WASH services, while at the same time international subsidies are phased out. People will pay for their own toilet; water infrastructure investment costs will be reimbursed by water tariffs; entrepreneurs get loans to start a business in WASH and local governments increase that investments and activities in WASH. Accelerating WASH is about reaching 100% coverage (so leaving no one behind) in such a way that full coverage can be ensured forever by locals for locals. In addition to sustainability, the acceleration mind-set adds a sense of urgency, accommodating growing populations and addressing the need for scale.



Sustainable acceleration will happen when donors do not invest directly in WASH service provision, but instead invest in the capacity of local structures (cooperation between governments, businesses, financial institutions and communities) to improve their ability and motivation to realise WASH services themselves. In this way, an accelerating system is created. When we facilitate the development of a system in which all these stakeholders work effectively together on realising sustainable water services, the system automatically takes over, replicating itself, making external subsidies redundant over time.

#2 OUR ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY APPROACH TAKES THE ENVIRONMENT INTO ACCOUNT, WHILE ENSURING ACCESS TO SAFE WASH

While we make sure current generations can increasingly make use of safe WASH facilities and services supply, we mustn't forget about future generations. This means that the only way to set up sustainable water and sanitation, is doing so without degrading the environment. This approach takes into account the mutual interdependence between the ecosystem and the community. It therefore looks for environmentally sustainable solutions, making sure the E of our [FIETS approach](#) is covered. In creating safe and sustainable WASH for all, it is really important to keep the environment healthy for its residents.

It is easy to forget about the worth of water, until the well is dry. The guiding principle in the Environmental Sustainability approach is that water, land and other resources are part of one single ecosystem and cannot be dealt with separately. A mind-shift is needed for most stakeholders, to make this an integral part of our thinking. By approaching WASH programmes from the environmental angle, you will secure the availability of water in the long term. Therefore, understanding relevant environmental aspects is crucial for any WASH programming and should be performed at all levels. In case you observe that awareness and capacity need to be built, then the training-of-trainer package on environmental sustainability in WASH is a great way to show people how the environment works, but also how its environmental services can be used to sustain your WASH services.

The [training-of-trainers manual](#) for WASH programme planning is central, but the toolkit also contains field exercises, tools for visualising and an e-sustainability interactive manual to ensure an environmental sustainability approach. Find them all [online](#).

#3 OUR FINANCE & BUSINESS CASE APPROACH AIMS AT LOCALLY FUNDED WASH

Business cases offer great opportunities to realise access to water, while at the same time help restoring or conserving landscapes. But how to (locally) finance WASH services in landscape programmes? And how to provide solutions and mechanisms that are able to scale up? The Finance & Business Case approach helps to answer these questions and offers tangible tools and methods to create a workable approach that focuses on local financial sustainability.

The business case of land and water, aims to increase the appreciation, valuation and monetisation of natural resources by the market. Also, as private businesses play an important role in markets, this approach will lead to engagement of the private sector in land and water management activities on the ground. This is where our Finance & Business Case approach comes in. Application of the WASH business case development toolkit results in more promising concept notes, increased financial sustainability and acceleration of your funding procedures. At the same time the toolkit triggers you to include environmental sustainable interventions in the plan, instead of planning for depletion of natural resources, like water and soil.

Looking from a business perspective, landscape can add value to its users in many different ways. To integrate this into WASH development and programmes, we developed the Finance & Business case approach. The approach helps developing countries to get out of poverty, connecting them to global markets and boost sustainable (economic) growth. The publication explains all about the business case for land & water, together with tools as our landscape canvas, value proposition and client(s) and landscape selection methods. Businesses will need to recognise the interdependency between the state natural resources are in, and business results and continuity. By adopting such an approach, we can understand true business drivers and motivations and use this to develop new and successful ways to articulate environmental protection.

Curious about the [Business Case for land and water](#)? Check out this and all other tools.

#4 OUR GENDER & SOCIAL INCLUSION APPROACH MAKES SURE EVERYBODY HAS ACCESS TO WASH

The WASH Alliance International aims for sustainable acceleration through following [the five FIETS sustainability principles](#), while leaving no one behind. Aiming for all these aspects has a tendency to create tension as it is easier to accelerate through targeting easy to reach areas, leave out the hard to reach and very poor. How do we make sure we leave no one behind? To achieve and facilitate a process of change within the WASH sector, we have the role of watchdog, to ensure the socially weak aren't left behind, but are fully included during change and development.

