



SANITATION
AND WATER
FOR ALL

REACH OUT AND REACH UP:

A GLOBAL STUDY ON EXTERNAL
PERCEPTIONS OF WATER, SANITATION
AND HYGIENE

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1. Introduction

1.1 Research objectives

This research was commissioned by Sanitation and Water for All (SWA). Its objective was to understand how different sector audiences perceive the water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) sector, and explore the kinds of messages that will resonate with them.

It follows a formative SWA paper in 2020, called [A Proposal for Repositioning Water, Sanitation & Hygiene](#), which found that messaging on WASH is “sometimes too broad to create the impact we need it to.” The study also builds on other recent research, including UN-Water’s [Listening Exercise](#) for World Water Day 2021, and SIWI’s [Communications Initiative](#). These have all suggested a growing demand for more effective communications about WASH with non-WASH audiences.

The research’s main purpose is to sharpen and inform the messaging and communications strategies for the WASH sector, shaping how WASH is framed and promoted – particularly when engaging other sectors and political leaders at the highest levels.

1.2 About SWA and BEC

Sanitation and Water for All

SWA is the United Nations-hosted partnership for the WASH sector. It works towards the objective of ‘water, sanitation, and hygiene for all, always, and everywhere’. The partnership uses innovative ways to increase political support for realizing the human rights to water and sanitation. It does this by engaging with and mobilizing over 300 partners from governments, utilities, regulators, donors, financial institutions, UN agencies, civil society and research organizations, and the private sector. The partnership works together to coordinate high-level action, improve accountability and use scarce resources more effectively.

Partners share the conviction that achieving universal access to water and sanitation requires more than building wells or latrines and laying pipes, so they harness their collective power around strong leadership and good governance. This includes advocating for political prioritization at the highest levels of power, promoting participation of vulnerable groups in decision-making, ensuring finance is made available and used effectively, learning across countries and regions, and holding each other accountable for commitments made.

The work of partners is focused around three elements:

- ‘Reaching up’: This means political engagement and advocacy to the highest level of decision-making. Amplifying and focusing the voice of the sector in a strategic way, so it is heard and acted on by those that make key decisions. The most visible examples of this element are [SWA’s Sector Ministers’ Meetings](#) and [Finance Ministers’ Meetings](#). However, it also includes much other work, such as advocacy to Heads of State or Government, ministers, [parliamentarians](#), and the work of [SWA’s Global Leadership Council](#).
- ‘Reaching out’: This means increasing understanding of how crucial WASH is to the objectives of other development sectors; raising and broadening the profile and visibility of water, sanitation and hygiene to external sector audiences. Examples of this work have included engagement with other sectors on [climate action for COP26](#), [SWA’s gender campaign of 2021](#), [the COVID-19 Call to Action](#), and the 2020 publication of the [Handbook for Finance Ministers](#).
- ‘Reaching across’: This means improving collaboration and learning *within* the water, sanitation and hygiene sector. Activities include organising webinars and opportunities for

peer-to-peer learning. It also means offering support for the creation and maintenance of government-led, multi-stakeholder co-ordination platforms. Such platforms help ensure decision-making is strengthened, through encouraging the meaningful participation of different actors and vulnerable groups. SWA's [Mutual Accountability Mechanism](#) provides a specific framework for members of the partnership to support each other. It is designed to help sector partners articulate a shared vision, enabling them to develop and achieve specific commitments to realize progress.

For more information about SWA, please visit the website at: www.sanitationandwaterforall.org

Browning Environmental Communications

BEC was commissioned by SWA to undertake this research. BEC specializes in communications on environmental topics, working with businesses, NGOs, international agencies and governments from all over the world. BEC has conducted major global campaigns for several United Nations agencies, including the United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Environment Programme.

For more information about BEC, please visit the website at: www.browningenvironmental.com

2. About the research

2.1 Research methods

A perception study is a survey of individuals that provides a snapshot of views on a particular topic.

It is built on interviews, typically with people that are experts in their field. The interviews aim to elicit a mixture of quantitative data and qualitative information. The interviews last between 30 minutes and 1 hour. The data are analyzed to produce both quantitative and qualitative results.

Unlike an opinion poll, the results are not designed to reflect overall public opinion, or to provide precise measures of opinion. Instead, perception studies are designed to yield strategic intelligence on areas such as awareness levels, motivations, perceptions, and use of language among different audiences, which can help guide communications messaging and broader strategies.

The 'Reach Out and Reach Up' perception study was designed to inform how communications professionals can elevate their engagement with non-WASH audiences on WASH issues.

The research is informed by interviews of 200 professionals working across six different sectors outside of WASH: economic development, health, education, humanitarian response, human rights, and climate change. It was supplemented by further insights from government advisors in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and Europe & North America. The findings from the study can strengthen WASH communications when engaging other sectors, as well as suggesting messaging that is likely to resonate more effectively with political leaders.

More detail on the methodology for the research can be found in [Appendix 1](#).

2.2 The sample

A global view of WASH

Our network of interviewers surveyed professionals with expertise in 90 countries, divided into four broad global regions: Africa, Asia, Europe & North America, and Latin America.

Professionals from other important ‘sub-regions’ were also interviewed as part of these broad regions, including experts from Australasia, Central and Eastern Europe, Middle East & North Africa, Small Island Developing States, and South-East Asia. Professionals working in conflict zones were also included, such as Afghanistan and Ukraine.

