

Enhancing WASH in Northern Ghana: Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Analysis



Study Overview

In northern Ghana, Global Communities leads a consortium of 10 organizations, which implement the **Enhancing Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (En-WASH) Activity** (2021 – 2026), funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The project aims to increase the adoption of sustainable and equitable water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services by households, communities, health care facilities and schools. En-WASH uses a behavior integration approach and behavior-led theory of change to address factors that influence access to and use of WASH services and products. The project focuses on poor, marginalized and vulnerable groups, while integrating gender considerations under the guidance of a dedicated Gender and Youth Advisor.

In 2022-23, the En-WASH team conducted a Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) Analysis to gain insights into WASH-related inequalities, and to better understand gender norms and power dynamics which influence the accessibility, responsiveness and sustainability of WASH services in northern Ghana. Based on the findings, the team developed an Action Plan to (1) Guide the program in taking an inclusive and gender-responsive approach; (2) Improve equitable access to WASH services and commodities; and (3) Facilitate meaningful participation of women, men, youth, people with disabilities (PWD) and other marginalized groups in WASH governance, the private sector and in all consultations and decision-making that support the project objectives.

Key Findings

- Accessing clean water is becoming increasingly difficult in northern Ghana because of climate change and the lack of adequate infrastructure and services.
- As the primary collectors of water, women and children are most affected by the lack of WASH services. They spend four hours on average, and up to seven hours a day, fetching water.
- Men are typically responsible for the design, construction and maintenance of WASH infrastructure.
- Approximately two-thirds of community members participating in WASH governance, decision-making and leadership are men. PWD are reportedly almost never involved or present.
- There is limited participation of women, youth and PWD in WASH enterprises, driven by limited access to capital and insufficient demand for WASH-related products and services.
- Women and girls face menstruation stigma and typically cannot afford sanitary pads.

Methodology

The GESI Analysis relied on qualitative and quantitative data to identify pathways for advancing equality and inclusion within the parameters of the En-WASH Activity. The analysis is based on a literature review; data from a comprehensive baseline survey conducted by En-WASH consortium member Aguaya; and a qualitative GESI study undertaken by Global Communities. The study involved discussions with the representatives of the Government of Ghana (GoG), implementing partners, WASH service providers and community members. It included 67 key informant interviews at the national, district and community levels as well as 9 focus group discussions (FGDs) and 6 household dialogues at the community level.¹ The analysis examines the domains of gender analysis articulated in USAID's Automated Directives System (ADS) Chapter 205.² Following the study, the En-WASH team conducted two workshops in Tamale to validate and disseminate key findings, and to support action planning.

Summary of Findings

ACCESS TO WASH SERVICES

- According to the En-WASH baseline survey, 52% of households in the project's zone of influence have access to basic drinking water, but merely 1% of households have access to safely managed drinking water services. Only 8% use recommended household water treatment technologies correctly. External data shows that 64% of households in Ghana from the poorest wealth quintile have no access to sanitation and practice open defecation.³

"A lot of households in this community do not have latrines and so we resort to open defecation." –Female FGD Participant

- As the primary collectors of water for cooking, cleaning and consumption, women and children are among the most affected by the lack of WASH services. Marginalized populations and those living in vulnerable situations face the greatest difficulties accessing WASH services that meet their needs.



Map 1: En-WASH is implemented in 30 districts across six regions of northern Ghana. Global Communities collected qualitative data for the GESI study in three regions of the project's zone of influence: Nkwanta North, Wa East and Bawku.

¹ The FGDs were conducted in Nkwanta North District (Oti Region), Bawku West District (Upper East Region) and Wa East District (Upper West Region).

² The five domains of gender analysis laid out in "ADS Chapter 205: Integrating Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in USAID's Program Cycle" include (1) Laws, policies and institutional practices; (2) Patterns of power and decision-making; (3) Social norms and beliefs; (4) Gender roles, responsibilities and time use; and (5) Access to and control over assets and resources. Given the high prevalence of harmful practices and gender-based violence (GBV) in northern Ghana, we have added a sixth domain – personal safety and security – to examine a) Risks of injury and GBV associated with inadequate access to WASH facilities; and b) Risks of GBV, especially intimate partner violence, as an unintended consequence of programming.

