

Study Session 1: Understanding the context you're working in

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Introduction

Large-scale rural sanitation programmes aim to improve services and behaviours, leading to better sanitation and hygiene outcomes and resulting in improved public health and other benefits such as greater safety, privacy, wellbeing, comfort, security and economic gain.

Achieving these multiple goals depends on many things but one essential requirement is a sound understanding of the situation you are operating in. To design a new programme, or review an existing one, the first step is to explore (or possibly re-explore) the context by gathering or reviewing information that will provide the evidence base for the programme.

This study session outlines the various types of quantitative and qualitative data you will need to collect or review for successful, large-scale programmes. It also highlights the cross-cutting issues of equity and inclusion, gender equality and sustainability support that should be integral to programming processes and decisions.

Learning Outcomes for Study Session 1

After you have studied this session, you should be able to:

- 1.1** Outline the data and information that needs to be collected and reviewed to inform your programming practice.

1.2 Reflect on the reasons for reviewing this information within the process of programming.

CONTINUE

1.1 What do you need to know?

The information needed to understand the context for your programme has four main components. The first is collection and review of quantitative data, known as **situation analysis**. Initially, the 'situation' to be analysed is at a national/country (or possibly subnational) level. Later in the programming process, you'll need to analyse the situation at a local level; this is described in Study Session 3.

A second key component is '**lessons learned**', in other words a review of previous programmes in the country where you are working to find out the drivers and barriers that led to success or possibly failure.

A third is assessment of the 'enabling environment'. The **enabling environment** refers to a set of conditions that support the effectiveness, scaling up, sustainability and equity of rural sanitation programmes. If the enabling environment is weak, this can affect choices and plans for the programme.

An important part of enabling environment assessment is to know if the resources to implement the programme will be available. **Capacity appraisal** is therefore a fourth essential preliminary step. These four components are described further in the following sections.

Gathering this information has several purposes. It provides a framework for programme design and planning that will enable you to select, prioritise and make best use of resources. It will help you identify opportunities that may be open to you such as collaborating with partners. It will also help identify potential bottlenecks and challenges, which could slow progress and may need additional resources. By identifying challenges in advance you can plan ahead and think of ways to overcome them. However, one other point to remember is that not everything can, or should, be planned for. You should always try to keep an open mind and adopt a flexible approach that can adapt over time to possibly changing circumstances.

1.2 Situation analysis

Situation analysis requires collection of existing secondary data. Potential sources include national census and statistical reports, large-scale household surveys, sector management information system reports and programme evaluations. (You can find links to some sources that publish country-level data in *Further reading*.)

The situation analysis should examine at least the following areas:

- sanitation and hygiene
- water supply
- health and nutrition
- poverty
- gender and vulnerable groups.

If secondary data on the key variables is not available, you may have to look for **proxy data** or consider some **formative research** involving primary data collection.

1.2.1 Sanitation and hygiene

The initial analysis should include a review of available data on:

- Open defecation (OD) rates.
- Access to and use of:

- **unimproved sanitation** facilities
 - **shared sanitation** facilities (**limited sanitation**)
 - **improved sanitation** facilities (**basic sanitation**)
 - **safely managed sanitation** services
 - hand washing facilities with soap and water.
- Number of verified open defecation free (ODF) communities.
 - Environmental sanitation conditions (solid and liquid waste management, animal excreta management, food hygiene, vector control).

Figure 1.1 shows an example of household sanitation data available at national level. Similar data may be required at subnational level for regions, provinces or districts. Areas with low sanitation and hygiene access, high rates of open defecation or other sanitation and hygiene deficiencies should be considered for prioritisation within a programme.

The situation analysis should also review qualitative information including any research or other evidence of the impact of sanitation and hygiene practices on factors other than public health such as safety, security, wellbeing, mobility, economic status, independence, power or gender relations.

