

Civil Society Engagement with the Private Sector for Inclusive WASH:

Insights from Water for Women



In brief

This learning brief brings together the knowledge, experience and insights of water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) sector civil society organisations (CSOs) in engaging with private sector actors in South Asia and South East Asia to foster gender equality, disability and social inclusion (GEDSI), sustainability of WASH programs, and critical thinking. It covers:

- the various roles of the private sector in WASH service delivery systems
- key considerations for CSOs when partnering with private sector actors
- benefits, challenges and strategies of applying a GEDSI lens
- ways to ensure the sustainability of private sector engagement
- recommendations for future programming and investment.

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.

Acknowledgements

Water for Women acknowledges Melita Grant and Avni Kumar of the University of Technology Sydney's Institute for Sustainable Futures (UTS-ISF) for their leadership of this collaborative Learning Agenda initiative and the development and collation of this learning brief.

The following partners and co-partners made extensive contributions to this initiative, throughout all phases: iDE; SHE Investments Cambodia, SNV Netherlands Development Organisation (SNV), RTI International (RTI), Thrive Networks/East Meets West (Thrive/EMW), and UTS-ISF. We also recognise their leadership and support for engaging the private sector for inclusive WASH.

Special thanks also to the advisory group for this Learning Agenda initiative: Rana Abdel-Sattar (iDE Cambodia), Le Huong, Outhikone Souphome In and Gabrielle Halcrow (SNV), Dr Lien Pham, Kim Hor and IV Bunthoeun (Thrive/EMW), Nutan Zarakpar (RTI) and Melita Grant and Avni Kumar (UTS-ISF). Thanks also to the Water for Women Fund Coordinator team, who played a substantial role in the development of the initiative and this report: Kate Orr, Amanda Jupp, Alison Baker, Jose Mott, Bianca Nelson Vatnsdal and Mia Cusack.

This work was supported by the Australian Government's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

Citation: Water for Women. (2022). *Civil society engagement with the private sector for inclusive WASH: Insights from Water for Women*. <https://www.waterforwomenfund.org/en/news/civil-society-engagement-with-the-private-sector-for-inclusive-wash-insights-from-water-for-women.aspx>

Front cover: A WASH entrepreneur from Cambodia. Credit: iDE Cambodia / Sereypanha Sith

Abbreviations

CSO	Civil Society Organisation
FSM	Faecal Sludge Management
FSSM	Faecal Sludge and Septage Management
GEDSI	Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion
iDE	International Development Enterprises
LBO	Latrine Business Owner
MHH	Menstrual Health and Hygiene
O&M	Operation and Maintenance
PPP	Public–Private Partnership
SeTP	Septage Treatment Plant
SHG	Self-Help Group
SNV	Netherlands Development Organisation
SWOT	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats
Thrive/EMW	Thrive Networks/East Meets West
UTS-ISF	University of Technology Sydney Institute for Sustainable Futures
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene



Contents

In brief	ii
About Water for Women	ii
Acknowledgments	ii
Abbreviations	ii
Introduction	1
Background	2
Critical thinking	3
Importance of market analysis	3
Roles of the private sector in WASH systems	3
How do CSOs and the private sector engage to improve WASH?	3
Incentives for working with the private sector in WASH	5
Challenges of working with the private sector in WASH	6
Considerations for CSOs engaging the private sector in WASH	6
Key ingredients for a strong and sustainable partnership with private sector actors	9
Fostering inclusion through the private sector in WASH	11
Benefits of applying a GEDSI lens in private sector engagement	12
Challenges of fostering inclusion while working with the private sector	15
Strategies to strengthen GEDSI through engagement with the private sector	15
Sustainability and the private sector	20
Social sustainability considerations	20
Economic sustainability considerations	21
Environmental sustainability considerations	24
Cultural sustainability considerations	24
Conclusion	25
References	26
Further reading	27
Annex A	28

Introduction

Civil society organisations (CSOs) in the water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) sector have collaborated with private sector actors for decades and in diverse ways. They have built plumbing components, developed and managed piped water systems, delivered latrine pit-emptying services, and fulfilled operation and maintenance (O&M) contracts. With the growing focus on inclusive WASH to ensure that no one is left behind, it is timely to take stock of how CSOs are engaging with the private sector to make WASH access and systems inclusive and equitable. This learning brief brings together the knowledge and experience of Water for Women-funded WASH sector CSOs in South Asia and South East Asia. CSOs are working with small-scale private sector actors in a myriad of ways, with a focus on fostering gender equality, disability and social inclusion (GEDSI), sustainability of WASH programs, and critical thinking ([Figure 1](#)).



Figure 1. The three focus areas of this learning brief

Background

As part of Water for Women's Learning Agenda, the University of Technology Sydney's Institute for Sustainable Futures (UTS-ISF) and other Fund partners undertook a collaborative online learning initiative to better understand how CSOs and other WASH program implementers can engage with the private sector to improve inclusive WASH services and systems. The initiative took place from September to December 2021. It brought together over 70 participants from 20 CSOs and research organisations across South and South East Asia working with the private sector in their WASH programs, both within and external to Water for Women. While Water for Women partners are also working across the Pacific, there are few partnerships with the private sector in that region. Therefore, this learning brief focuses on South and South East Asia, though learnings are applicable beyond this region. The learning initiative involved engagement through various remote modalities ([Figure 2](#)). Participants were supported with a [reading list](#), which included key resources related to private sector engagement in inclusive and sustainable WASH.

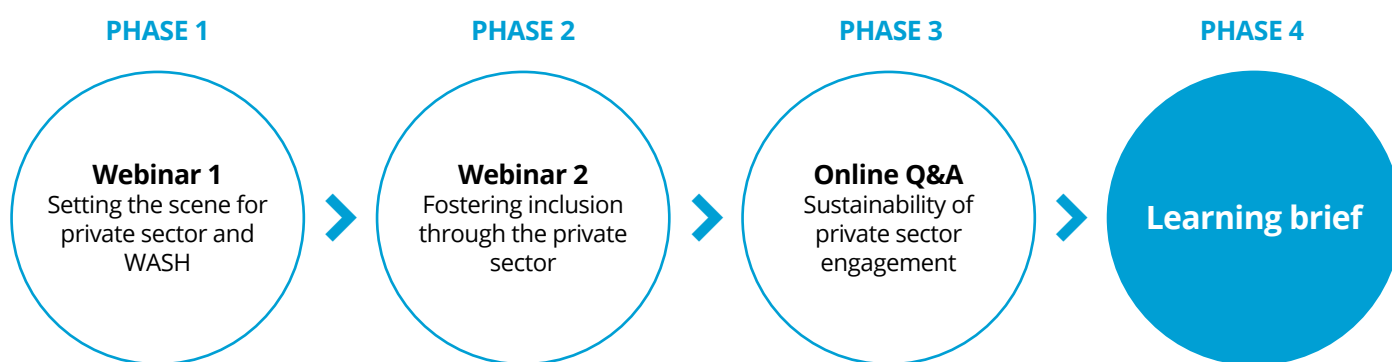


Figure 2. The four phases of the learning initiative

The development of this learning initiative was guided by Water for Women partners, including iDE, SNV, RTI, and Thrive Networks/East Meets West (Thrive/EMW), who are engaging with small-scale private sector actors under their Water for Women projects. All projects have a strong approach to equity and inclusion, for instance, by encouraging and supporting women and other marginalised groups to become WASH entrepreneurs. Actively involving all people within communities (women, men, people with disabilities, people from sexual and gender minority communities, and other marginalised groups) ensures more equitable and inclusive processes, which lead to more effective and sustainable WASH outcomes. It can be challenging to meld objectives of inclusion with private sector engagement given differing drivers and incentives, but this yields many opportunities and synergies. As this learning brief explains, Water for Women partners have strived to bring the financial and business motives of the private sector together with the development objectives of CSOs, with lessons learned along the way.

This brief brings together the learnings, insights and resources generated from the first three phases of the initiative ([Figure 2](#)). It focuses on:

- the various roles of the private sector in WASH service delivery systems
- key considerations for CSOs when partnering with private sector actors
- benefits, challenges and strategies of applying a GEDSI lens
- ensuring the sustainability of private sector engagement
- recommendations for future programming and investment.

