

# **A GLOBAL WATER AND SANITATION SYSTEM THAT WORKS FOR ALL**

Oxfam GB's Sustainable Water  
and Sanitation Strategy



**OXFAM**



Arafa collects water from a stream in Kutupalong, Bangladesh. Credit: Tommy Trenchard/Oxfam

## TOO MANY PEOPLE STILL LACK ACCESS TO CLEAN WATER OR A DECENT TOILET

### It is matter of life and death

In the most desperate circumstances, clean water and sanitation can mean the difference between life and death - and not just in times of catastrophes. For people already facing the injustice of extreme poverty, it's a daily challenge and a deadly risk.

More than 1.8 billion people still have to use unsafe water from a source contaminated by faeces - that's 1/4 of the world's population drinking, cooking and washing with unsafe water every single day. Meanwhile, 80% of waste water worldwide is released into the environment without being properly treated, contaminating water sources and causing serious health problems.

500 million people suffer from severe water shortages all year round, this not only has critical impacts on health but has significant financial implications on households, and for governments, with \$260 billion lost globally each year due to lack of basic water and sanitation. \$114 billion per year is needed to achieve safely managed water and sanitation, this represents a gap of \$89.6 billion

2.4 billion people still don't have a toilet either, or even a basic pit latrine, that is 1/3 of us.

### It places an extra burden on women and children

Women feel the consequences of unsafe, insufficient water and sanitation services most acutely as it affects their health, dignity and personal safety on a daily basis.

They shoulder the largest burden in water collection worldwide. When there's no tap nearby, someone has to go and fetch water by hand, often from foul, unhygienic sources miles away from their homes. It keeps women out of paid work and girls out of school, denying them the chance to get an education and limiting their ability to work their way to financial independence.

Women and girls living without a toilet also spend 266 million hours each day finding a place to go. Globally, 1/3 of all schools lack access to safe water and sanitation, causing girls to drop out.

To make things worse, women are the least consulted and included in key decisions governing water use, management and design.

### It is a global crisis

The world is experiencing a global water crisis made worse by conflict, climate change and natural disaster. Water quality is deteriorating and availability is dwindling, even as demand increases and managing it grows more complex. And it's the poorest, most vulnerable people who are bearing the brunt.

20% of the world's aquifers are already overexploited and 40% of us will be faced with water shortages by 2050. By then, up to 2 billion people are likely to suffer from increasing water stress. This number could reach over 3 billion in 2080.

This global water crisis is rooted in power, poverty and inequality, not just in physical availability.

It requires greater efforts to seek a combined approach to tackling the issues of water management. Inequalities are perpetuated by poor planning, governance and investment in water resources. If left unaddressed, the impact is, and will continue to be, most acutely felt by the poorest and most marginalized groups of society.

## WHY IT MATTERS TO OXFAM'S VISION OF A WORLD WITHOUT POVERTY

Clean water and a clean environment shouldn't be a luxury. We have to make safe water and sanitation available to everyone, regardless of who they are or where they live. We simply can't end poverty without it.

This ambition is not unique to Oxfam, in 2000 the Hague Declaration highlighted the role of safe and sustainable water in not only achieving health but sustaining economies, the Paris Declaration talks of water security and most recently the UN set Sustainable Development Goals.

This is why Oxfam supports the internationally agreed goal of SDG6: the right to universal and equal access to safe and affordable drinking water for all; access to adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene for all and an end to open defecation.

In 2018, the UN wrote in their SDG6 Synthesis Report: "Fresh water, in sufficient quantity and quality, is essential for all aspects of life and sustainable development. The human rights to water and sanitation are widely recognized by Member States.

Water resources are embedded in all forms of development (e.g. food security, health promotion and poverty reduction), in sustaining economic growth in agriculture, industry and energy generation, and in maintaining healthy ecosystems."



### OUR ADDED VALUE

Oxfam works in some of the world's most difficult, most water insecure and chronically vulnerable places. We believe that working in the hardest to reach places is the only way we are going to achieve safe and sustainable water for the poorest and most marginalized people.

Building on 50 years' experience, we're first on the scene with clean water and toilets when disaster strikes. But the water crisis reaches into the most intimate parts of people's everyday lives, so we need look for long-term solutions too. Staying beyond a crisis, Oxfam works with the poorest or most vulnerable to make sure no one is too poor to have clean water.