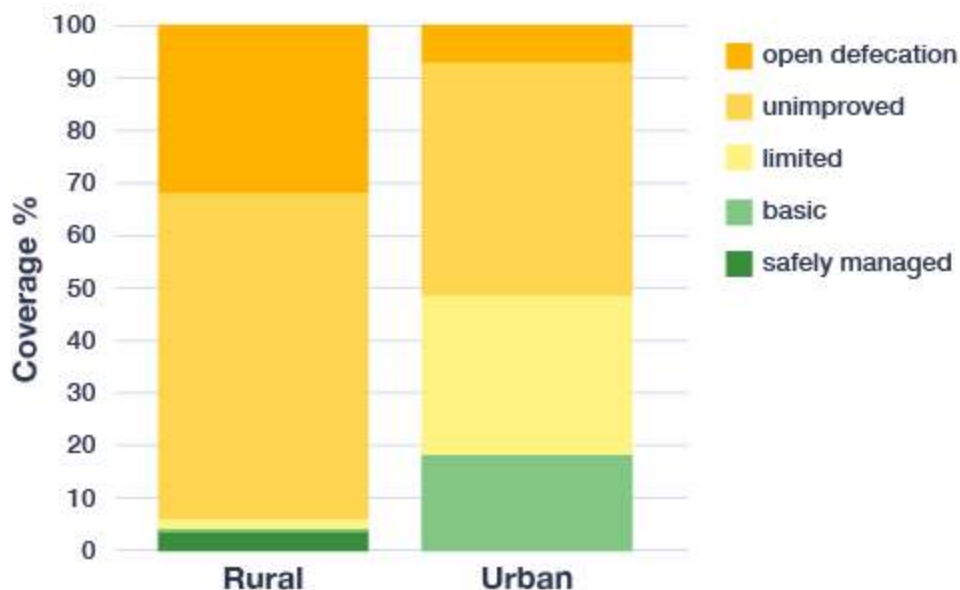


Figure 1.1 National level data for sanitation service levels: this example shows household data for rural and urban areas in Ethiopia in 2015 from the JMP database (JMP, 2017). JMP also publish data for WASH in schools and healthcare facilities.

1.2.2 Water supply

Water supply may be required for toilet flushing, anal cleansing, handwashing with soap and other hygiene practices as well as drinking, cooking and washing. Data on the types of water source and distance for collection is helpful to determine availability and households' access to water for these purposes. There are associated impacts on time and physical burden on those responsible for water collection, frequently women and girls. Also, the volume of water available can influence the amount of faecal sludge produced and therefore the filling rate of containment systems, the emptying techniques and the quantities of sludge that need to be safely managed.

1.2.3 Health and nutrition

Poor public health and nutrition in rural areas are often linked to inadequate sanitation. Joint analysis with local authorities of sanitation-related disease (e.g. diarrhoea, soil transmitted helminths, schistosomiasis and trachoma) and nutrition data can highlight areas with sanitation and hygiene deficiencies.

Open defecation and poor hygiene are linked with stunting in children. Careful measures of undernutrition (e.g. height-for-age and other **anthropometric data**) can be useful indicators of child health along with diarrhoea. However, accurate assessment of these variables is difficult so secondary data should be interpreted with caution.

1.2.4 Poverty

Data on income poverty (wealth) may be available from large-scale national surveys. Poverty may be correlated with other factors including governance, challenging contexts, vulnerability and marginalisation. Poverty-affected areas should be a priority in government development strategies, or at least considered in decision making.

1.2.5 Women and disadvantaged groups

The SDG sanitation target calls for a progressive reduction of inequalities in access to adequate sanitation. Where disaggregated data on the sanitation and hygiene status and health status of women and girls are available, these should be considered in the selection of the programme area and setting of programme results. Similarly, data on disadvantaged and vulnerable groups should be considered.

These groups include minority ethnic or religious groups, people living with disability or chronic illness, conflict or disaster-affected populations (Figure 1.2), remote populations, and older people-, female- or orphan-headed households. Review of these data should identify populations and groups that have greater sustainability problems than others due to the contexts they live in. It will also identify any factors relating to discrimination or disadvantage that affect how these groups experience sanitation and hygiene practices and processes



Figure 1.2 Nepal after the 2015 earthquake. Natural disasters can have a devastating effect on access to water and sanitation, with additional challenges in remote areas.

