

LEARNING NOTE THREE

Stronger systems for inclusive and sustainable WASH



Shifting WASH systems towards greater equity and sustainability through sector planning, monitoring and review

Summary

Water for Women aims to strengthen national and subnational water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) systems in Asian and Pacific communities through greater emphasis on gender equality, social inclusion (GEDSI), safely managed WASH and water security.

Sector planning, monitoring and review (PMR) enables WASH systems to realise WASH rights and ensure that no one is left behind. PMR can provide rhythm, enable collaboration, and drive learning, reflection and improvement. PMR also offers useful case studies of how change happens within WASH systems.

Beyond PMR outputs – WASH plans, monitoring systems, data and progress reports – civil society organisations' (CSO) engagement with other actors in WASH PMR is important in transforming system functioning. Using intentional, systematic PMR, CSOs can drive structural, relational and attitudinal changes that improve the quality, inclusion and sustainability of WASH services and the entire system as a whole.

Contents

Introduction	3
Strengthening WASH PMR: addressing systemic challenges to service provision	4
Driving systems change through PMR	6
Recommendations for CSOs	12
Conclusion	14
References	14
About Water for Women	15
Acknowledgements	15



Water for Women CSO partners reflected on how their PMR¹ contributes to systems change.

At the structural level

Stronger PMR:

- brings order and structure to sector coordination
- is a conduit for capacity development
- highlights and fills gaps in practice
- provides evidence to convince decision-makers to allocate resources for WASH
- gives private sector confidence to invest
- contributes evidence that government duty bearers and CSOs need for reporting and accountability
- can, via the integration of indicators and targets, mainstream GEDSI into WASH service delivery and improvement, guidelines, procedures and organisational work planning, and mainstream GEDSI beyond WASH.

At relational and political levels

Stronger PMR can:

- improve accountability, bring GEDSI actors into the WASH system, and capitalise on effective leadership
- connect communities with inadequate WASH directly with government and service providers
- promote meaningful involvement of women, people with disabilities and other marginalised groups, and rights holder organisations (RHOs) in decision-making
- improve the communication needed to 'do no harm', strengthen the voice and agency of diverse actors in the WASH system, and shift power imbalances
- enable CSOs to track their own accountability to other WASH and GEDSI actors that they collaborate with.

At the attitudinal level

Stronger PMR can:

- help authorities to understand their roles, support leaders to demonstrate their commitment, and inspire shifts from inertia to action
- deepen WASH actors' sensitivity to GEDSI considerations in service provision, and ensure no one is left behind, through the involvement of GEDSI actors
- ensure decision-makers consider issues from service user's perspectives, through the integration of bottom-up, top-down and horizontal PMR approaches.

Based on these lessons, CSOs can transform the system as follows:

- establish duty bearers' and RHOs' ownership and leadership of PMR
- use PMR to demonstrate inclusive and participatory WASH processes
- promote public sharing of PMR results and public engagement for improved accountability.

¹ Water for Women uses the [Sanitation and Water for All Building Blocks](#) – key elements that the sector must have in place to be able to deliver sustainable and equitable services – of sector policy and strategy, institutional arrangements, sector financing, and planning, monitoring and review, and capacity development to help consolidate reporting across the Fund.

Introduction

The Australian Government's Water for Women Fund aims to improve the health, gender equality and wellbeing of Asian and Pacific communities. One of the four end-of-Fund outcomes is 'strengthened national and subnational water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) sector systems with greater emphasis on gender equality, social inclusion, safely managed WASH and water security'.

Under Water for Women's Learning Agenda, partners are collaborating on a dedicated systems strengthening initiative that aims to deepen partners' and the broader WASH sector's understanding of how strengthening WASH systems can lead to more gender and socially inclusive, sustainable WASH services. Two primary learning questions are being explored:

- How do partners interpret, frame, understand and engage with WASH systems?
- What changes are Water for Women contributing to within (local and national) WASH systems, and how do these changes happen?

This learning note seeks to contribute to the second learning question by considering how civil society organisation (CSO) partners (hereafter referred to as partners) strengthen sector planning, monitoring and review (PMR) processes and mechanisms ([Box 1](#)) for equitable and sustainable WASH.

Box 1. What is planning, monitoring and review?