Critical thinking

Critical thinking involves understanding the current and future state of the market, and the role the private sector and CSOs play within it. It also involves a collaborative process to identify the benefits and risks of partnerships or contractual relationships with WASH private sector actors. Importantly, understanding the market context involves determining who is included or excluded in the short and long term with respect to private sector WASH activities and partnerships.

Importance of market analysis

WASH markets are reflective of the broader market conditions of a country, and every context is different. It is important to recognise and distinguish between the different market environments that exist for private sector actors, because this affects both opportunities for enterprise development and the relative importance of government roles. For instance, piped water services are generally monopolies. However, in some contexts, such as in Cambodia and Vietnam, small private piped water suppliers are being encouraged and are proliferating in areas that are not serviced by a government monopoly. In such contexts, there is a critical need for appropriate governance and oversight in tendering and in ongoing regulation and monitoring. In contrast, sanitation product suppliers and supply chains (e.g., soap manufacturing, latrine parts development and sales) generally operate under competitive market conditions, such that any entrepreneur can develop a product or service. In this context, government regulation and oversight are needed to protect customers and ensure product and service standards are met. Some countries have strong and diverse markets with competition and consumer rights institutions. In others (e.g., Bhutan), diversity is minimal, with few WASH-specific businesses and construction companies that can be engaged for latrine construction. These issues largely determine the ways in which WASH CSOs work with the private sector, hence a strong understanding and robust and regular analysis of WASH markets are critical.

Roles of the private sector in WASH systems

Private sector actors providing WASH products and services include individual entrepreneurs and organisations that vary in scale and scope, and include private companies and social enterprises ([Box 1](#)).

Box 1. Definitions

A private enterprise is a business or entity that is owned and/or managed by independent companies or private individuals, rather than government or CSOs.

Social enterprises use entrepreneurial behaviour, business practices and the market as tools to meet explicit social goals.

State-owned enterprises include businesses that are wholly or partially owned and controlled by the government¹.

Source: UTS-ISF (2016a)

¹ This learning brief does not discuss state-owned enterprises specifically, but issues related to engaging the private sector in WASH are relevant to these organisations, and they are commonly involved in WASH in some countries (e.g., Vietnam).

How do CSOs and the private sector engage to improve WASH?

Private sector actors have various functions in WASH, including product delivery (e.g., the design, development and supply of water and sanitation equipment; production and distribution of hygiene products) and service delivery (e.g. water supply, toilet installation and maintenance, desludging). Moreover, the private sector is crucial in supporting the broader enabling environment to ensure inclusive, equitable and sustainable WASH outcomes.

Civil society organisations engage the private sector in many ways, facilitating their involvement, and boosting opportunities in the WASH sector (see [Annex A](#)). This includes:

- brokering relationships between private sector actors, government and the community
- strengthening markets and supply chains
- creating demand for WASH services at household and community levels
- setting up mechanisms for accountability to protect consumers/community
- collecting and sharing evidence for monitoring, evaluation and learning
- applying a rights-based approach in engagement with private sector actors and the training they provide ([Figure 3](#)).

Please see [Annex A](#) for a summary of Water for Women CSO partners' work with the private sector in WASH programs.

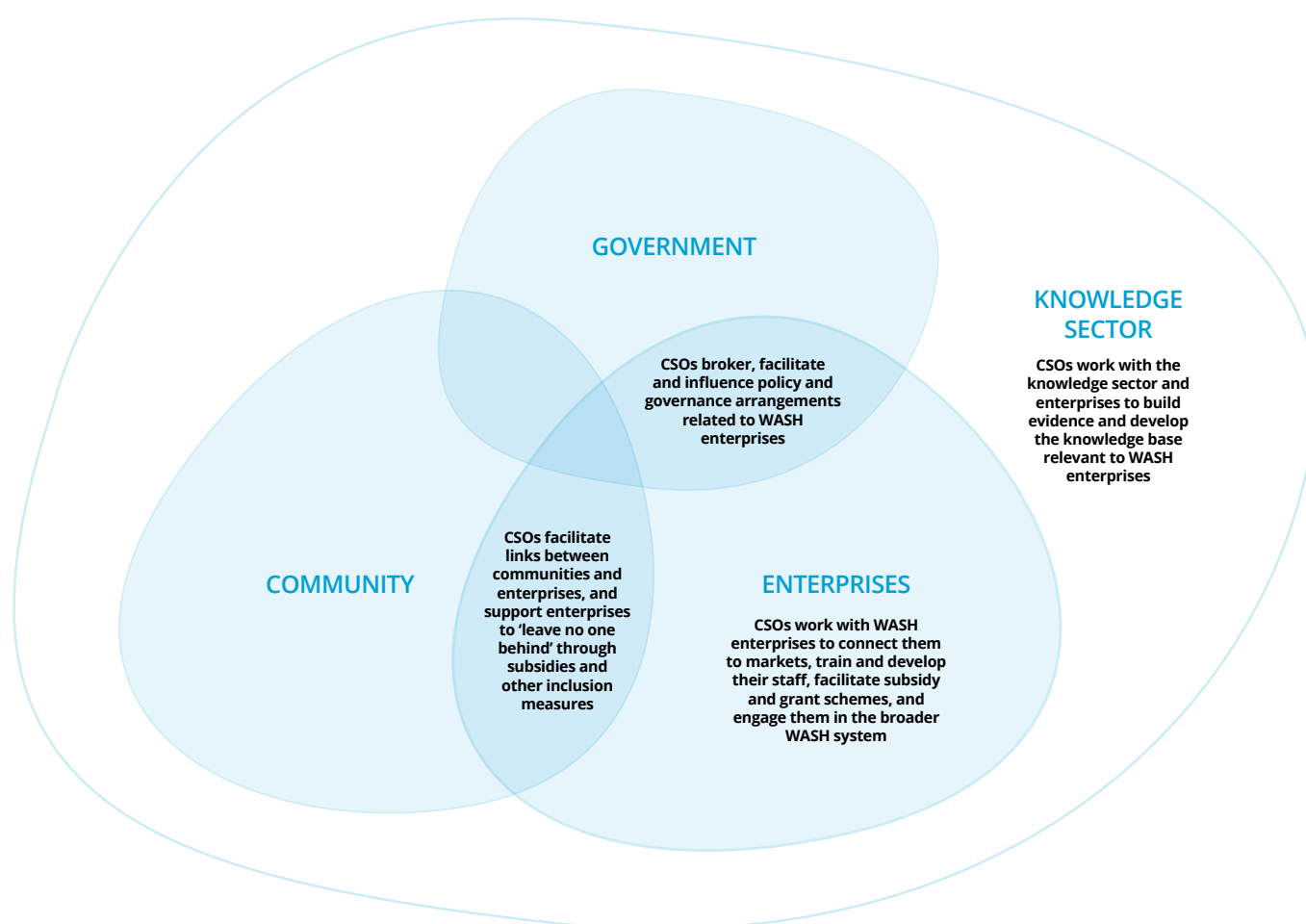


Figure 3. Key roles of CSOs engaging with private sector actors

Source: Adapted from UTS-ISF 2016a

Incentives for working with the private sector in WASH

Along with understanding the market context and regulatory environment and partners' roles, it is important to recognise the incentives for each actor to collaborate in delivering WASH programs. Under this learning initiative, WASH sector CSOs considered the following factors to be the primary incentives for actors to engage the private sector in WASH.

Opportunities for revenue generation, access to markets and end users, capacity building and social acceptance in the community encourage private sector actors (businesses, companies, entrepreneurs) to engage in WASH. Research has also found that some enterprises (especially social enterprises) are intrinsically motivated to improve their communities (Gero et al., 2015; Murta, Gero et al., 2015a; Murta, Indarti et al., 2015b; Willetts and Murta, 2015).

Government agencies engage private sector actors because they recognise that the private sector can contribute to progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals, and public-private partnerships (PPPs) can provide additional investment in WASH. CSOs do so to access finance to implement aspects of WASH service provision, and tap into private sector innovation and product development (e.g., hygiene products and disposal services). CSOs also engage private sector actors to broaden their influence and to work with a broad range of actors who are part of the WASH system overall.