If disaggregated data is not available you should use proxy indicators or do some formative research to uncover any inequalities of access and differences in use by gender or other characteristics. It is also important, where possible, to consult disadvantaged and vulnerable groups directly during the programme design process.

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1.3 Review of lessons learned

Particular efforts should be made during the national analysis phase to collate and review relevant evidence and data on what has worked in the past, what has not worked, and the lessons learned from these experiences. This information may be available from national WASH sector performance reports and review processes or from national learning forums. You may also want to look for relevant published research papers and conference proceedings, or consider conducting your own interviews or focus group discussions with sector experts and community members involved with previous (successful and unsuccessful) initiatives.

As part of the review, you should look for evidence and information on the drivers of, and barriers to, sanitation and hygiene behaviour change. For example, in some rural communities **social norms** can strongly influence sanitation and hygiene behaviour and may be a barrier to change.

Understanding why previous approaches did not work and the reasons for problems or failures, including underlying causes such as social norms, is important. New approaches are unlikely to work better if the causes of the problems have not been understood or addressed. Case Study 1.1 gives an example where lessons from past **Community-led Total Sanitation** (CLTS) projects have strengthened subsequent initiatives.

Case Study 1.1 Lessons learned about CLTS

Several studies of CLTS projects have highlighted reasons for success and failure. For example, in southern Madagascar, a history of failure of CLTS interventions was linked to a social norm for open defecation. Local people believed that the earth was sacred because that was where ancestors were buried so digging a pit for excrement was disrespectful; excreta had to be left on the ground, not in it. They also only used cement, a costly material, to build graves therefore using it to make a building for defecation was not acceptable.

Understanding these beliefs and value systems made it possible to develop alternative strategies for CLTS that could overcome the barriers. These included institutional triggering at various levels from ministry downwards (Figure 1.3), buy-in from traditional leaders and involving multiple villages in collective public

declarations of their intent to abandon open defecation at a '*foire de caca*' or shit festival. The new approaches resulted in more than 56 000 latrines being built in 15 months (Gaya et al., 2015).



Figure 1.3 Triggering local and traditional leaders together with community health workers in southern Madagascar.

In your review of lessons learned, it may also be helpful to look for any information available on consumer preference, willingness to pay and expectations on the level of sanitation service. If data are unavailable, these questions could be investigated through formative research.

There are other possible benefits from reviewing previous projects. If you can collect evidence of past successes, this could be valuable if you are trying to convince decision makers to support your programme.

It may also influence plans for scaling up if success of past small-scale projects can be built on and developed into a large-scale programme.

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1.4 Enabling environment review

There is more than one way of defining the components of the ‘enabling environment’. Different actors and documents describe it in different ways with variations depending on differing organisational systems and processes. Whatever the definition, the purpose of review is to identify areas where support may be limited or where there are gaps that could cause problems; you want to ensure that the environment is ‘enabling’ and not ‘disabling’. You also want to look for opportunities to improve the effectiveness of the programme, while bearing in mind the overarching needs of scale, sustainability and inclusion.

Any existing national, subnational and programme assessments of the enabling environment should be reviewed because it is important to build on and update previous work, rather than start from scratch (even if the previous work used a different analytical framework).

The definition of enabling environment proposed by Sanitation and Water for All has become widely used. It has five key elements or ‘building blocks’ (adapted from SWA, 2016):

Sector policies – You need to be fully aware of government policies and strategies relating to sanitation and hygiene that may affect your programme so you can work in compliance with them.

Institutional arrangements – This refers to the structures and coordination mechanisms of the various stakeholders in sanitation, and their roles and responsibilities. The review process should identify the relevant government departments, organisations and other institutions who are, or could be, partners in your sanitation programmes. It also includes understanding the legal and regulatory framework applicable in the country where you are working. Reviewing and understanding **WASH governance** systems will enable you to identify possible areas of weakness that could hinder progress.

Financing and budget – This means considering questions such as: What are the budget allocations for rural sanitation at national and subnational level? What financial data is available to help with assessing costs and planning expenditure?

Monitoring and review systems – Your enabling environment review should also include assessment of the existing mechanisms for evaluation of performance in the sanitation sector, and also the mechanisms for accountability. What procedures are in place for checking on programme outcomes and who is responsible for them?