Planning, monitoring and review (PMR) comprise one essential building block of a well-functioning WASH system. They are essential functions through which WASH actors can operationalise sector goals, track progress towards targets and service standards, and institutionalise reflection and adaptation that enable the sector to learn from successes and failures and progressively eliminate inequalities in access. PMR functions enable accountability between policymakers, service providers and service users.

Sanitation and Water for All (2022) further defines the components of WASH PMR as:

- effective, inclusive and systematic planning, monitoring and evaluation of sector performance to ensure the most effective route to achieve goals
- mid-and longer-term review of sector performance through multi-stakeholder platforms and mechanisms for sector dialogue and learning
- clearly defined accountability mechanisms
- data transparency and public access to information.

Sector PMR processes are important to progressively realise rights to water and sanitation. PMR processes and mechanisms usually occur routinely or regularly, providing much-needed rhythm, regular touchpoints for collaboration, and cycles for learning, reflection and improvement. In the context of CSO efforts to strengthen WASH systems, they offer a useful case study to consider how change happens within WASH systems.

Scope and structure of this learning note

Capacity to undertake PMR is important for individuals' professional performance; for the efficient organisation of private sector businesses, utilities and CSOs; and for intra-sector collaboration. This learning note focuses on sector-level government-led PMR, recognising that government leadership of PMR around nationally agreed sector priorities and strategies should underpin non-government actors' coordination and support.

The learning note begins by introducing four examples in which CSOs confronted challenges to WASH service provision and engaged in PMR to create momentum and change within the system. The second section introduces a framework for

understanding systems change and uses this framework and examples from Water for Women to explore how CSOs can catalyse practical systems change. The third section provides three recommendations for CSO interventions to strengthen WASH systems.

The learning note synthesises learning and evidence from various sources, including partners' annual reports, online webinars and workshops, case studies and partners' documentation, interviews with partners, and an online partner survey. While it consists primarily of four case studies, it draws on experiences from across Water for Women more broadly.

Strengthening WASH PMR: addressing systemic challenges to service provision

Provision of sustainable and equitable WASH services is the result of well-functioning and inclusive WASH systems. These systems involve a variety of actors – individuals and institutions – who interact with each other and with non-human factors such as policies, financial systems, geographic features, environmental conditions and cultural norms. Because of these many parts and constantly evolving interactions, WASH systems are complex (Ramalingam et al., 2008). Therefore, the challenges that prevent sustainability and inclusion of WASH services in these systems are also complex and multi-faceted. The following examples illustrate some of the complex problems that partners encounter in their contexts and the ways that partners are contributing to positive change.

Microplanning and public reporting for WASH accountability in India

People living in informal settlements of Bhubaneswar, India, face multiple, compounding barriers to WASH services. One third of informal settlements are in low-lying and undulating terrain, which the Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation designates as prone to environmental disasters. These settlements' illegal status causes unclear institutional and administrative mandates for WASH.

Many residents experience intersectional social and attitudinal barriers and stigma due to their gender, sexuality, caste or disability. The result of these barriers is that WASH services are often provided by short-term administrative fiats and one-off improvements rather than systematic sustainable and inclusive improvements. Through initiating a micro-planning process and encouragement of PMR (Saniwall²), the Centre for Advocacy and Research (CFAR) facilitated collaboration between urban authorities and community members through its [Water for Women project](#).

The resulting plans, and the process to develop them, led to more effective decentralised governance with meaningful involvement of community, including the most marginalised, in WASH service planning and monitoring. They also led to regular reviews, sharing of information, and feedback mechanisms to improve accountability and responsiveness of service providers.



A saniwall designed to track the weekly performance of sanitation services in each ward [is unveiled](#) in Bhubaneswar, India
Credit: CFAR

² The Saniwall is a publicly accessible community dashboard that presents information on the demand for WASH services and access. Information from the Saniwall is jointly reviewed every month by authority and community representatives.

Government-led district WASH planning in Papua New Guinea

District governments in rural Papua New Guinea (PNG) are responsible for expanding and improving WASH services. However, WASH is not typically seen as one sector, with responsibilities divided between various line departments with limited coordination and unclear and sometimes overlapping roles. Such institutional barriers prevented the prioritisation of WASH and meant no one actor took the lead in gathering reliable data and using it to plan and deliver services. Historically, there was no shared mechanism for communities, rights groups and government to coordinate and collaborate.