³ MoSWR. (2023). *Ghana WASH Sector Development Program (GWASHSDP) 2021-2030*.

- Access to water is becoming increasingly difficult in northern Ghana because of climate change and the lack of infrastructure and services. Women focus group participants reported spending four hours on average, and up to seven hours a day, fetching water. This includes waiting time at the water sources and multiple trips in areas where there are acute water shortages during dry seasons. In some communities, such as Jato Kparikpari, women spend nights searching for or sleeping near water sources, while husbands report feeling deprived of intimacy with their wives, which can lead to intimate partner violence. These trips can also expose women to physical harm, particularly when walking alone, such as sexual abuse when traveling long distances during the dry season. Other safety risks include exposure to snake bites, water borne diseases (e.g., cholera, typhoid and diarrhea), drowning during the rainy season and injuries from carrying water for a long time, which is typically done by head-loading.



“Men hardly involve themselves in fetching water for household use...They always say that water fetching is part of women’s roles because men married and brought the women home.” —Female FGD Participant



- Men and boys are starting to assist with household water collection during the dry season so that women have more time to support their husbands on their farms and engage in other income generating activities. This may indicate a normative shift in gender roles, responsibilities and time use, at least in the areas where water shortages are most acute.



- The lack of adequate WASH services, including menstrual health and hygiene (MHH) facilities and products, decreases school-aged girls' time for studying and increases school dropouts with the onset of puberty. One participant in a women's FGD noted that school becomes ineffective during the peak of the dry season, between March and July each year, because children – mostly girls – cannot go to school without bathing. In some cases, teachers become idle and schools close as the majority of students search for water.
- When asked about the affordability of MHH products, study participants noted that sanitary pads are expensive, and many women and girls must rely on less effective cloth options.

Ministry of Sanitation and Water Resources (MoSWR) Guidelines for Targeting the Poor and Vulnerable for Basic Sanitation Services

According to the guidelines, basic sanitation support may be given on a case-by-case basis, underpinned by demonstrated poverty and vulnerability. Priority should be given to households or individuals from communities that are certified as open-defecation free. Support should be given to the poor and vulnerable meeting the following criteria:

- Participants of existing pro-poor programs, such as the Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty, the National Health Insurance Scheme and the Ghana Social Opportunities Project.
- Female-headed households without adequate social support system.
- Persons living with disabilities without support or means of livelihood.
- The elderly (60 years and above) who have no external support.
- Marginalized groups with no external support.
- Persons who are not gainfully employed and have no regular source of income and external support system.
- Terminally ill persons, with no external support system.
- Households with orphans or vulnerable children (OVC).
- Widows and widowers without external support.

WASH GOVERNANCE & LEADERSHIP

Laws, Policies and Institutional Practices

- Despite national laws and policies introduced by the GoG to prioritize equity and inclusion in WASH governance, study respondents reported a lack of action plans to mainstream gender into WASH plans and implementation at the district level.
- There are GoG initiatives to operationalize national WASH policies, including guidelines for improving MHH; however, respondents noted several barriers to gender-responsive and inclusive budgeting, including (1) A lack of funding and resources due to competing needs; (2) Gender being seen as a cross-cutting theme resulting in a lack of budgets for gender-specific WASH needs; and (3) Inadequate representation of women in the Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies (MMDAs) and very few women and PWD serving on WASH committees.

Patterns of Power and Decision Making

- Approximately two-thirds of community members participating in WASH decision-making and leadership are men. PWD are reportedly almost never involved or present. Men are broadly perceived as the decision makers in both public and private spheres, and some women feel that their lack of education precludes them from contributing to decision-making. Further, women, youth and PWD have limited time to participate in community meetings. Women often have disproportionately more domestic responsibilities than men, which affects their availability; youth are busy with schooling or disinterested in participating; PWD often face mobility and accessibility challenges.
- Women, youth, PWD and other marginalized groups are not adequately consulted during the design of WASH facilities and services. In rural areas, women's lower literacy rates also impact their ability to meaningfully contribute during consultations.