WASH and GEDSI outcomes can be progressed through greater participation of community members, including those with disabilities, in entrepreneurship. CSOs may engage private sector actors in WASH and GEDSI activities to support a broader diversity of role models, challenge discriminatory norms and promote diversity across the WASH workforce.

Box 2. Working with the private sector to improve onsite faecal sludge management (FSM)

In Cambodia, Thrive/EMW, through their [Water for Women project](#), engaged local suppliers and masons to build double pit latrines for onsite treatment of faecal sludge. The double pit was designed by Thrive/EMW Cambodia, with local suppliers and masons creating and installing the systems. Thrive/EMW also engaged commune councils to fund households to build the latrines. This is an example of a CSO brokering the design and development of a WASH product, engaging and facilitating local private sector actors to develop the infrastructure, and then engaging local government to promote uptake of the product.



Local suppliers and masons install a twin pit latrine designed by EMW in Cambodia
Credit: Thrive / EMW

Challenges of working with the private sector in WASH

WASH sector CSOs identified a range of challenges to working with the private sector. These were:

- private sector actors' lack of interest in GEDSI (they perceive it as costly, with little financial return)
- lack of government engagement, support and funding for incentives for GEDSI and pro-poor policies that need to be followed by all WASH actors
- inability to be flexible with payments and subsidies for people who are disadvantaged (i.e., who may not be able to pay bills on time, or need financial support to access products and services)
- lack of a broker to facilitate PPPs; a coordinating entity can manage both sides' expectations and incentives
- lack of coordination between the private sector and local government, leading to conflict between private sector actors (sales agents) and local communities (members of the village authority)
- low scalability and financial viability of sanitation businesses, particularly in rural contexts
- low sustainability and resilience of private sector businesses in evolving WASH markets.

Considerations for CSOs engaging the private sector in WASH

Civil society organisations that were part of the learning initiative articulated the following important considerations for them when designing an approach to engage private sector actors in WASH.

Set realistic expectations when engaging in WASH markets

Understanding the broader private sector and market context (risks, opportunities and constraints) is an important first step, because the WASH market will likely reflect the broader economic context and opportunities for entrepreneurial activity. The following questions could help CSOs to decide whether to partner or engage with certain types of businesses in WASH markets.

- Is there an existing market to tap into?
- Is there competition?
- Are there economies of scale?
- Could existing complementary businesses be supported to move into delivering WASH products and systems (e.g., building latrine parts)?
- What is the demand for the product/service, and is it a potentially viable and profitable market?

Answering these questions can help to avoid assumptions about uptake and viability, which have been found to be challenges in a range of contexts.

Assess the existing market, early and often

It is important that CSOs have a deep understanding of the WASH market and the impact of their approach on market distortions and business sustainability. CSOs should build on existing WASH market supply chains and help to build community demand, possibly with and through local private sector actors. Building on existing market strengths and opportunities can avoid distorting the market by setting up businesses and enterprises that may not have a long-term presence and could possibly even weaken existing businesses.

Understand the attitudes towards the private sector in the WASH sector overall

Some countries and contexts have more appetite and appropriate governance for privately delivered essential services (such as WASH) than others, and this will affect whether private sector engagement is wanted and successful. Understanding the perspectives of the community, government and customers can be useful in this regard, and indicate the potential customer base for a WASH product or service.

Consider the pros and cons of private sector delivery of WASH products and services

Some aspects of WASH lend themselves well to private sector development and/or delivery (e.g., manufacturing of soap and dispensers, menstrual hygiene product manufacture and disposal services, latrine parts manufacturing, and plumbing services). Others are more challenging and riskier (e.g., piped water services and large-scale sewerage systems). The full spectrum of short-term and long-term pros and cons needs to be mapped and considered prior to determining which type of actor (government, private sector, CSO, other) is best placed to deliver that service or product. This mapping process should take into account the market context, long-term viability, and O&M considerations of the WASH product and service.

Apply a Do No Harm perspective and approach

A thorough risk assessment, informed by political economy analysis, needs to underpin any decision to partner with private sector actors to ensure that the collaboration does not create harm, including through unintended consequences. Harm might include:

- people unable to pay their bills being disconnected from WASH services
- only people who can afford a product or service being reached (unless other mechanisms such as pro-poor policies are applied)
- poor workmanship and faulty products
- environmental and public health impacts of poorly managed faecal sludge
- weak/non-existent occupational, health and safety measures for sanitation workers
- backlash and increases in violence towards marginalised groups perceived as receiving 'special attention', or towards women who benefit from economic empowerment initiatives.

This is not an argument for not implementing special measures (such as targeted programs and subsidies), because 'doing nothing is doing harm' (Water for Women, 2019) through reproducing unequal systems and structures. Rather, it points to the importance of ensuring Do No Harm strategies are in place for interventions that are specifically aimed at targeting, supporting and/or empowering women and marginalised groups.

Consider long-term operation, maintenance and viability issues

Ask questions like:

- What will the WASH products and services look like in 10 or 20 years' time?
- Will the business be able to continue in the long term, or is the vision for a short-term commitment?
- Who picks up the service, including O&M, after installation or a short period of private sector management?
- Is the business part of a larger entity, or is it a micro-enterprise, and what does that mean for the sustainability of the service?
- What do differing business models (e.g. build-operate-own-transfer schemes; small-scale infrastructure and family enterprises; building and equipment companies branching into WASH services) mean for service viability?

Put people's rights to water and sanitation at the forefront of decision-making

Governments are duty bearers, in that they are ultimately responsible for ensuring people's right to water and sanitation. Bringing the private sector into WASH brings the profit motive into the equation, and people vary in their ability to pay for WASH services. Decision-makers need to consider the following questions.

- What might a fee for service mean for these rights?
- Can everyone afford the products and services?
- Where do subsidies fit into the picture, and how?
- Is there evidence of subsidies enabling all people to be reached while not distorting the market unfairly?
- What do affordability issues mean for longer-term access to products and services and their maintenance?

Box 3. Reducing or increasing inequalities? The role of private water enterprises in rural Vietnam

Research that UTS-ISF and Thrive/EWM conducted in Vietnam (Grant et al., 2016) found that private provision and other water services' models can present risks to equality if they are not developed and delivered in consideration of the needs of marginalised people, especially poor and female-headed households. Poor households can miss out on piped water services when service providers and/or governments fail to implement measures to increase affordability and access. Private service delivery is increasing in line with national policies in Vietnam and more generally in the global WASH sector. Therefore, it is essential to consider the particularities of private service models and establish regulatory mechanisms that prevent the expansion of piped water systems from increasing and entrenching existing inequalities. The research found that inequality of access to water services was an issue in rural Vietnam, with poor households experiencing disadvantage in four key ways:

- poor householders sometimes paid higher fees
- connection fees were a barrier to accessing services
- piecemeal service coverage disadvantaged the poor
- support mechanisms were applied unevenly.



An elderly woman from a minority community enjoys access to the newly piped water supply at her home
Credit: Thrive / EMW in Vietnam

Key ingredients for a strong and sustainable partnership with private sector actors

Learning initiative participants identified factors for strong and sustainable partnerships. They build on the ideas presented in this learning brief about why CSOs engage with private sector actors, the risks and opportunities that need to be navigated, and the importance of understanding the market and roles of players and incentives. Important ingredients for partnerships with private sector actors in WASH are:

- placing people at the centre of partnerships with the private sector in WASH, not only financial interests (though finances may be a key driver of private sector engagement)
- engaging private sector actors and the broader community from the inception of a program – in problem identification, prioritising issues, developing the action plan, and implementation
- establishing mutual interests, good working and personal relationships and clear communication, and understanding each other's drivers and motivations
- taking a city-wide or district-wide approach, so that all stakeholders have a common vision to achieve for the benefit of all in the area
- creating contextualised income and livelihood opportunities in and beyond WASH, that build on the private sector's capacity and ambitions as well as households' financial capacity and WASH needs
- identifying the gaps in the market and opportunities for resolving them, for instance through PPPs
- considering the socio-economic, environmental, and cultural factors in the delivery of programs, together with private sector partners, e.g., in the case of MHH initiatives
- planning for a long-term strategy by building the capacity of local private sector actors and local government, including in GEDSI issues, O&M needs, and local behavioural aspects related to WASH
- building and expanding the private partners' business networks by facilitating connections with local government, community, and other WASH sector actors so that their reach and opportunities are enhanced and economies of scale achieved where possible.