WaterAid has worked with district and local level governments, rights groups and CSOs to establish a district WASH coordination body (WCB) in the Wewak district of PNG's East Sepik province. The WCB brought clarity to institutional mandates and created new collaborative relationships between these diverse actors. With WaterAid's support, the WCB undertook a detailed district-wide WASH baseline assessment of WASH conditions in communities and institutions. It used the data from this exercise to develop PNG's first five-year district WASH plan.

Backed by strong government leadership, the WCB is implementing the WASH plan to deliver more and better WASH services to the communities that need them most. At quarterly and annual meetings, WCB members review progress towards the targets outlined in the plan, adjust their priorities and hold one another to account.

Rights-based approaches to regular review in Bangladesh

Legally, governments at Union Parishad level³ in Bangladesh are responsible for ensuring WASH service access and quality in their jurisdictions. However, poor understanding of their roles and responsibilities, both individually and institutionally, usually means these responsibilities are not met. This leads to insufficient public investment in WASH, a stagnant WASH market and inadequate WASH service access.

World Vision Bangladesh took a rights-based approach to this challenge through its [Water for Women project](#), working with both government from Union Parishads and Upazila⁴ levels, and with community members, to understand and advocate for their rights to water and sanitation. Upward pressure from service users and establishment of constructive and routine interaction between service providers and users has helped to keep WASH on the government's agenda.

Institutionalised annual joint review processes between service providers and service users have shifted power imbalances towards more collaborative WASH governance. Development of government officials' capacity has enabled Union Parishads to plan, budget and deliver services, and monitor progress towards WASH targets.

"[The] Union Parishad is a friend of women, people with disability, Dalit⁵ and other marginalised people. We listen to people before taking any initiative. We included the voice of excluded people in our structure, planning, implementation and monitoring. People have easy access to our Council."

Uria Union Parishad representative
(Photo Voice, Gaibandha)

³ The smallest rural administrative and local government unit in Bangladesh.

⁴ The administrative level above Union Parishad.

⁵ In Bangladesh, Dalits are groups who are marginalised on social, economic and religious grounds, which forces them to work in poor conditions for minimal economic return.



Strengthening inclusive WASH planning in Bhutan

In Bhutan, government planning and review processes are already strong, with a clear framework of national goals and priorities for which different ministries are accountable. For sanitation, the Ministry of Health sets national goals and develops local area annual plans and individual performance plans, with annual reviews to assess progress towards goals. However, inclusion and accessibility have not historically been integrated into these targets and planning processes.

SNV, Disabled People's Organisation of Bhutan and Ability Bhutan Society have developed guidelines, strategies and tools for inclusive WASH, to involve people with disabilities and their representatives in planning, and to advocate to local leaders to support investment in sanitation by households containing people with a disability. The Ministry of Health has also benefited from data provided by local organisations of persons with disabilities (OPDs) on the prevalence and contact details of people with disability to enable more targeted planning of accessible services.

Driving systems change through PMR

The examples presented in the previous section highlight various context-based challenges in WASH systems that prevent universal provision of inclusive and sustainable services. Complex bottlenecks to service improvement include:

- ineffective flows of resources and information
- slow creation of policies and strategies and their translation into practice
- sectoral fragmentation, siloing and power imbalances
- social norms that contribute to the exclusion of the marginalised from decision-making processes
- pervasive attitudes and assumptions about the importance of WASH, accountability and equality.

The [Sanitation and Water for All](#) (SWA) framework of building blocks can help to identify the system elements or functions needed in order to deliver WASH services. However, building blocks do not explain how system elements interact or how change within a system can be effected and sustained to overcome systemic challenges like those highlighted above. Exploring how change happens requires a different framing.



At an interface meeting in Satkhira, WASH status updates are shared shared by the Union Parishad

Credit: World Vision Bangladesh / Protiva Bikash Sarker

Introducing the six conditions of systems change

The water of systems change (Kania et al., 2018) provides a useful and actionable framework (Figure 1 and Table 1) for considering the factors that create and perpetuate systemic challenges. It identifies the conditions that may be shifted to enable the WASH system to move from inertia towards continuous improvement, positive reinforcement and progressive realisation of equitable and sustainable services.

"Systems change is about shifting the conditions that are holding the problem in place."