Capacity appraisal – As part of your review, you need to know if there is **capacity** for implementation of all components of your programme. If there are gaps in available capacity, then methods to fill those gaps by **capacity development** may be needed. Capacity appraisal therefore should include assessment of systems to train trainers, assess capacity needs, provide refresher training etc. It should also examine potential economies of scale, for example through the use of one consortium or institution (NGO, consultant firm, academic institution, government), or a combination, to provide capacity development and support services across more than one area or district.

It is important that while analysing sector policies and institutional arrangements you check they are still correct and up-to-date at the time of your review. This is critical as political process and changes in government often lead to reorganising of institutional arrangements but policy formulation and review do not always keep pace with these changes. Case Study 1.2 gives an example of this in Ghana.

Case Study 1.2 Changing policies and institutional arrangements in Ghana

Ghana has extensive policy, institutional and legal frameworks to address its sanitation and waste management challenges. These include the Local Government Act 462 (revised as Act 964 in 2016), the Environmental Sanitation Policy of 1999 (revised in 2000 and 2010), the National Environmental Sanitation Strategy and Action Plan (2010), the Strategic Environmental Sanitation Investment Plan (2012), and the Rural Sanitation Model and Strategy (2012).

When the Environmental Sanitation Policy was updated in 2010 (Figure 1.4), a great effort was made to define the roles and responsibilities of the various ministries, departments and agencies but since then, the

governance structures have changed. In 2010, the lead ministry for sanitation and waste management was the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development (MLGRD).

In 2017, a new Ministry of Sanitation and Water Resources (MSWR) was created. Some departments moved to the new ministry while other key units involved in delivering sanitation at the district and local levels remained within the MLGRD. Unfortunately, the Policy document is yet to be revised to recognise the new structure, which has led to confusion on reporting lines, accountabilities and ways of working, and has made coordination very difficult. There is poor monitoring and therefore under-reporting of performance because the MSWR has no direct relationship with the implementing agents in the field. For example, the environmental health officers report to district assemblies under the MLGRD and not to MSWR. This illustrates why it is important to check beyond the existing policies for more recent changes that might have been missed in the policy texts.



Figure 1.4 Cover image from the Government of Ghana’s Environmental Sanitation Policy, published in 2010.

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1.5 Cross-cutting themes

In addition to gathering and reviewing these many different types of data, there are some important themes that have to be kept in mind at all stages of programming. They need to be built in to your thinking right from the start. If you are focusing closely on programme details, it can be easy to overlook these overarching themes if they are not consciously and deliberately considered.

The three themes are:

- Equity, inclusion and non-discrimination
- Gender equality
- Sustainability support.

1.5.1 Equity, inclusion and non-discrimination

Successful achievement of the sanitation SDG will require approaches that reach everyone, with active strategies and interventions to identify and support hard-to-reach groups and those currently without adequate sanitation and hygiene.

An important first step is to recognise the reasons why people may be excluded from WASH services. This may be simply because of the attributes of the person or group concerned, for example, their gender, age or disability. Physical barriers such as toilets with steps and narrow doorways are a frequent problem for people living with disabilities (Figure 1.5).



Figure 1.5 The lack of a smooth path to reach this toilet, the step to get in, the narrow doorway, lack of handrails inside and dirty floor make it very difficult for this young woman to use it.

Exclusion can be caused by challenges of the geographic location such as in water-scarce or remote areas. The attitudes of other people may also result in exclusion where social norms, traditions or cultural beliefs lead to prejudice against certain groups of people, for example some ethnic groups, people living with HIV/AIDS, or people with intellectual impairment. A fourth reason is insufficient resources. This could refer to a lack of building materials, no access to markets, or not enough trained personnel as well as financial resources and affordability for the service users. Figure 1.6 shows these interconnected factors. The overlapping circles indicate that there may be more than one reason for exclusion of any individual or group.



Figure 1.6 Factors affecting exclusion of people from WASH services.