A Udyami Stri' (businesswoman) stands with her first customers in Dholi village, Rajasthan, where she now sells locally made sanitary products after participating in WASH entrepreneur training through RTI's Water for Women project, in association with local CSO, the Centre for Community Economics and Development Consultants Society, and manufacturer, Jackson Care Products LLP
Credit: RTI International

Box 4. Developing an ecosystem to engage the private sector on faecal sludge and septage management in Odisha, India

RTI's WaSH Hub platform, supported by Water for Women, worked with a diverse group of public, private and community stakeholders to strengthen WASH systems and deliver faecal sludge and septage management (FSSM) in urban areas of the Indian coastal state of Odisha. Consultations with the state/city government, water and sewerage utility, and the FSSM technical support unit revealed three major gaps in FSSM service delivery:

1. insufficient cesspool vehicles to empty on-site sanitation systems
2. inadequate systems for the repair and maintenance of cesspool vehicles
3. septage treatment plants (SeTPs) with outdated technology, and too few of them, to treat the volume of faecal sludge collected by the cesspool vehicles.

To build the case for private sector engagement to solve these problems, the WaSH Hub undertook secondary research on private sector companies working in FSSM in India. Workshops bringing together the government and private sector entities followed. These joint discussions used 'design thinking' to identify the challenges and the needs of stakeholders, and to develop mutually agreeable solutions (examples provided below).

Challenges identified	Solutions proposed*
Unregulated and uncertain demand makes it economically unfeasible for the private sector to operate FSSM across the districts of Odisha.	Creating a central repository of demand by the municipal government and floating a centralised tender to help the private sector get clarity on the demand from a single point of contact.
Lack of mechanisms to secure technical inputs to improve existing technology in SeTPs.	Facilitating private sector company visits to SeTPs by government to help them understand existing technology better, and suggest improvements.
Limited technical knowledge and experience of government in engaging women and transgender self-help groups for O&M of SeTPs.	Creating a hybrid model, wherein private sector companies will assist SHGs in regular O&M of SeTPs, thereby building SHGs' technical capabilities.

Increasing clarity in the public and private sector about each other's needs and concerns resulted in the Odisha State Government releasing 27 FSSM-related project tenders with a cumulative value of AUD 10.65 million in one year. The procurement process incorporated feedback from the private sector during the joint consultations. In addition, the Government handed over operations and maintenance of four SeTPs to women and transgender SHGs, and established contract agreements between the SHGs and respective municipal governments.

*Note: the extent to which these have been adopted and implemented is unknown

Source: RTI (2021a)

Fostering inclusion through the private sector in WASH

The WASH sector has long acknowledged the need for mainstreamed and targeted approaches to GEDSI whereby GEDSI is considered throughout the project cycle, as well as specific measures put in to reach disadvantaged groups and individuals ([Box 5](#)). These approaches support people disadvantaged by gender and societal norms (e.g., women, people from sexual and gender minority communities, people with disabilities, ethnic minorities), and help to shift power dynamics in the institutions and networks that govern WASH.

Box 5. Strengthening women's roles in co-owned sanitation businesses in Lao PDR

SNV supported co-owned sanitation businesses run by husband-and-wife teams in Lao PDR through their [Beyond the Finish Line project](#), supported by Water for Women. Their experience revealed the sanitation sector was largely male dominated; in couple-owned businesses, men were usually the 'face of the business'. SNV conducted a survey to understand the roles of these business owners and how they could be supported to promote GEDSI in their operations, outcomes and service provision. The survey revealed valuable insights. Although women are educated, it they have fewer opportunities than men for employment and training. In addition, while women play multiple roles in their family sanitation businesses, many of their husbands dismiss/downplay their contributions.

Recognising these dynamics, SNV developed training for couple-owned businesses for both husbands and wives. This program included:

- promoting men's recognition of women's role in the business
- promoting collaborative decision-making between the couples
- engaging men as champions of their wife's business
- lowering gendered barriers (including transport and mobility stigma) to attending the training program
- building women's networks and opportunities for their voices to be heard and considered in decision-making.

SNV also designed capacity-strengthening programs for business owners. Joint training was provided to women co-owners to strengthen general skills as well as tailored hands-on coaching on specific topics such as public speaking, customer relations, sales and marketing, negotiation skills, cost calculation and book-keeping methods. The onsite facilitated discussions also helped the owners' understanding of their roles and responsibilities at home and in the business. The discussions encouraged husbands and wives to reflect on and adjust their division of labour and decision-making methods to be more favourable to both parties.

Source: SNV (2021)



A sanitation promoter in Champhone District, Lao PDR, [explains the importance of a safe toilet](#)
Credit: SNV / Outhikone Souphome In

When it comes to CSOs engaging the private sector in WASH, there are numerous benefits to a GEDSI lens. Learning initiative participants were asked about the benefits for each of the key players (individuals, private sector, and society at large); the answers are outlined below.

Benefits to individuals of applying a GEDSI lens in private sector engagement

- Promotes diversity in WASH service provision so more people can be involved and benefit personally and professionally from opportunities to work in businesses delivering WASH services.
- Empowers women and people from marginalised communities, both as providers (entrepreneurs) and users of WASH products and services.
- Draws on a greater range of skills and knowledge, builds individual capabilities, creates more options for customers and increases competition, leading to more affordable pricing and innovation in WASH products and services.

Benefits to the private sector of applying a GEDSI lens

- Increases awareness and understanding of the differentiated needs of diverse individuals and groups, leading to a broader customer base and improved market insights.
- Improves product and service quality, suitability and uptake.
- Identifies more effective ways to communicate with and engage customers, including increasing awareness and uptake of WASH products and services.
- Contributes to corporate social responsibility goals and requirements.

Benefits to society of applying a GEDSI lens to private sector engagement

- Creates equal opportunity and economic empowerment for people employed in WASH businesses.
- Shifts social norms through the creation of diverse role models and WASH businesses' outreach.
- Improves health and hygiene if WASH products and services reach more markets/customers and help to shift behaviours (e.g., high-quality latrines become desirable, hygiene products become available and affordable).
- Improves WASH businesses' financial viability, and ability to reach more people and shift behaviours.



An iDE sanitation champion [discusses toilet ownership](#) with the woman of the household in a rural village in Cambodia
Credit: iDE

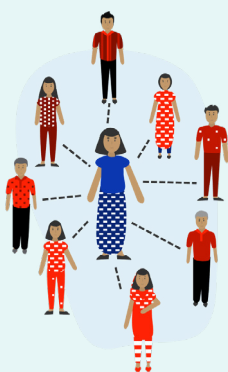
Box 6. Studies on women in WASH enterprises in Cambodia

UTS-ISF conducted a synthesis of studies on civil society organisations (CSOs) working with women in WASH enterprises in Cambodia in 2020. Looking across a range of published and unpublished reports and literature, many similarities were found.



Importance of family support

Studies found that support for women in terms of household duties and agreement with/support for their income generating activity was a significant predictor of retention in WASH income generating activities (WaterShed 2019, SHE/iDE 2019). UTS-ISF found that women expressed the importance of support from the family in their decision to establish, and ability to manage a piped water scheme (UTS-ISF, 2017).



Importance of training and networking

Collective action with female entrepreneurs through training and networking opportunities increased female entrepreneurs' decision-making ability, sense of community and confidence through the sharing of ideas, best practice and information (SHE/iDE, 2019, WaterSHED 2018 and UTS-ISF, 2017 studies).



Double burden of work

The 'double burden' of household and care responsibilities with income generating activities limited women's ability to manage their WASH enterprise or achieve required sales outcomes, primarily due to time constraints (WaterSHED (2018) and UTS-ISF (2017)).