Kania et al. (2018)

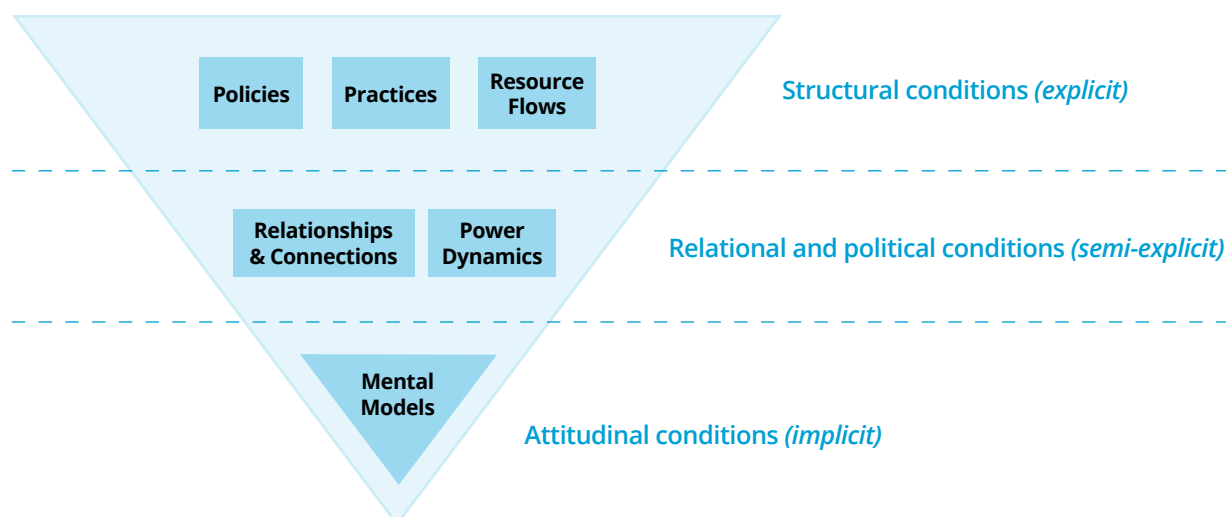


Figure 1. Conditions of systems change

Source: Adapted from Kania et al. (2018)⁶

Table 1. Conditions of systems change definitions

Mainstreaming strategies	Disability-specific strategies
Policies	Government, institutional and organisational rules, regulations, and priorities that guide the institution's own and others' actions
Practices	Activities of institutions, coalitions, networks and other entities. Also, within the institution, the procedures, guidelines or informal shared habits that comprise their work
Resource flows	How money, people, knowledge, information and other assets such as infrastructure are allocated and distributed
Relationships and connections	Quality of connections and communication occurring among actors in the system, especially among those with differing histories and viewpoints
Power dynamics	The distribution of decision-making power, authority, and both formal and informal influence among individuals and organisations
Mental modes	Habits of thought – deeply held beliefs and assumptions and taken-for-granted ways of operating that influence how we think, what we do, and how we talk

⁶ The six conditions are presented in three levels based on how visible and readily assessable they are. All six conditions are interconnected and mutually influencing. For example, changes in flows of resources to WASH might occur as a result of changes in the beliefs/assumptions of budget-makers, but the effective use of allocated resources might also catalyse a shift in decision-makers' assumptions. While the framework does not necessarily intend that the less visible and more transformative changes in mental models are more 'causative' for change in systems, sustainable and sustained change requires change in conditions at all three levels.

The conditions of systems change in [Figure 1](#) are categorised into three levels:

1. the structural level at which the system delivers WASH services
2. the relational and political level at which the system is organised
3. the attitudinal level at which actors perceive their engagement with the WASH system.

By applying the six conditions of systems change framework to partner experiences in WASH PMR, the Learning Agenda initiative was able to draw the following insights about how changes happen in WASH systems and how CSOs can contribute to systems change.

At first glance, the SWA building blocks seem to align most closely with the structural level of systems change in this framework. However, the following examples and insights demonstrate that the building blocks and the conditions of systems change are complementary and cross-cutting. Changes in people's assumptions and beliefs about their engagement with PMR (attitudinal transformation), and participatory PMR approaches that challenge harmful power imbalances (relational change) are essential to the creation of effective and inclusive plans and monitoring systems (structural change).