Your situation analysis may have included data on a range of disadvantaged groups (Section 1.2.5) but there may be additional challenges in particularly hard-to-reach groups, often referred to as ‘the last mile’. In a review of rural sanitation in West and Central Africa (IDS, 2018b), four main groups were identified as the ‘last mile’:

- people living in conflict-affected or insecure areas (e.g. areas affected by armed insurgencies)
- people living in remote or physically challenging contexts (e.g. mountainous, flood-prone, desert or water-scarce areas (Figure 1.7)
- people living in non-responsive or hard to reach communities (e.g. pastoralists, mobile fishing groups, miners)
- non-responsive or hard to reach groups within communities (e.g. people with intellectual, sensory or physical impairments, chronically ill people, chronically poor people, orphans, older people without support).



Figure 1.7 The dry, remote location of the village Talo in Mali increases the challenges of WASH service provision for the inhabitants.

Through your context analysis, you should try to identify and understand the range of groups/contexts in these categories at a national level to inform top-line decisions on where to work and who to reach. Later in the planning process, you will refine this analysis to the local contexts your programme is targeting.

1.5.2 Gender equality

Sanitation affects women and girls in different ways from men and boys, with women and girls often disproportionately affected by inadequate sanitation. Furthermore, some sanitation programmes can reinforce negative gender norms, roles and stereotypes. Programming should promote gender sensitive – and ideally empowering or even transformative – actions that actively identify and address the needs of women and girls, as well as try to refute negative gender norms and stereotypes.

To design, implement, monitor and evaluate effective gender transformative programmes, specific training will likely be required for programme staff to promote reflection on their own gender biases and support them to learn about the use of gender transformative approaches in their work. As a sector we are still gathering evidence on what makes up effective gender transformative WASH programming approaches but Figure 1.8 shows nine steps for programmers to consider. [This blog](#) provides more information on these steps and gender transformative WASH programming (see *Further reading*).

