

Bridging Borders: The Role of Climate-Resilient Sanitation in Global Peace and Sustainability

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As [SIWI World Water Week 2024](#) kicks off in Stockholm this week, we are reminded of the profound importance of water and sanitation cooperation in fostering peace and security across the globe. This year's theme, "Bridging Borders: Water for a Peaceful and Sustainable Future," reminds us of the intricate interconnections between and across communities and nations and emphasizes the need for collaborative efforts to secure a better future for all. Ensuring that sanitation systems are robust and adaptable to climate challenges is not only essential for safeguarding public health but for promoting regional stability and sustainable development. [The Climate Resilient Sanitation Coalition \(CRSC\)](#) of more than 30 leading organizations that work at this intersection recognizes the significance of climate-resilient sanitation (CRS) in building a peaceful, secure, and sustainable future.

As climate change intensifies, traditional sanitation infrastructure is increasingly vulnerable to damage, disruption, and contamination as a result of extreme weather events, rising sea levels, and shifting precipitation patterns. Sanitation systems that not only endure these challenges but also contribute to climate mitigation efforts are critical for a climate-resilient future. CRS approaches are systems and practices designed to deliver safe and effective sanitation services that can withstand and adapt to the impacts of climate change. These approaches are vital for protecting public health, preserving environmental quality, and reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Sanitation is closely linked to dignity and peace. Inadequate facilities can fuel conflict by intensifying competition for resources and triggering public health crises. We have seen this [in India](#), where water contamination from poor sanitation has led to tensions and disputes between communities over access to clean water. Similarly, in refugee camps [in Cox's Bazar](#) Bangladesh, where inadequate sanitation has caused disease outbreaks, worsening living conditions and heightening tensions among displaced populations and in conflicts such as [Gaza](#) where the destruction of water and sanitation systems allows once eradicated diseases such as Polio to resurface. Poor sanitation also undermines dignity and contributes to gender based violence, as seen throughout the world where women and sexual and gender minorities face risks of violence when accessing unsafe sanitation facilities. Conversely, CRS sanitation promotes health, dignity, well-being, and social and environmental stability, reducing the risk of conflict and fostering peaceful coexistence.

Climate-resilient sanitation offers significant benefits for peacebuilding — by reducing resource-based conflicts, stabilizing communities through improved public health, and empowering marginalized groups through better access. Ensuring that sanitation infrastructure can withstand climate impacts reduces the strain on water resources, thereby minimizing competition and potential conflicts over clean water access, especially in regions prone to droughts or flooding. Resilient sanitation systems promote good public health by preventing disease outbreaks and

reducing the burden on healthcare systems, which fosters community stability. Resilient sanitation systems are key to empowering systemically marginalized groups, particularly women and children, by supporting their safety, dignity, well-being, and participation in community life, ultimately contributing to a more peaceful and inclusive society. Such approaches highlight the importance of broader systems thinking in CRS, where interconnected solutions address not just immediate needs but also long-term sustainability, social inclusion and equity.

Climate resilient sanitation interventions play a demonstrably vital role in promoting peace. CRSC member [iDE Global](#), supported the implementation of a [Sky Latrine](#) intervention in Cambodia to assist vulnerable communities around Lake Tonle Sap, who are severely affected by seasonal flooding. By providing elevated latrines as a safe and sustainable solution, the intervention has enhanced public health and reduced the risks of physical and sexual violence, especially for women and children who no longer have to leave the house to defecate outside at night. Social stigma and shame associated with not having access to a latrine has also been alleviated. This is one of many examples of climate and flood resistant toilets being designed to address both environmental challenges and social vulnerabilities. The lessons learned on peacebuilding through CRS infrastructure interventions need to be scaled up — lessons such as the value of community involvement, the need for adaptable designs and for systems approaches, and a core focus on equitable outcomes for all, particularly the most marginalized.

As climate change threatens global stability, stakeholders - governments, NGOs, funders, donors and communities must prioritize integration of CRS into global and national climate policies. By supporting national governments with tools, evidence, and expertise, we can embed CRS in government strategies, plans and budgets. Elevating sanitation in climate discussions through active dissemination of evidence and real-world experiences is crucial, as is attracting finance to this sector to strengthen its role in stabilizing communities and reducing conflict. Building a robust evidence-base solidifies the case for CRS as a cornerstone of global peacebuilding and sustainability.

Now is the time for leadership and investment in climate resilient sanitation as a pathway to ensure a peaceful, sustainable and climate-resilient future for all.