Catalysing structural change in how WASH systems deliver services through PMR

WASH actors will recognise that PMR processes are closely linked with the policies, practices and resource flows presented in [Figure 1](#) as structural aspects of the WASH system:

- planning and monitoring systems are the mechanisms through which policies are operationalised and their impact assessed
- annual cycles of planning and review are the central practices around which the wash system sets and assesses targets for better services
- monitoring is the flow of information as a resource
- the allocation of financial and human resources is, theoretically, linked to targets, priorities and areas of progress documented in evidence-driven plans.

Insights from partner discussions ([Table 2](#)) indicate the huge value that CSO engagement in strengthening PMR processes can contribute to shifting the explicit system conditions of policies, practice and resource flows. By engaging with sector PMR, CSOs help to operationalise WASH policies and strategies, make institutional practices routine and optimised, put guidelines into action and influence financial and human resource allocations.



A representative of the East Sepik Provincial Health Authority, and member of the Wewak District WASH Coordination Body, provides training for enumerators as part of the Wewak District WASH baseline
Credit: WaterAid PNG / Saskia van Zanen

Table 2. How strengthening PMR can shift structural system conditions

Insight	Examples
Stronger PMR brings order and structure to sector coordination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In India, the introduction of micro-planning helped to shift WASH policy and programs in Bhubaneswar from one-off executive decisions by local urban authorities to become more responsive to the WASH needs of the community. • In Papua New Guinea (PNG), the Wewak district WASH plan provided legitimacy to the newly formed WCB's coordination efforts and set targets against which WCB members could hold each other to account in regular review meetings. • In Bhutan, as with many contexts where local WASH decision-makers are elected positions,, the existence of WASH plans and annual review processes at various governance levels ensured continuity of progress and helped to orient the new leaders to the previously defined priorities of the sector.
PMR is a conduit for capacity development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In Bangladesh, World Vision facilitated dialogue among duty bearers to articulate their roles and responsibilities. • In Bhutan, SNV capacity self-assessments include specific outcome indicators for government staff to reflect on their ability to collect and use data for planning, and to create capacity development plans accordingly. • In PNG, WaterAid introduced standardised monitoring processes and indicators for safely managed WASH services to Wewak. This helped the sector to identify skills that local government and civil society needed to develop in water quality testing, data management and analysis.
PMR highlights and fill gaps in sector practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In PNG, by supporting the Wewak WCB to gather reliable district-wide WASH data, WaterAid helped highlight which communities and institutions most needed services. • In Bangladesh, World Vision's facilitation of two-way discussions between community rights holder organisations (RHOs) and government duty bearers identified gaps in communication and service provision. Action plans and regular review through feedback mechanisms have helped to respond to those gaps.
PMR can, via integration of indicators and targets, mainstream GEDSI into other WASH practices (e.g., service delivery, guidelines and organisational work planning), and mainstream GEDSI beyond WASH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In Nepal, SNV worked alongside RHOs to integrate GEDSI within rural municipality (local government) WASH planning. This led to the creation of budget lines to support accessibility of WASH services for people with disabilities and budget allocations for menstrual hygiene and health activities. • In Bangladesh, World Vision has observed the results of Union Parishad GEDSI-focused WASH action plans. They include schools and local governments taking better records, promoting equal participation on school councils of male and female students and students with a disability, and upgrading accessibility of school WASH facilities. • In PNG, GEDSI has been integrated in district WASH planning and monitoring in Wewak. WaterAid has observed many WASH coordination body members applying GEDSI awareness and sensitivities in other community development and service provision.
PMR provides evidence to convince decision-makers to allocate or prioritise resources for WASH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In PNG, after years of underinvestment, the Wewak district five-year WASH plan provided a roadmap for various government departments and budget holders to finance and prioritise WASH. WaterAid observed this has catalysed implementation of new service models • In India, CFAR supported joint microplanning between community and the local urban authority in Bhubaneswar. The results from household service monitoring were used to formulate proposals for WASH improvement and enabled greater and more targeted municipal budget for WASH. • In Bhutan, a last mile study supported by SNV identified the last 3–5% of households who lacked sanitation and the barriers to its uptake, including poverty and disability. The strategies and guidance emerging from the study helped local authorities to plan, design and allocate resources to interventions targeting support to these groups.
PMR gives private sector confidence to invest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In Cambodia, district and commune governments in having clear plans for accelerating sanitation provision encourages sanitation businesses to invest and expand their businesses.
Stronger PMR contributes evidence that government duty bearers and CSOs need for reporting and accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In Nepal, improved local government capacity for planning and monitoring provided the evidence SNV needed to assess annual progress towards its program outcomes. • In PNG and India, data from annual government service and functionality monitoring helps CSOs like WaterAid and CFAR to track progress towards service quality and sustainability goals.