Presenting the management of land and water as a business case, aims to increase the appreciation, valuation and monetisation. In order to ensure "No one is left behind" in our programme, we have developed two main documents to help us improve inclusiveness in our programme and our partner organisations, which can be used by anyone from WASH sector and beyond:

1. "[Leaving No One Behind Through adopting an Inclusion Lens](#)": this document explains the ambition, including background information on (dimensions of) inclusion and exclusion and barriers to achieve this goal. The "Inclusion Lens" tool takes into account all important aspects when designing, implementing and reviewing WASH programmes.
2. "[Organisation Inclusion Assessment Tool](#)": this tool helps to become more inclusive in both the interventions as the organisations their selves. For this, the assessment tool looks at eight "Focus Areas" and includes suggestions for strategies and activity plans to improve the inclusion level for each Focus Area.

Inclusion and exclusion are about Power: in order to structurally remove the barriers, you need to make sure everyone is empowered to have a fair game. To achieve this, we first have to learn who is left behind and why. In providing access to WASH to the bottom of the pyramid, we need to focus on exclusion based on gender, race, poverty, religion, ethnicity, political orientation etc. There is no one size fits all solution that can be used, to include all of them. When defining terms as "poor", "marginalized" or "bottom of the pyramid", we need to be as specific as possible. Inclusion is not about allowing people to join, but empowering those who are often excluded to rise beyond the barriers and actively participate in the decision-making processes. This ultimately affects their lives, their family and their society. To have inclusive programmes and be inclusive organisations, we need to look sharply through an "Inclusion Lens" to see who is left behind and then take action to ensure we really reach everyone.

#5 MAKING SURE ACCESS TO WASH REMAINS REQUIRES A SUSTAINABILITY APPROACH

With the SDGs set until 2030, there is an increased focus on sustainability. But how do we know that our interventions contribute to sustainable WASH services? We would need a crystal ball to look into the future...

But there is something that we can do: we can take into account sustainability principles during our intervention and programmes, to increase the likelihood of the current functionality to be maintained or improved in the distant future. The Sustainability Monitoring Framework (SMF) guides the process to unpack the complexity of sustainability into five principles and to monitor whether these principles are sufficiently secured in our current programmes or at district level.

Achieving the WASH SDGs is both doable and very challenging at the same time. The systems needed to build on investments in infrastructure and provide uninterrupted and high quality services are weak or missing. Even if the service is available, the quality may still be poor or the accessibility limited. The WASH service levels depend on the performance in service delivery tasks at different institutional levels and the behaviour of its users.

We define sustainability as the continuous use of WASH services. The main factors contributing to the sustainability of WASH services are the following five key sustainability principles: Financial, Institutional, Environmental, Technical and Social (FIETS). The SMF is a tool that links the enabling environment (policy, strategy, capacities, attitudes etc.) with the use of WASH services. Are all principles sufficiently secured to ensure a sustainable WASH service? Having met all the requirements does not necessarily ensure a sustainable WASH service, but it is likely that it will be. Therefore, we plead: The SMF measures the likelihood of sustainability. The following opportunities have been identified for the use of the SMF:

1. Assist in understanding and unpacking the complexity of sustainability for a certain project area or district for all stakeholders involved.
2. Set a baseline and monitor trends to see if the likelihood of sustainability is increasing – using the Sustainability Index that is part of the SMF.
3. Understanding the conditions of the enabling environment in which WASH activities and interventions are carried out. . And, analyse if they contribute to setting favourable conditions with regards to sustainability and adapt the interventions accordingly.

Learn more about the Sustainability approach and check the [Sustainability Monitoring Framework](#).

About the WASH Alliance International

The WASH Alliance International is a multi-national consortium of over 100 partners worldwide. We work together with local NGOs, governments and businesses to make sure everyone on this planet has sustainable access to water and sanitation. In Africa we run programmes in Ghana, Mali, Benin, Uganda, Ethiopia and Kenya. In Asia, we work in Nepal and Bangladesh. All tools, publications and manuals linked to the 5 key learnings of our learning programme, you can find on www.wash-alliance.org