Tension between perceived capabilities and gendered capabilities

Female WASH entrepreneurs reported having the same perceived capabilities as men and able to "do any job men can do", however, gender norms in society and perceptions that promote men as more mobile and stronger were also articulated (WaterSHED 2019 and UTS-ISF 2017).

Limited mobility and its impact



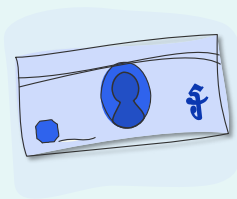
Female entrepreneurs and sales agents experienced challenges in relation to their ability to travel safely and with confidence. Women in the WaterSHED (2018) and UTS-ISF (2017) studies reported that they were unable to travel far from home due to safety and reputation concerns, as well as limited access to sanitation facilities. Related to this, studies found that the home-based nature of some WASH income generating activities, such as managing the accounts of a piped water scheme (UTS-ISF, 2017) suited women well, and WaterShed recommended that the flexibility of these jobs was an important aspect in attracting female staff (WaterShed 2019).

Note: this issue was also identified as a difference in some studies.



Importance of involving men

It was found to be advantageous for CSOs, associations and governments to involve men (particularly husbands) and family members in the promotion and socialisation of women's involvement in WASH enterprises, to minimise backlash and enable women to stay in their roles as they wish (SHE/iDE 2019, WaterSHED 2019 and UTS-ISF 2017).



Financial barriers to female entrepreneurs' ability to manage their enterprise

Limited access to low interest loans/finance and customers not paying on time were concerns experienced by women in the WaterSHED (2018) and UTS-ISF (2017) studies and resulted in negative impacts on their businesses, and reduced economic empowerment.



Giving back to the community

Women expressed a desire to reduce poverty or improve the health of people in their community through their WASH income generating work (UTS-ISF 2017 and WaterShed 2019). Women's altruistic motivations were found to be important drivers of why women became involved in WASH income generating activities.

Challenges of fostering inclusion while working with the private sector

Partners reported that while targeted programs and initiatives are important to improve GEDSI outcomes, it is often difficult to encourage private sector actors to invest in this area. Investment could involve funding training programs, modifying ways of working to accommodate more diverse people, offering flexible working arrangements, and tackling barriers in recruitment. Businesses' willingness to adapt their services to certain segments of the population (such as people with disabilities or who live in remote areas) can be low due to the perception that the additional cost of inclusive practices will reduce their profit margins.

Learning initiative participants raised the issue of whether women and marginalised people truly benefit from private sector engagement in WASH, or are in fact more burdened. For example, providing economic opportunities to women and marginalised individuals can result in their disempowerment if the programs do not involve men and families. Similarly, in some cases essential services delivered by businesses could lead to marginalised populations paying more for WASH products and services. It is integral to the Do No Harm approach to consider these factors when collaborating with the private sector and to implement strategies to mitigate risks, because WASH is not an ordinary product or service. An example of a practical way that this can be done is to include a Do No Harm clause² in procurement contracts with private sector sub-contractors.

Learning initiative participants identified that households headed by women or containing family members with a disability may face financial barriers to WASH service use. These households may benefit from paying for products and services in instalments or via subsidies (if available).

Strategies to strengthen GEDSI through engagement with the private sector

Previous research on women-led private enterprises (Grant et al., 2018; Grant et al., 2019), and the experiences of participants in this learning initiative, reveal diverse strategies that WASH CSOs can use to incorporate a GEDSI focus when working with businesses and private sector actors.

Collaborate with rights holder organisations and local GEDSI experts

This can build an understanding of gender differences and challenges into programming. A professional training and capacity building organisation, such as SHE Investments ([Box 7](#)), can diagnose the particular needs of women entrepreneurs. Partnering with rights holder organisations and GEDSI experts needs to be funded and allocated a suitable budget.

Box 7. Creating a transformative impact in the private sector

iDE partnered with a local organisation, SHE Investments, through its [Water for Women project](#), to support women-run latrine businesses in rural Cambodia. SHE Investments learnt about the barriers women faced to running their own businesses and provided a tailored training program to overcome them. Their curriculum incorporated not only skills related to technical and business management, but coaching on soft skills such as negotiation and confidence building. Evaluation of the program revealed that women participants reported an increase in their income, learnt to track their finances, grew their savings and assets, and reduced their debts. Hat Tin, one of the women entrepreneurs who attended this training and was interviewed for a [video](#) produced as part of this learning initiative, reported that she learnt useful business skills such as time management, client negotiation, planning and sales forecasting, staff recruitment and management.

Source: iDE (2020)

² Such as apprenticeships and training opportunities, building in budget and processes for whole-of-community consultations (including meeting with women and marginalised groups separately), and ensuring that women and marginalised groups are recruited into diverse roles and given equal opportunity.

Engage men as allies

Working with both women and men can reduce backlash, facilitate greater uptake and participation by women as entrepreneurs, and shift gender roles in household and care responsibilities. For example, SNV's [Water for Women supported project](#) works with husbands and wives who own WASH businesses in Lao PDR to strengthen their partnerships and encourage equitable decision-making, build greater respect for women's work, and encourage sharing of care responsibilities at home.

Take an evidence-based approach

Analysis of the WASH supply chain with a GEDSI lens can reveal the opportunities and constraints faced by women entrepreneurs and inform programs that increase gender-equitable engagement in the WASH sector. Qualitative and quantitative data on the experiences of people working in WASH enterprises are needed, as well as on consumers of WASH products and services delivered by enterprises and private sector actors.

Involve private sector actors at the inception stage

By involving private sector actors early on, and training them in GEDSI concepts and approaches, their understanding of GEDSI will increase and help them to meet the requirements of the partnering CSO.

Collect and use sex-disaggregated data to amplify the voices of success

Integrating GEDSI indicators into a program's monitoring and evaluation approach is important to assess program impact and to inform adaptive management. Stories of impact – such as when women enter male-dominated fields and succeed, responsibilities are shared in a couple-owned business, and people with disabilities or people from sexual and gender minority communities establish viable WASH businesses – provide models for others in the community.

I found that ... I could talk to my husband about finances more confidently with evidence. It allowed us to focus more on discussions about how to improve the business rather than fighting each other about money. Moreover, I know how to do the cash flow for my business. It helps me a lot managing cash of my business and I clearly know when I should use money and when I should not.

Hat Tin, latrine business owner



Latrine business owner Hat Tin says she has gained technical and business management skills that have helped grow the business and her confidence
Credit: iDE Innovation Lab Cambodia

Build relationships between communities and private sector partners

Women managing piped water supply businesses identified the need for more community awareness raising about the benefits of piped water systems to increase demand for their services.

Include GEDSI in procurement

Preferencing particularly types of candidates can be an effective strategy to increase diversity within organisations and ensure that women and marginalised groups are recruited into diverse roles and given opportunities. Providing specific training support opportunities to women and marginalised groups such as through apprenticeships can also improve the talent pool for the organisation and the sector.

Box 8. Empowering rural women entrepreneurs in Bhutan, Lao PDR, and Nepal

SNV's Beyond the Finish Line projects in [Bhutan](#), [Nepal](#) and [Lao PDR](#), supported by Water for Women, engaged women entrepreneurs in the WASH sector and promoted their economic empowerment across the WASH supply chain. They adopted an iterative approach in which the country teams regularly reviewed the programs' successes and challenges, using multi-dimensional tools such as the Gender@Work framework³. This approach recognised that empowerment cannot be promoted through increased economic opportunity in isolation. SNV facilitated creation of spaces for women's entrepreneurship in WASH by first promoting participation of a few women in male-dominated professions such as masonry. These women were identified with the support of local women's non-governmental organisations. Engaging men and establishing buy-in from the families in the initial phases of project development, before technical training, was vital to the mitigation of unintended consequences such as backlash.

Source: SNV (2021)



Local toilet ring manufacturers working together in Savannakhet Province, Lao PDR

Credit: SNV / Bart Verweiji

³ <https://genderatwork.org/analytical-framework/>

Focus on women's networking skills and collective action

SNV is working with women entrepreneurs in Nepal to set up informal peer networks and formal support structures such as associations and cooperatives (see [Box 8](#)). In Cambodia, the Cambodia Water Supply Association and Thrive/EMW are supporting women who manage water schemes in rural areas ([Box 9](#)).