Along with the provision of services, WASH plans, and monitoring and review mechanisms are among the most visible and understandable components of the WASH system. This visibility makes PMR a useful entry point for engaging WASH and GEDSI actors in discussions about systemic problems. Achieving quick wins in PMR that lead to changed policy, practice or resource flows can demonstrate that systems change is possible, which builds trust and confidence among actors. Finally, stronger PMR processes help to highlight tangible actions around which collective action can be mobilised, and give direction and routine to sector collaboration.

Building stronger relationships and shifting power through PMR

Strengthening PMR processes has obvious links to the six conditions of the systems change framework. However, the way that partners approach PMR interventions can enable shifts in the less explicit connections, relationships and power dynamics between actors. Rather than working solely with one duty bearer or institution with a mandate for planning and monitoring, partners have demonstrated that participatory and collaborative approaches can improve PMR while shifting the system conditions that privilege certain stakeholders and viewpoints over others (Table 3).

Table 3. How strengthening PMR can shift relational and political system conditions

Insight	Examples
Joint PMR can improve accountability, bring GEDSI actors into the WASH system, and capitalise on effective leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In Bhutan, responsibility and mandates for achieving national targets are transferred from national to local level government. Through annual performance planning, local leaders align local needs with national development goals, and annual performance review processes hold these elected leaders accountable to both their communities and line ministries. One local leader participating in joint monitoring of WASH in health care facilities with SNV and rights groups was so struck by the conditions that he committed to improving budgets for health care facilities in the next annual planning cycle. • In PNG, the Wewak WCB's regular quarterly meetings enable government, RHOs and civil society to review progress towards their five-year plan and reflect on WASH service delivery. As the chair of the Wewak WCB, the District Administrator adds legitimacy and political influence to the group's decisions. Reviewing, reflecting and setting new joint action plans keep the WCB members active and accountable to one another.
Planning and review mechanisms connect communities with inadequate WASH directly with government and service providers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In Bangladesh, women, people with disabilities and other people who experience marginalisation often feel unable to engage directly with service providers. World Vision established citizen voice and action mechanisms that empower these groups to engage with decision-makers to meet their needs. • In India, the public display of sanitation monitoring data in Bhubaneswar (through the Saniwall) made WASH progress measurable and visible. Through monthly review meetings referencing the Saniwall data, high-level officials and community share progress and discuss ongoing improvement to sanitation services, and community members can hold authorities to account.
PMR promotes meaningful involvement of women, people with disabilities and other marginalised groups, and RHOs in PMR mechanisms and decision-making, which can improve the communication needed to 'do no harm', strengthen the voice and agency of diverse actors in the WASH system, and shift power imbalances	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In India, CFAR observed that low involvement of citizens in sanitation planning and monitoring perpetuated inadequate and inferior service quality in slums in Bhubaneswar. Through participation in microplanning, community-led monitoring and monthly review meetings, these groups became essential members of the WASH sector, took ownership of WASH service data, and exercise voice and agency in demanding better services. • In PNG, the East Sepik Council of Women and the East Sepik Disabled People's Association have been actively involved in the district WASH baseline and development of the five-year Wewak district WASH plan. This has enabled the integration of GEDSI targets and indicators in WASH planning and monitoring. In addition, it has given representatives of women and people with disabilities decision-making power for the first time.
PMR enables CSOs to track their own accountability to other WASH and GEDSI actors they collaborate with	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In Bhutan, SNV facilitates annual project review meetings for WASH and GEDSI stakeholders. They discuss what is going well and what should be improved in the next work planning cycle to align the CSO intervention with broader WASH PMR processes. Annual and six-monthly donor reporting cycles like this can remind partners of their own commitments and provide a prompt for accountability and feedback from sector partners.