We look at the bigger picture. We are known for our extensive and proven track record of successfully implementing high-calibre water and sanitation programmes at scale, in a range of contexts, from fragile and conflict affected countries to emerging states and middle-income countries.

We're a successful and trusted partner, delivering specialist water and sanitation technical training and capacity building at all levels, working with national, regional and international institutions, governments, businesses and NGOs to offer innovative solutions to one of the world's longest running dilemmas.

# DELIVERING SYSTEMIC CHANGE

We know that without approaches to inclusion – such as appropriate investment, accountability, and representation of the most marginalised – current management of water and sanitation services are doomed to fail.

We need to focus on developing inclusive and viable markets and professionalise water systems within a range of contexts from fragile to middle income countries.



**NOBODY SHOULD BE TOO POOR TO DRINK CLEAN WATER OR USE A DECENT TOILET**



**WE DESIGN FOR SCALE FROM THE BEGINNING**



**SAFE, CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION UNLOCKS WOMEN'S AGENCY, CHOICE & POWER**

## Quality & coverage

Oxfam considers not only “how much” water is required but also “for whom” to increase access to basic services, in areas of chronic vulnerability and water insecurity so that resources are more equitably distributed, affordable and accessible.

We build systems that last, delivering essential water services. We also want them to reach the poorest and most marginalized, including in the world's most difficult and insecure contexts, strengthening the link between development, relief, and rehabilitation.

We make sure personal identities (e.g. disability, caste, gender, race, economic status, political views, religion) and contextual factors (e.g. geographic location and conflict divides) are not barriers to the use of services.

## Good governance & accountability

If we're going to put clean water and sanitation facilities into every community, we need to give everyone a meaningful say in how resources are managed. That means bringing people, businesses and governments together across political, cultural and national borders.

We work towards shifting norms and structural barriers that lay the foundations for fairer gendered roles and responsibilities in water use and service delivery. This is applied in areas where formal state structures are in place, but also within informal settings where non-state actors are the main actors for creating fairer distribution of power and resources.



Solar-powered water pump in Lodwar, Kenya. Credit: Anne Cossutta/Oxfam



Charles Kabumba is the president of the Kiabondo water committee, DRC. Credit: Anne Cossutta/Oxfam

## WHAT WE WORK ON

### PEOPLE

#### **We strive to give people a voice in decision making, going beyond just the infrastructure.**

We work with established civil society structures to hold government and duty bearers accountable for levels of service, raising the voices of the poor through institutional strengthening. We must make sure that those who manage the service respond to the needs of the poorest.

We influence social norms and empower women in the community with knowledge, advocacy tools and supporting voice for transformative change.

We set up partnerships with a wide range of actors to create spaces for forward thinking and promoting good practice and learning.

### SYSTEMS

#### **We look beyond infrastructure to facilitate more systemic, longer lasting change.**

We help strengthen institutional systems at national and decentralised governance levels so that they are held accountable to respond to the needs of the most marginalised.

We build sustainable markets that generate both supply and demand for resilient water and sanitation commodities and services.

We engage with new funding models and instruments to leverage additional /refine targeting of resources.

We design for scale and use innovative finance mechanisms, such as smart subsidies for the poorest, and include them in our programmes from the start.

### INNOVATION

#### **We believe the use of technology can achieve greater inclusion, transparency and more reliable service provision.**

We capitalize on technology that is cost-effective, adaptive and scalable - both during construction and over their lifetime - to deliver better services to the most marginalised.

We invest in research and development of water and sanitation technologies that will contribute to tackling issues of water insecurity (e.g. desalination, solar power).

## WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE IN PRACTICE

We are establishing learning and developing thinking for equitable and sustainable water and sanitation solutions. We are sourcing funding and modelling innovative solutions in governance and investments, market-based approaches as well as efficient and adaptive tools and technologies.

Solar-powered water pump in Lodwar, Kenya. Credit: Anne Cossuttra/Oxfam



### Kenya

Oxfam is working with Social Finance UK to explore the role of County Governments, NGOs, water utility companies and funders to try and build Kenya's first Water Outcomes Fund in Turkana County. The Outcomes Fund could incentivise sustainable water service access throughout the county – particularly for those currently excluded from safe water access – and serve as a blueprint for financing sustainable and professionalised water services throughout the Arid and Semi-Arid Lands in Kenya.