Conduct a gender analysis of the WASH supply chain

Gender analysis can reveal the opportunities and constraints that women customers and women-led enterprises face, and inform the design of interventions to increase gender-equitable engagement in the private sector. Targeted studies and conversations of this nature will help to identify gaps and opportunities in the way the business operates within and with the community.

Box 9. Working with female piped water operators and the Cambodian Water Supply Association

Thrive/EMW in Cambodia worked with the Cambodian Water Supply Association and 14 female water operators employed in (mostly) family-based businesses to deliver piped water supply to 3,750 households across seven provinces in Cambodia, supported by Water for Women. This partnership resulted in 1,337 households that are headed by women, economically marginalised and/or include people with disabilities being connected to 12 of the 14 piped water supply systems.

Research conducted with UTS-ISF and the 14 women managing the water enterprises found that the women would like to be supported in delivering their services through:

- technical support, including training and support related to water management and water quality
- community mobilisation, including dissemination of information on the importance of clean water
- financial support, especially at start up, when capital costs are high
- connections (networking) with other entrepreneurs to share experiences and knowledge related to water supply schemes
- subsidies for poor and remote households to connect to water supplies.

As a result of the research, Thrive/EMW and the Cambodian Water Supply Association provided training and targeted support to these enterprises.

Source: Grant et al. (2019)



Entrepreneurs who manage piped water systems in Cambodia speak with researchers from Thrive Networks/East Meets West and UTS-ISF
Credit: UTS-ISF / Melita Grant

Box 10. Strengthening diversity among female WASH entrepreneurs in Indonesia

WASH programs have an imperative to contribute to a more diverse WASH workforce, including among private sector actors, to support diversity in WASH service provision. Research conducted by UTS-ISF and partners with female WASH entrepreneurs in Indonesia revealed that after training and support, many faced challenges in operating their businesses and as a result did not continue them. Reasons included their household and childcare roles reducing their ability – particularly those with younger children – to focus on the business. Additionally, women with disabilities had to navigate biases and societal perceptions related to their capability to operate a business, as well as in access to resources such as formal sources of finance. The study also found that female entrepreneurs faced significant barriers due to regulations related to accessing formal credit, requiring them to have assets in their name to offer as collateral.

To reduce these barriers, the study offered the following recommendations for CSOs seeking to support and recruit women entrepreneurs:

- consider affirmative action approaches to help diversify the workforce
- design training programs that incorporate an understanding of the motivations of participants, their entrepreneurial interests, previous business experience, life experiences, position in society and social networks, to match their aspirations and capabilities to the skills required to become an entrepreneur
- support women with disabilities to be WASH entrepreneurs as an avenue for personal empowerment, as well as opportunities to generate employment among vulnerable populations
- involve husbands and make family members proactively in entrepreneurial capacity building to promote an improved understanding of the women's WASH businesses and inculcate values around shared responsibility for household tasks; involving males who already share household tasks as role models for other males can be a way to set new norms
- facilitate strengthened enabling environments at local and district level for female WASH business owners; this can be through development of micro-finance groups, networks or associations, and advocating to government for development of supportive policies.

Source: Kumar et al. (2021)



A member of one of Sumbawa's three women and disability Participatory Action Research groups, who lives with vision impairment, sews [masks for sale](#) in the community during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic
Credit: Yayasan Plan International Indonesia

Sustainability and the private sector

Strengthening the WASH sector, including through private sector engagement, requires thinking critically, fostering inclusion, and embedding inclusive and transformative practices. While sustainability can be defined in several ways, this learning initiative drew upon participants' experiences in building partnerships with the private sector that were socially, economically, environmentally and culturally sustainable, as explained below.

Social sustainability considerations

Social sustainability is ensuring partnerships with the private sector extend and enhance GEDSI goals and approaches, building in processes to share and maintain knowledge even when staff or partners change, responding to the needs of the whole community, and adapting products and services to ensure that no one is left behind. Social sustainability of private sector-delivered WASH also incorporates GEDSI goals and approaches, as discussed in the previous section. Some of the ways that CSOs can build social sustainability into projects with private sector actors are described below.

- **Seek out and listen to the voices of the community** throughout the project to ensure no one is left behind and to foster mutual and continuous collaboration among stakeholders. This could include documenting who is taking up the WASH service or product and who is not, and why.
- **Promote diverse entrepreneurs in the WASH workforce and provide role models** of women and marginalised peoples. Boosting the business skills and confidence of women and diverse entrepreneurs supports more people to be involved in and benefit from WASH businesses and job opportunities.
- **Engage men and boys** in gender-inclusive activities to reduce backlash and increase support and acceptance of women leading and making decisions (see [Box 9](#) for an example).
- **Support women and business leaders from marginalised and minority groups** through whole-of-family approaches to ensure buy-in and support from their partners and families. Research has found that family support is a significant enabler of women running or taking part in WASH businesses.
- **Provide training for private sector actors**, especially in the areas of financial literacy and debt management (e.g., separating business versus household finances; paying oneself a salary), and building skills in marketing, negotiation, recruitment and staff management, and vision setting for the business.
- **Train private sector actors and enterprises in technical aspects of WASH**, such as water quality monitoring, FSM, latrine construction, and develop skills related to GEDSI, leadership, negotiation and confidence.
- **Consider how capacity-building efforts can provide childcare and support mobility of participants**, and be careful not to increase women's burden of unpaid work.
- **Support networks and mentoring** through development of professional networks, micro-finance groups, peer-to-peer support, and learning opportunities between women working in WASH enterprises and roles.
- **Link entrepreneurs with local financial institutions**. Give women WASH entrepreneurs access to resources associated with entrance and retention in the private sector, including information about obtaining capital, financial support such as low-interest loans, and skills in developing financial proposals.
- **Integrate GEDSI outcomes into programs and M&E frameworks**, and discuss gender equality with the WASH owner and with respect to business operations.
- **Advocate for design policies and programs** that promote the occupational health and safety and dignity of WASH workers, especially those involved in sanitation and hygiene.
- **Support or establish training and mentorship programs** for people (especially women) with disabilities, and people from diverse communities to achieve inclusive programming and more effective/sustainable results.
- **Include GEDSI clauses in procurement contracts and guidelines**.
- **Improve the viability of private sector engagement** in remote communities or socio-economically disadvantaged communities by investing in short-term targeted evidence-based subsidies.

Economic sustainability considerations

Evaluating economic sustainability includes considering who contributes financial resources, in what ways, how and for how long. Often the economic sustainability of a WASH service delivered by the private sector involves leveraging private sector capital while balancing affordability issues for customers, managing financial risks, profit margins and subsidies, as well as drawing in donor and government funds. Learning initiative participants identified several examples of how CSOs working with WASH businesses can support and enhance economic sustainability.

- **Create and scale up WASH markets.** This can involve, for example, building and supporting a network of high-performing sanitation enterprises over several years. See [Box 13](#) for factors that are linked to scale up and economic sustainability of WASH businesses.
- **Create linkages across sectors.** Highlighting the economic benefit of inclusive WASH access to the tourism industry and linking other private industries to WASH programs can enhance the relevance and reach of WASH across the community. Connecting to the tourism sector could lead to tourism operators supporting initial infrastructure construction, as well as facility maintenance and behaviour change promotion, in neighbouring communities (see [Box 11](#)).
- **Build the financial literacy of government, private sector operators and local communities,** including in cost/benefit analysis, life-cycle cost analysis, cost-effectiveness analysis, assessment of willingness and ability to pay, and relevant economic frameworks and instruments (see [Box 12](#)).

Box 11. Building social and economic sustainability in the tourism sector

A destination-wide approach to inclusive WASH can improve the image of tourism destinations by making them cleaner, safer and healthier. This helps the tourism industry to increase visits and revenue generation in the area. Tourism operators that support communities with WASH programs will gain social acceptance in the surrounding community, improve their image, and strengthen their business model.