SOCIAL NORMS, BELIEFS & WASH BEHAVIORS

- Harmful social norms and stigma around menstruation place restrictions on menstruating individuals. For example, in some families and communities they cannot share latrines, collect water or prepare food for their households. These restrictions are most prevalent in the Nkwanta North district of the Oti region. Menstruating individuals are perceived as "impure" and believed to contaminate latrines and the water supply. Because of this belief, families construct two latrines in their homes, one for female and one for male household members. When construction of two latrines is not possible, menstruating individuals must resort to open defecation. In addition, menstruating women and girls are prohibited from stepping into rivers and fetching water for use by men and older boys. They must wait at a distance from the water source for another person to fetch water for them. A menstruating woman is also forbidden from cooking for her husband for seven days, at which point she is believed to be "clean enough" to resume her regular cooking and water collection responsibilities. These norms are less prevalent in other communities and are generally weakening in northern Ghana.
- There is a lack of education and knowledge of MHH among school-aged children and teachers, which has led to girls missing school during their menses or dropping out. In a survey by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), 19% of Ghanaian women reported not participating in school, work or social activities during the previous 12 months because of menstruation.⁴

⁴ UNICEF, et al. (2019). Ghana Multiple Cluster Indicator Survey 2017/18. Snapshots of Key Findings.



GENDER ROLES, RESPONSIBILITIES & TIME USE

- Women in northern Ghana face severe time constraints due to unpaid care work, including collecting water and fuelwood as well as other household tasks, such as cooking, caring for children, the sick and the elderly, and cleaning their compounds and latrines. Women also tend to be responsible for educating children about proper hygiene behaviors.
- Because women are responsible for collecting water, not all men prioritize paid access to water in household budgets. Water has traditionally been a “free” good, supplied by women’s unpaid labor. The need to pay for clean water or reliable water services is hard for men to accept, because traditionally this has not been considered their responsibility. Similarly, women’s needs for MHH products are not prioritized.

“What have I got to do with MHH products as a man? Menstruation is unclean and I can’t be associated with that.” – Male FGD Participant

ACCESS TO RESOURCES & ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

- Women tend to have less access to disposable income than men. They are also disadvantaged in access to land and frequently lack control over other assets or resources. The GoG has passed laws to restructure the inheritance systems (e.g., the Intestate Succession Law) and ensure fair distributions

that support otherwise excluded spouses and children.⁵ While Ghanaian women can legally gain access to or inherit land through marriage, lineage and contractual agreements, this is not applied consistently.⁶

Engagement in WASH Enterprises

- The lack of assets and resources affects women's ability to establish and grow enterprises. In Ghana, 78% of informal sector workers are female. Most women with small-scale businesses lack the capital needed to expand their enterprises. They also lack information on how to access networks, value chains and markets.
- When asked for the main reasons why there is limited participation of women, youth and PWD in WASH enterprises, study respondents cited a lack of access to capital and a lack of sufficient demand for WASH-related products and services.
- There are some women- and men-owned local businesses which sell sanitary pads, soap and detergents, but there is reportedly a general lack of awareness about the business opportunities and prospects in the WASH sector. Moreover, the demand is not high for hygiene-related products and there is limited understanding of marketing and business skills among WASH entrepreneurs.

SAFETY, SECURITY & GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

- Due to the limited access to clean water sources, women and girls travel long distances to remote locations and make multiple trips daily fetching water in some areas. This can expose them to physical risks and harm, such as GBV, particularly when walking alone or staying overnight at water sources.
- The lack of access to water creates stress and conflict within families, increasing the risk of intimate-partner violence.
- Women and girls experience increased vulnerability to GBV when latrines and toilets are not safe, separate, well-lit and lockable. Women cite the lack of household sanitation and on-site water sources as heightening their fear of sexual violence.⁷

Recommendations

The recommendations presented below⁸ are organized according to the anticipated results of the En-WASH program and are intended to guide the program to (1) Facilitate participatory processes to better assess and address people's distinct needs and preferences for safety, privacy and accessibility; (2) Advance diversity and inclusion in WASH governance and the private sector; (3) Challenge rigid social norms, power dynamics and division of labor which affect the adoption of improved WASH behaviors and place an undue burden on women for collecting water and other WASH-related tasks; and (4) Reduce GESI-related barriers in access to WASH services and commodities, especially in households, schools and healthcare facilities.