By proposing and brokering participatory PMR, CSOs can shift the semi-explicit conditions of the system to foster connection and greater equity. By encouraging collaboration and meaningful involvement of RHOs, community service users and GEDSI actors, CSOs can contribute to improved equity in decision-making and better WASH service outcomes.

Shifting system actors' ways of thinking through stronger PMR

Shifts in mental models are seldom easy to measure. The first sign that an individual has changed their assumptions or beliefs, or that the norms and mindsets within government departments or utilities has shifted, may be change in their practices, policies or relationships with other actors. Without shifts in how actors perceive their role in the system, and the removal of attitudinal barriers, the structural and relational changes identified will not be sustained. Shifts in mental models following repeated exposure to an idea or another way of viewing WASH problems may take time, but may also happen quickly, as some examples in [Table 4](#) show.

"GEDSI advocates and rights groups like OPDs being vocal have started to change things – men see the importance of women's roles and showing respect."

WaterAid PNG

This section presents insights about how actors' mindsets and ways of thinking contribute to systems change. Water for Women has produced a separate [guidance document](#) that explores social norms in WASH in more detail (Water for Women, 2022b).

Table 4. How strengthening PMR can shift attitudinal system conditions

Insight	Examples
Integrating bottom-up, top-down and horizontal approaches to PMR ensures that decision-makers consider issues from service users' perspectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In India, CFAR observed that many staff within urban authorities in Bhubaneswar held an underlying assumption that community members knew nothing about WASH and the appropriate solutions to problems they face. Deeper collaboration and regular two-way sharing helped decision-makers to appreciate service users' rich WASH knowledge and experience. Authorities now actively seek out insights from community when considering how to overcome WASH problems.
Clearer PMR processes can help authorities to understand their roles and support leaders to drive a shift from a mindset of inertia to action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In Bangladesh, World Vision observed that positive role models can inspire leaders to take on new roles and responsibilities. Leaders from Uria Union Parishad championed WASH by producing a WASH plan and engaging with the rights groups and the community, and other Union Parishads followed their lead. • In Bhutan, leaders who inspire can create an environment for good practice. SNV has observed examples of passionate leaders influencing the attitudes of others working on WASH and thereby changing the practices of the whole sector. • In PNG, WaterAid observed that talking about WASH has been normalised since the WCB created the district WASH plan. Media, government and the community are more aware of the importance of WASH services and the government's responsibility to ensure WASH access.
Involvement of RHOs and GEDSI actors in PMR processes can deepen WASH actors' sensitivity to GEDSI considerations across various aspects of WASH service provision, and strengthen the ability to ensure that no one is left behind	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In Nepal, SNV observed that regular inclusion of rights groups and GEDSI actors in WASH PMR processes normalised their involvement. One local government body began inviting GEDSI actors to participate in all their events, and changed event locations to accommodate accessibility needs. • In PNG, ceremonies to open new school WASH facilities in Wewak included keynote speakers from government departments that had worked with RHOs in the WCB. All spoke unprompted about the importance of inclusive WASH facilities, indicating they have internalised principles of inclusion.

These insights and examples demonstrate that the way CSOs engage with WASH PMR can contribute to significant shifts in mental models and worldviews among other actors. By specifically helping government to link PMR to their own individual and institutional responsibilities, WASH can become a higher priority. By supporting charismatic and influential leaders to lead change, and by creating new relationships and connections between rights holders and duty bearers, CSOs can contribute to changes in how people understand the system and their role within it. These ways of working are especially important for shifting mindsets and norms for more gender equitable and socially inclusive WASH.



Women and girls review WASH progress in Jamalpur during a score card session

Credit: World Vision Bangladesh / Tarzina Khatun

Recommendations for CSOs

Civil society organisations can support the development of a sector WASH plan, its implementation and its monitoring and review process without changing the broader structural, relational and attitudinal conditions that would enable the plan to be translated into more sustainable and inclusive WASH services. Drawing on the experiences from Water for Women CSO partners, this section of the learning note proposes three recommendations for how CSOs can shift WASH systems towards greater sustainability and inclusion.

Establish duty bearers' and RHO's ownership and leadership of PMR

Ownership and leadership are essential if PMR mechanisms are to be sustained beyond a CSO project lifespan. PMR mechanisms that are informed and collectively owned by diverse sector actors who are invested in collaborating to improve WASH services are more likely to be sustained. Collaborative approaches to PMR, and active leadership by individuals and institutions that add legitimacy, can build this ownership and ensure that responsibilities for WASH PMR are mutually understood and that actors hold each other accountable. Involving RHOs, community representatives and civil society in PMR via a rights-based approach ([Box 2](#)) can help to build this collaboration, and strengthen accountability mechanisms for WASH duty bearers.