A [Water for Women research project](#), led by the International WaterCentre of Griffith University, found that inclusive access to WASH is important for the tourism sector to maintain a strong reputation with tourists (especially during times of COVID-19) and its social license to operate in local communities. Hotels can create positive change by ensuring that GEDSI WASH-at-Work practices are enacted in the workplace and at home, via collaboration between government personnel, tourism operators and local community members. Doing so will provide 'over the fence' WASH awareness in local communities. With the increasing frequency and severity of droughts, floods and storms associated with human-induced climate change, businesses must ensure that water and sanitation services are well maintained as part of their response.

Working with the tourism sector has beneficial implications for businesses, local communities and the wider destination. For example, it:

- enhances the competitiveness of tourist destinations via effective hygiene practices and cleanliness, improved health and safety of employees and tourists, and compliance with health regulations
- improves the resilience of tourism infrastructure and systems to cope with crises such as pandemics and natural disasters
- improves the destination's image and reputation as a clean and healthy environment for visitors
- promotes behaviour change that improves health and safety for tourism employees and their families in the community
- improves inclusive WASH access for people in the community, including socially vulnerable groups.

Source: IWC (2021)

Box 12. Life-cycle cost analysis and private sector water operators: the need for better data, and better use of data, for financial sustainability

The life-cycle costs associated with the delivery of safe and sustainable water services in rural Vietnam are not well known, potentially compromising the long-term sustainability of water schemes. To fill this gap, UTS-ISF assessed the cost structures of 14 private sector-managed water schemes in northern and southern Vietnam, and recommended that:

- the national and provincial governments in Vietnam ascertain the costs of water supply schemes over the long term, and use this data to inform standards for water schemes, affordable and appropriate tariff structures and subsidies, and processes for transfer of assets from government agencies to other types of water supply providers (such as private enterprises)
- enterprises and government agencies improve their understanding of how piped water enterprises are investing in capital maintenance, informed by depreciation forecasts and cost of capital, to ensure that water supply schemes are maintained in the long term using a strategic asset management approach
- private water enterprises be required and supported to collect financial data regularly and provide it to relevant authorities and financial donors and NGO partners
- care be exercised when comparing life-cycle costs across contexts given they differ greatly due to geography, water sources, access to technology, and labour accessibility and costs.

Source: UTS-ISF (2018)



Enterprise owners, CSO and university staff conduct research in Vietnam on life-cycle costs analysis of piped water systems

Credit: UTS-ISF / Melita Grant

Box 13. Strategies to enhance the economic sustainability of WASH businesses

iDE conducted a survey in late 2020 to assess latrine business owner (LBO) sustainability under its [Sanitation Marketing Scale-Up](#) project in Cambodia, and found that WASH sector economic sustainability was linked to:

- diversification in WASH and non-WASH products; LBOs were more likely to be sustainable when they offered products and services that were not WASH-related
- investment in equipment (e.g., interlock brick-making machines, delivery trucks, etc.), and WASH product sales via direct retail channels
- development of latrine business capacity, which was found to build long-term success
- involvement of multiple family members playing various roles in the business, which earned more revenue per month than businesses with less family involvement.

Source: iDE



WASH entrepreneurs who participated in an [iDE supported](#) SHE Investments workshop are using the skills and knowledge they gained to set long-term goals for their business

Credit: iDE / Tyler Kozole

Environmental sustainability considerations

Environmental sustainability involves:

- managing issues of water quality and quantity for the environment and community with consideration of the water cycle
- increasing the capacity to manage, mitigate and adapt to climate change
- maintaining environmentally sensitive sanitation service chains (including containment, pit-emptying, and transport of faecal sludge and treatment of sewage)
- managing water cycle and catchment management issues
- engaging private sector actors to help manage and adhere to safety and quality standards, including water conservation initiatives.

Learning initiative participants provided the following examples of how CSOs are engaging private sector actors with consideration of environmental sustainability:

- **developing information and supportive guidelines** for WASH businesses to highlight the importance of sustainability issues and broader water cycle and catchment management considerations
- **considering private sector actors in water safety planning processes**
- **assisting private sector actors with compliance with environmental policy and regulations**, and connecting them with relevant government officials who can provide technical support and information about obligations
- **developing and implementing environmental and catchment management plans** to identify the types and magnitudes of environmental impacts generated in WASH programs and how to manage them; e.g., drawing on monitoring and evaluation data (including that pertaining to water quality and quantity) to help latrine businesses understand and manage environmental impacts.

Cultural sustainability considerations

Cultural sustainability in the WASH context requires consideration of cultural norms and practices in relation to WASH, and how local culture will influence the success and sustainability of a WASH project or program. It could include leveraging the strengths and influence of certain cultural practices (e.g., reverence for rivers). Cultural perspectives on menstrual health and hygiene (MHH) and appropriate disposal of human waste differ cross contexts, and may influence WASH programs and outcomes. Learning initiative participants provided specific examples of ways to incorporate cultural sustainability in private sector-delivered WASH programs.

- **Adopt a human-centred approach to designing WASH products** to produce affordable and practical outcomes for both the community and sanitation businesses. A human-centred approach puts the people for whom products and services are designed at the heart of the process, and includes GEDSI dimensions.
- **Consider the cultural context** while developing and delivering training programs with and for the private sector, and adapting training to meet people's communication and cultural styles and needs.
- **Examine WASH behaviours**, including how the cultural context influences the way that people engage with, maintain and use WASH products and services.
- **Use cultural norms, role models, and motivations/incentives** in WASH behaviour change campaigns and communications.
- **Discuss how to maintain and enhance the cultural riches** that underpin society, and how to improve WASH services to attract visitors and keep them healthy during their stay.

Conclusion

This learning brief provides an overview of the opportunities, challenges and examples of latest practice related to WASH CSOs engaging small-scale private sector WASH actors in a range of contexts in South and South East Asia. It is based predominantly on the outcomes of a series of webinars hosted in late 2021 by UTS-ISF and the Water for Women Fund. It confirms that private sector roles in the WASH sector are many and varied, including the design and development of WASH products, supply of water and sanitation equipment, and WASH service provision. CSO roles in the engagement of private sector actors include brokering relationships between the private sector, government and the community; supporting the development of viable markets and supply chains; and setting up mechanisms for accountability, ideally working with government to develop regulatory frameworks. To protect and enhance GEDSI, CSOs provide training to private sector actors on a rights-based approach to service delivery.

This learning brief emphasises the importance of distinguishing between the types of markets in which private sector WASH actors operate, because market type influences the opportunities and incentives for engagement and whether it will be successful and sustainable.

Ensuring that GEDSI is meaningfully considered in private sector collaborations is essential for supporting women and other marginalised communities to be part of entrepreneurial activity, and promoting effective and sustainable WASH outcomes. However, it cannot be assumed that private sector WASH actors will promote economic empowerment, so evidence-based practices need to be implemented to manage financial risks for entrepreneurs, as well as avoid harm to communities and entrepreneurs alike.

Finally, this learning brief provides a range of suggestions, drawing from practitioners and literature, on how CSOs and private sector actors can engage to promote the social, economic, environmental and cultural sustainability of WASH services, as well as a comprehensive [reading list](#) to support future policy and practice.