GESI Integration Principles

The following core GESI values are to guide all En-WASH activities. En-WASH Consortium is advised to track alignment with and progress against each principle.

- Lead by example; elevate women's strengths and leadership.
- Prioritize the needs and preferences of marginalized and underserved people and communities.
- Focus on equity to achieve inclusive gender equality.
- Do No Harm.
- Leverage GESI data to promote learning, reflection and action.

⁵ Japan International Cooperation Agency. (2013). *Country Gender Profile: Republic of Ghana*.

⁶ Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. (2019). *Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI): Ghana*.

⁷ Fiasorgbor DA. Water and sanitation situation in Nima and Teshie, Greater Accra Region of Ghana. *J Toxicol Environ Health Sci*. 2013;5(2):23-8.

⁸ For brevity, not all recommendations are included in this Learning Brief.



Result 1: GoG (MoSWR and MMDAs) effectively and efficiently plans, budgets for, implements and monitors water and sanitation services and policy.

- Facilitate the meaningful participation of underrepresented groups in WASH investment planning, community meetings and governance bodies. Where relevant, encourage affirmative action and reasonable accommodations to increase representation.
- Expand awareness and knowledge about WASH-related GESI issues among government staff through capacity strengthening initiatives.
- Strengthen the socioeconomic business case for GESI-responsive WASH facilities and services. GESI-responsive sanitation services include separate, safe (lockable), accessible and private toilets.
- Promote GESI-responsive budgeting for WASH facilities and services that address the needs of women, youth, PWD and other underserved populations.
- Support the identification and monitoring of GESI-responsive indicators by water service authorities to ensure that underserved populations have access to affordable clean water and WASH facilities, including in schools and healthcare facilities.

Result 2: Government and other actors improve the enabling environment for private sector participation in the WASH sector.

- Create an enabling environment for private sector WASH services to reach underserved groups.
- Expand awareness among private sector service providers about available GoG subsidies and provisions to facilitate implementation of the MoSWR Guidelines for Targeting the Poor and Vulnerable for Basic Sanitation Services.

- Support the creation, registration and growth of WASH enterprises owned by women, youth, PWD and members of other marginalized groups, including through training and coaching in business development, financial management and marketing.
- Promote low interest financial products for WASH enterprises and households to expand access to WASH services and products.
- Improve women’s financial inclusion, including through village savings and loan associations (VSLAs) and tailored financial services.
- Support household budget audits to examine spending priorities and potential costs of not having access to WASH services and products on family health, workloads and children’s education.
- Encourage GoG investment in WASH infrastructure and promotion in regions with lowest access to rural water supply and sanitation.

Result 3: Citizens adopt and sustain improved WASH practices

- Consult women, youth, PWD and other underrepresented groups to identify context-specific WASH needs and barriers to accessing safe and convenient WASH services in households, communities, schools and healthcare facilities.
- Promote positive role models and normative change messaging in communities to encourage the use of basic WASH products and facilities.
- Facilitate smaller and more affordable prepayments for water and sanitation services through digital financial services.
- Promote awareness about MHH and uptake of improved hygiene practices in healthcare facilities, schools, VSLA meetings and community meetings.

Result 4: WASH service providers adopt improved management, operational and finance models

- Promote investment in the design and marketing of low-cost, high-quality sanitation and hygiene products that are more accessible and affordable to women, youth, PWD and other marginalized groups.
- Offer training and coaching (e.g., in marketing, sales, financial literacy and business development) to entrepreneurs and business owners in WASH markets. Focus on women and youth entrepreneurs who may be more qualified to reach and serve other women and youth based on their social networks and lived experience.

The GESI Analysis was led by Global Communities’ En-WASH Gender and Youth Advisor, Patience Alagskomah, and co-authored by Charla Britt, an independent consultant. This learning brief was prepared by Chloe Pan and Kelly Dale Graham from Global Communities. The analysis was made possible with support from the American people, through USAID. The authors’ views expressed in this document do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.