Oxfam is also part of the wider Accountability For Water Consortium to strengthen learning and evidence for the water sector by conducting action and research. It aims to ensure that stronger accountability fulfils its potential to accelerate delivery of the water SDGs.

SWIFT water taps in Mueke, DRC. Credit: Anne Cossuttra/Oxfam



### SWIFT Consortium

Since 2014, the Sustainable WASH In Fragile Contexts (SWIFT) Consortium has been working to provide access to water and sanitation and to encourage the adoption of basic hygiene practices in the Democratic Republic of Congo and in Kenya. SWIFT aims to bridge the gap between short-term emergency responses and longer-term development programmes. Indeed, few fragile states have reached their millennium development goals for water and sanitation and when the context is fragile, the provision of WASH services presents specific challenges.



### Zambia

Oxfam worked on 'Promoting the right to safe water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) of peri-urban communities in Lusaka, Zambia' project – in short, the 'Urban WASH' project. This project was carried out in George and Chawama compounds in Lusaka between July 2013 and June 2017, by Oxfam together with our implementing partner Village Water. The project aimed to improve provision and sustainable management of WASH services by engaging citizens to hold duty bearers and service providers to account. We collaborated with local institutions on an array of activities, engaging stakeholders to create a conducive environment for service provision and improving capacities and practices.



WASH committees, Chawama, Zambia. Credit: Bekki Frost/Oxfam

## Tajikistan

One of the main projects targeting water and sanitation implemented by Oxfam in the country was "Tajikistan Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Sector Improving Social Accountability" (TWISA), a four-year project coordinated by Oxfam with the assistance of the Consumers' Union of Tajikistan as implementing partner. Based on a human rights approach to development, the TWISA project contributed to solving water-related issues at local and national levels through service performance indicators (SPIs) and supporting citizen-led monitoring mechanisms for constructive engagement. Building on the learnings from that project, the current WASH programme focuses on a self-financing sanitation approach that addresses the institutional and policy environment as well as working with consumers and implementing agencies.



## Nepal

In Nepal, Oxfam works closely with local and national authorities to improve the sustainability of water supply schemes through a public-private partnership approach. Oxfam is exploring how a financially viable management model could work to ensure sustained safe water access for communities long after project's end. A professionalised public Water Service Provider could engage local private sector actors to better financially manage and technically operate and maintain the water system if communities were to pay a reasonable tariff to cover ongoing costs.



Water and sanitation work in Tundhikel camp, Nepal. Credit: Pablo Tosco

Handwashing at a school in Rakhine, Myanmar. Credit: Dustin Barter/Oxfam



## Myanmar

In Myanmar, Oxfam is working with government municipalities and Ernst & Young Enterprise Growth Services to develop a tiered pricing model for faecal sludge collection and management. We've demonstrated that the municipalities can increase revenue collection and expand their services to the poorest using the tiered pricing model. The growth in revenue can fund improvements in health and safety.

## Evidence

We challenge conventional approaches and methods to identify solutions to sustainability. By building an evidence base of our work to date in policy, practice and research, we can improve our own programming and influence others in the sector.

## Influence

Our aim is to convene partners, decision makers, thought leaders and donors to influence the approach of the wider water and sanitation sector. Our strong campaigning arm continues to work hard to raise the issues surrounding global water insecurity.

## Innovation

We are establishing learning and developing thinking for equitable and sustainable solutions. We are sourcing funding and modelling innovative solutions in governance and investments, market-based approaches as well as efficient and adaptive tools and technologies.

## OUR TOOL BOX

## PARTNER WITH US

The solutions to the water and sanitation system challenges that face us will not be solved by one organisation working in isolation. It will require **creative thinking, risk taking and new, innovative models**, co-created between partners. Solutions are already being trialled and progressed. We are seeing developments in finance, technology, governance and accountability which are building resilience and access to services. **Oxfam is looking for progressive partners** who want to continue this journey. Together we can collaborate and find the solutions to build a sustainable water and sanitation system.

## Get in touch

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Arron Gesar holds her token to collect water from a water ATM in Hadado, Kenya. Credit: Katie G. Nelson