Box 2. Rights-based approaches

Rights based approaches involve consciously and systematically paying attention to human rights in all aspects of program development. Rights-based approaches in WASH seek to realise rights to water and sanitation by empowering people (rights holders) and strengthening the State (duty-bearers) by embedding principles of equality, non-discrimination, transparency, participation, accountability, and sustainability into the ways rights are realised (de Albuquerque, 2014).

Rights holders: Individuals or social groups that have particular entitlements in relation to specific duty bearers, in this case the right to WASH. In general terms, all human beings are rights holders, but the rights of some social groups may not be fully realised in particular contexts. A rights-based approach considers rights holders as active agents in the realisation of human rights and development – both directly and through organisations representing their interests.

Duty bearers: Those actors who have a particular obligation or responsibility to respect, promote and realise human rights and to abstain from human rights violations. The term is most commonly used to refer to State actors, but depending on the context, individuals (e.g. parents), private companies, aid donors and international institutions may also be duty bearers.

Rights holder organisations: Those organisations that are made up of, advocate for, and raise the voices of marginalised parts of a community, and include women's organisations, OPDs, sexual and gender minority organisations, ethnic minority organisations, and organisations that represent people who are economically disadvantaged.

Adapted from UNICEF (2018) and Water for Women (2022a)

Use PMR to demonstrate inclusive and participatory WASH processes

Water, sanitation and hygiene action plans are among the most understandable components of the WASH system.

Because PMR processes often occur routinely or regularly, they provide rhythm, regular touchpoints for collaboration, and cycles for learning, reflection and improvement through which the system can introduce and practise principles of inclusion and participation. By prioritising GEDSI in the establishment and strengthening of PMR processes and mechanisms, CSOs can:

- support system actors to influence positive changes in attitudes and norms
- help to develop capacity of WASH actors who may have little experience of GEDSI
- practise creating safe spaces for meaningful and empowering participation of RHOs and people who experience marginalisation.

Promote public sharing of PMR results and public engagement for improved accountability

Accountability can be a powerful incentive for change. Knowing that plans and progress towards achieving strategies and targets will be made public and scrutinised by constituents motivates duty bearers. Institutionalising regular publishing of monitoring data, public reviews and discussions between duty bearers for WASH and people who use WASH services helps to:

- share risks and responsibility for WASH service improvement
- shift power within the system
- improve the agency and representation of communities and marginalised groups who hold rich knowledge of their WASH needs and challenges.



At a manufacturing site in Kampong Chhnang, Cambodia, latrine business team members produce cement rings for pits
Credit: Miguel Jerónimo Photography

Conclusion

Planning, monitoring and review are essential if the WASH system is to realise the rights to water and sanitation and ensure that no one is left behind. CSOs play an important role in catalysing, facilitating and building PMR capacity. PMR outputs such as WASH plans, monitoring systems and data, and progress review reports are valuable, but how CSOs engage with other actors in WASH PMR processes is also important for transforming the system.

Civil society organisations can shift the conditions that prevent sustainability and inclusion by facilitating duty bearers' and RHOs' ownership and leadership of PMR, demonstrating inclusive and participatory processes, prioritising GEDSI and promoting public engagement in PMR. CSOs can contribute to structural, relational and attitudinal changes that improve not only the quality and sustainability of WASH PMR, but the quality, inclusion and sustainability of the system as a whole.

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About Water for Women

Water for Women supports improved health, gender equality and wellbeing in Asian and Pacific communities through socially inclusive, sustainable and climate-resilient water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) projects and research. It is the Australian Government's flagship WASH program, investing AUD \$154.9 million over seven years. Water for Women is partnering with civil society organisations, research organisations and local partners to deliver 33 projects in 15 countries from 2018 to 2024. Knowledge and learning are central to Water for Women, positioning the Fund as an important contributor to global knowledge development and sharing in inclusive and climate-resilient WASH. Water for Women's Learning Agenda promotes collaborative learning, knowledge development and sharing to support long-term transformative change to WASH policy and practice globally.

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