A homeowner in Cambodia stands by the high-quality latrine she was able to purchase with the support of an iDE targeted subsidy for 'IDPoor' households
Credit: iDE / Seng Liem

References

- Gero, A., Murta, J., Thanh, D.T., Ly, B.H. and Willetts, J. (2015). *Motivators and barriers for sanitation enterprises in Vietnam*, UTS-ISF. http://enterpriseinwash.info/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/UTS-ISF_2015_Summary-Report-4_Vietnam_Water-Motivators-and-Barriers.pdf
- Grant, M., Dominish, E., Carrard, N., Buy, L., Ha, H. and Nghiem, T. (2016). Reducing or increasing inequalities? The role of private water enterprises in rural Viet Nam, *Development Bulletin*, 77:31–36. <https://crawford.anu.edu.au/rmap/devnet/devnet/db-77/db-77-ee-4.pdf>
- Grant, M., Bunthoeun, I. and Willetts, J. (2019). Rural piped-water enterprises in Cambodia: A pathway to women's empowerment? *Water*, 11:2541. <https://doi.org/10.3390/w1122541>
- Grant, M., Soeters, S., Megaw, T. and Willetts, J. (2018). *Summary of research report 9 – female water entrepreneurs in Cambodia: Considering enablers and barriers to women's empowerment*, UTS-ISF. http://enterpriseinwash.info/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/SF-UTS_2018_Summary-Brief-9_Women-Empowerment-Cambodia_EnterpriseinWASH.pdf
- iDE. (2020). *Cambodia sanitation marketing scale-up 3: Female entrepreneur support with SHE investments*, iDE. <https://go.ideglobal.org/SMSU3-midterm-assessment>
- Kumar, A., Siscawati, M., Anggriani, S., Ratnasari, Nailah and Willetts, J. (2021). *What will it take to strengthen diversity amongst female water, sanitation and hygiene entrepreneurs in Indonesia?* UTS-ISF. https://multisitestaticcontent.uts.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/sites/57/2021/12/08062656/UTS-ISF-UI-and-Plan_2021_Strengthening-Diversity-in-Female-WASH-Entrepreneurs_Summary-brief.pdf
- Murta, J., Gero, A. and Willetts, J. (2015). *Motivators and barriers for water enterprises in Vietnam*, UTS-ISF. http://enterpriseinwash.info/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/UTS-ISF_2015_Summary-Report-4_Vietnam_Water-Motivators-and-Barriers.pdf
- Murta, J., Indarti, N., Rostiani, R. and Willetts, J. (2015). *Motivators and barriers for water sanitation enterprises in Indonesia*, UTS-ISF. http://enterpriseinwash.info/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/UTS-ISF_2015_Research-Report-3-Indonesia-motivators-and-barriers.pdf
- RTI. (2021a). *Developing the faecal sludge and septage management (FSSM) sector's private sector ecosystem in Odisha*, RTI, India
- SNV. (2021). *Empowering rural women entrepreneurs in WASH services in Bhutan, Lao PDR, and Nepal*, SNV. <https://snv.org/assets/explore/download/snv-bfl-rural-women-entrepreneurs-wash-web.pdf>
- Soeters, S., Grant, M., Salinger, A. and Willetts, J. (2020). *Gender equality and women in water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) enterprises in Cambodia: synthesis of recent studies*, UTS-ISF. <https://waterforwomen.uts.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/sites/57/2020/06/Cambodia-Enterprise-Synthesis.pdf>
- UTS-ISF. (2016a). *Learning brief 1: CSO roles to support effective enterprise roles in WASH*, UTS-ISF. http://enterpriseinwash.info/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/UTS-ISF_Enterprise-in-WASH_Learning-Brief-1-CSO-Roles_final.pdf
- UTS-ISF. (2016b). *Learning brief 2: Know your private sector*, UTS-ISF. http://enterpriseinwash.info/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/UTS-ISF_Enterprise-in-WASH_Learning-Brief-2-Private-sector.pdf
- UTS-ISF. (2018). *Life-cycle costs approach for sustainable piped water service delivery: A study in rural Viet Nam*, UTS-ISF. http://enterpriseinwash.info/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/UTS-ISF_2018_Lifecycle-Costs-Policy-Brief-Viet-Nam.pdf

Water for Women. (2019). 'Do No Harm' for inclusive WASH: working towards a shared understanding: Reflections from the Water for Women Fund's South Asia Regional Learning Event. https://www.waterforwomenfund.org/en/learning-and-resources/resources/GSI/WfW-SNV-Learning-Brief_Systems-Strengthening_Do-No-Harm_FINAL.pdf

Willetts, J. and Murta, J. (2015). *Motivations, barriers and opportunities for water and sanitation enterprises in Timor-Leste*, UTS-ISF. http://enterpriseinwash.info/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/UTS-ISF_2015_Research-Report-6-Timor-Leste-motivators-and-barriers.pdf

Further reading

For more information and further reading, please refer to the [reading list](#) developed for this learning initiative.

First published in December 2022

For further information please contact:
waterforwomen@ghd.com
waterforwomenfund.org

This publication was funded by the Australian Government through the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. The views expressed in this publication are the contributing authors' alone and are not necessarily the views of the Australian Government.

Annex A

Select ways in which CSOs are working with the private sector in their WASH programs.

Water	Services • Working with water utilities on provision of support services to rural communities • Working with water utilities on water service delivery models for urban informal settlements • Working with private water operators on water quality testing, piloting feedback mechanisms between users and operators, and coordinating subsidies for piped-water connections for marginalised households • Purchasing or engaging water purification services • Designing, construction and operation of water and wastewater treatment infrastructure • Building the capacity of private water operators (technical/financial/business management and climate resilience) • Working with micro-finance institutions to provide loans to private water operators • Building the capacity of private water enterprises, together with government, to pilot climate resilient water safety planning • Promoting water stewardship (e.g., water efficiency) in the private sector (e.g., hospitality industry), in turn benefiting WASH in communities • Encouraging private corporate social responsibility (e.g., hotels providing water supply to surrounding communities) Products and services • Supporting water vendors (kiosks, carts, taps, wells or rivers) • Distributing household water treatment products (provided by the private sector) • Engaging private water enterprises by providing output-based aid subsidies to serve the poor or last mile customers • Engaging social enterprises that sell ceramic water filters to households
Sanitation	Services • Facilitating or supporting development of faecal sludge treatment facilities • Working with de-sludging operators to provide/improve pit emptying services to communities Other • Facilitating the engagement of private businesses in sub-national government meetings and sanitation and hygiene national events • Engaging and building the capacity of local businesses to construct latrines and handwashing facilities, including supporting female entrepreneurs in these businesses • Arranging low-interest credit for toilet construction • Generating demand for local latrine businesses through door-to-door sales agents • Encouraging private corporate social responsibility (e.g., hotels providing sanitation services to surrounding communities) • Supporting associations of sanitation entrepreneurs • Bringing together private investors to invest in faecal sludge management • Providing latrine businesses with the technical capacity to perform human-centred design, manufacturing and installation of sanitation and hygiene products • Providing businesses with technical training related to how to build accessible and climate resilient latrines • Training businesses to work with and provide services for people with disabilities, and about the rights of those with disabilities and their barriers to sanitation services • Advocating for better occupational health and safety for latrine pit emptiers

Hygiene	Products • Working with start-ups who produce eco-friendly menstrual pads on marketing and MHH education to high school students • Supporting the marketing and sale of handwashing products, as well as the production of soap, handwashing sinks and reusable menstrual pads Products and services • Collaborating with soap and hand sanitiser producers in hand hygiene promotion • Providing handwashing devices (developed/provided by the private sector) to communities and promote good practices and hygiene behaviours in schools • In partnership with the private sector, providing MHH training to women, girls, men and boys in the community and local authorities as part of increasing the availability of commercial MHH products and services • Delivering behaviour change messaging to private sector actors (as well as government and communities) that links COVID-19 and handwashing • Co-developing behaviour change communication products and campaigns • Developing and disseminating guidelines for inclusive WASH in hotels
Other	Supporting private sector businesses to better understand their markets • Assessing the WASH sector market (supply chains, opportunities, constraints) • Training and strategies to promote the role of female entrepreneurs and women within small-scale WASH enterprises and female masons • Linking private sector suppliers to self-help groups to reach marginalised populations Engaging with governments • Supporting policy and advocacy to connect private sector actors with WASH service needs • Working with government agencies to eliminate supply chain barriers to private sector actors, and advocate for government recognition and support of their roles Facilitating private sector engagement beyond the WASH sector • Building relationships with information technology companies relevant to WASH • Developing consultancy agreements with businesses on finance, project management, insurance • Developing relationships and contracts with consultancies working in small-scale renewable energy as it relates to WASH • Connecting with providers of financial products • Supporting women's business leadership and economic empowerment • Supporting businesses to improve financial capacity by providing training on savings, obtaining credit, and tracking and recording income, together with broader business planning, goal setting, and sustainable income generation Research and development • Conducting research to understand private sector incentives to work with people with disabilities • Profiling the role of women and those with disability in the private sector • Conducting research and providing guidance on the use of subsidies and how the private sector can reach poor clients more effectively • Monitoring WASH businesses' growth and conducting research on the sustainability of the sector

waterforwomen@ghd.com
waterforwomenfund.org