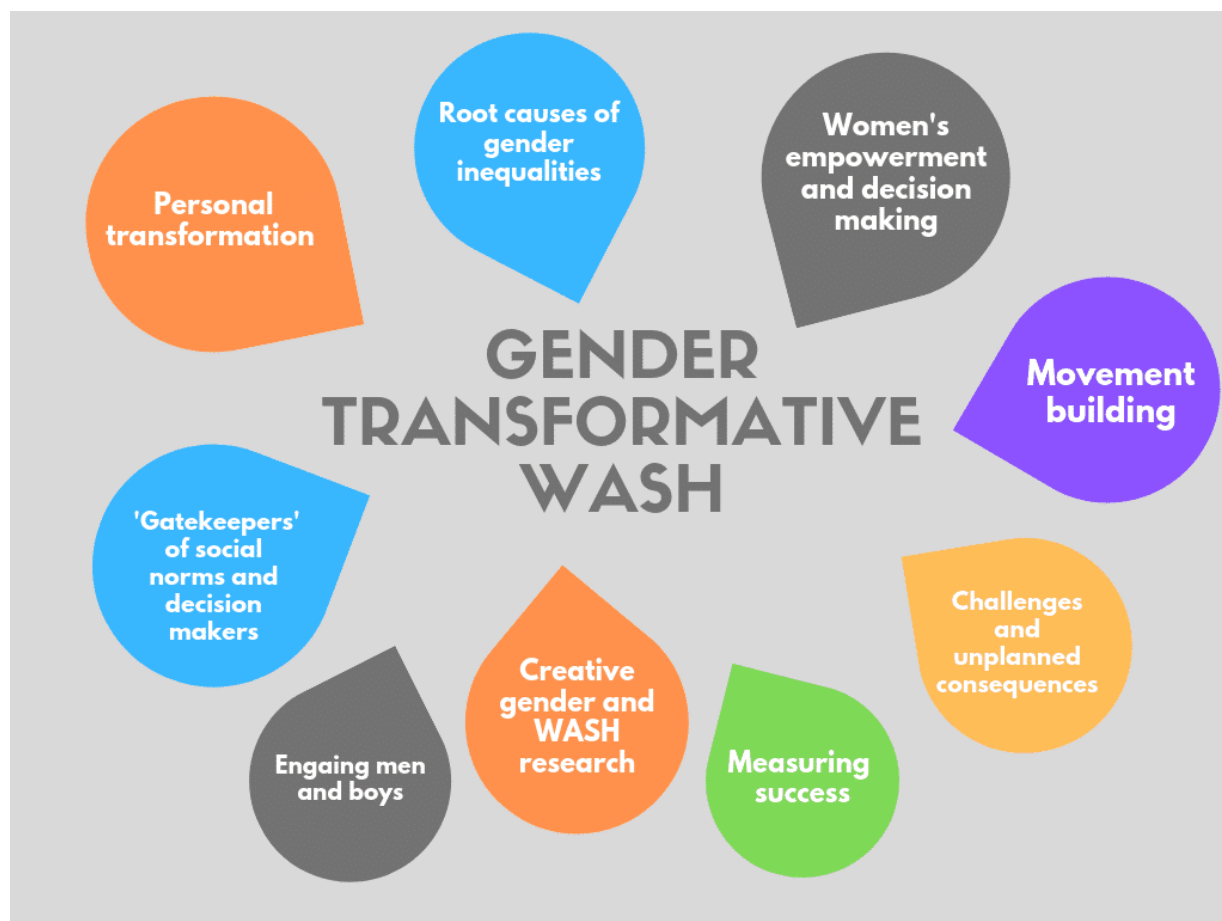


Figure 1.8 Nine ideas for Gender Transformative WASH programming.

Activity 1.1 Leave no one behind

What does the phrase 'leave no one behind'

Type your answer here and then click
Reveal

mean to you?

You can copy and paste your answer onto your Learner Journal before you click on Reveal.



Reveal

1.5.3 Sustainability support

Sustainability in sanitation and hygiene can be interpreted and understood in several different ways. It can refer to outcomes applicable to households, communities and institutions (e.g. schools, healthcare facilities) such as sustained use of improved sanitation and hygiene facilities or sustained practice of hygienic behaviours over time. Or it could refer more specifically to sustained community outcomes such as ODF status, or sustained institutional processes including support, capacity, finance and monitoring. Ultimately, it is helpful to ask ‘what changes made as a result of the programme need to continue beyond its lifetime, and what will influence whether or not this happens?’

A systematic approach should be taken to identify, assess and address the factors that may influence a programme’s sustainability. The enabling environment will be a strong – but not the only – influence. To make sure your analysis is comprehensive, you should consider the following five dimensions of sustainability:

1

Institutional sustainability – Are the relevant institutions likely to continue to fulfil their roles and responsibilities over time?

2

Financial sustainability – Is there, or will there be, adequate finance for institutions and services relevant to the programme over time?

3

Functional sustainability – Are the facilities and services relevant to the programme likely to continue to function over time?

4

Equity sustainability – Are the services and outcomes of the programme likely to remain equitable over time?

5

Environmental sustainability – Are there likely to be any harmful environmental effects over time?

This analysis will inform your programme design. If the programme cannot realistically address some of the constraints on sustainability, you should consider if there are alternative programme designs which would be less affected. Alternatively, it may be necessary to plan for some sustainability support activities. For example, there may be a need for continued advocacy with local governments to persuade them to allocate necessary resources for WASH beyond the programme period, which will also require that capacity and resource allocations are planned and agreed with local partners. You will explore this further in the next study session.

[CONTINUE](#)

Summary of Study Session 1

In Study Session 1, you have learned that:

1

For rural sanitation programming, you need to understand the context you are working in at national level. This requires analysis of data of several types and sources.

2

Situation analysis data of sanitation and hygiene service levels is essential. Data on water, health, poverty, ideally disaggregated for gender and disadvantaged groups will also be useful.

3

If secondary data is not available, you may need to consider doing some formative research.

4

Reviewing the lessons learned from previous programmes provides valuable information on reasons for past success or failure.

5

Understanding the enabling environment context will allow you to identify any areas of weakness that could have a negative effect on the programme and also positive aspects to build on.

6

All programmes should be planned and implemented with full and frequent reference to cross-cutting themes of equity and inclusion, gender equality, and sustainability support.

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