[Figure 1. Map showing interviewees’ countries of expertise]

Regional split

The study has a relatively equal proportion of respondents from the four regions of the world, with a slight under-representation of Europe & North American expertise (18%). Of the total number of interviewees, 45% worked on a regional scale, with 55% working on a national scale.

[Figure 2. Interviewees with regional vs. national expertise; Figure 3. Interviewees’ geographical region of expertise]

The sectors

Two hundred professionals working in six different sectors were interviewed. The sectors were economic development, health, education, humanitarian response, human rights, and climate change. Ensuring the broadest range of expertise possible was represented in the study led to a slight over-representation of economic development and climate change professionals, as both of these sectors include a more diverse range of professions than other sectors. The economic development sector, for example, included professionals working in micro-finance, as well as international trade experts. And the climate change sector interviews incorporate expertise ranging from international climate policy to ecosystem restoration.

[Figure 4. The number and percentage of interviewees within each sector]

Seniority

Interviewees were from senior levels in their respective fields. They included heads of government departments, high commissioners of public bodies, CEOs, former and current heads of inter-governmental agencies, leaders of international NGOs, senior academics, international activists.

2.3 Survey questions

Primary survey

To research how WASH communications professionals can ‘reach out’ and elevate their engagement with non-WASH audiences, participants in the survey were asked the following questions:

1. What are the three biggest priorities that your sector hopes to achieve?
2. How important are access to the following to your work? (clean water, sanitation, hygiene)
3. How specifically would enhancements in water, sanitation, and/or hygiene advance your own work?
4. Out of water, sanitation, and hygiene:
 - a. Which area do you think is not being prioritized?
 - b. Why do you think this area is not being prioritized?
5. What messages, arguments, or data do you think would motivate your networks to give higher priority to water, sanitation and/or hygiene?

6. What messages, arguments, or data do you think would motivate governments to give higher priority to water, sanitation and/or hygiene?

Supplementary survey

Data from a separate, smaller, supplementary survey was also incorporated into the study. This survey included individuals who are working, or have worked, at the highest levels of executive office or close to Heads of State. This data further informed how WASH communications can 'reach up' to engage political leaders more effectively.

Five individuals were interviewed for this smaller supplementary survey, representing the four regions – Africa, Asia, Latin America and Europe & North America. The survey consisted of four questions about the priorities of governments:

1. In your experience, how do Heads of State/Government choose the priorities of their mandate?
2. What are the factors that determine their choices?
3. What and who in your country could significantly contribute to increasing the prioritization of these issues by Head of State/Government?
4. What about at the regional/international level?

These questions gathered insights to complement the primary survey's findings on Question 6 (*What messages, arguments, or data do you think would motivate governments to give higher priority to water, sanitation and/or hygiene?*).

3. Findings: Reaching out to other sectors

3.1 Priorities and perceptions (Questions 1-4)

Headline findings, Questions 1-4

Below are some of the response highlights for the first four questions.

Question 1: What are the three biggest priorities that your sector hopes to achieve?¹

- Of the sectors questioned, 'access to WASH' was given the highest priority by health professionals. Indeed, they put it as one of the top three priorities of their work – totaling nearly a quarter of those surveyed globally.
- Other sectors' top three priorities often had indirect links to WASH.
- For example, over a third (37%) of humanitarian response professionals said ensuring public health in crisis zones was one of their top three priorities. And 30% of climate change professionals said climate resilience was a top priority. This suggests a clear area where WASH can help deliver one of the key priorities of the climate sector – and that a clear focus on climate resilience by WASH communications is likely to gain traction with climate professionals.

Question 2: How important are access to the following to your work? (clean water, sanitation, hygiene)

¹ This report considers global sector priorities. For more detail of sector priorities disaggregated by region, please refer to Appendix 3.

- Over 80% of respondents across all sectors questioned said that access to clean water and sanitation were important.
- Hygiene was seen as less important, especially for those working in the climate change and economic development sectors. Nearly a quarter of professionals from these sectors (22.5% and 23.7% respectively) did not consider hygiene as being of significant importance to their work. Education professionals gave by far the highest importance for hygiene (nearly 95% said hygiene was important or very important to their work).
- This suggests that awareness of the benefits of improved hygiene is relatively low outside the education sector. Hygiene communications that focus on increasing knowledge, highlighting advantages of improved hygiene, tailored to sector priorities, are likely to be more effective than more complex communications that rely on any assumed knowledge.

Question 3: Specifically, how would enhancements in water, sanitation, and/or hygiene advance your own work?

- All sectors implicitly or explicitly connected enhancements in WASH with advancing their sector's priorities.
- Climate change professionals, for example, listed many ways that improved WASH would enhance their work: A third (33%) said this would be by improving the health of communities and the ecosystems they live in, a fifth (20%) said by improving food security and 15% said by helping vulnerable communities adapt to climate risks. The sector's top priorities can ALL be improved through enhancements to WASH: these were climate change resilience, mitigation, and ecosystem conservation.
- This suggests climate change professionals in particular can be strongly engaged to connect the goals of their work to those of the WASH sector.

Question 4: A) Which out of water, sanitation, and hygiene do you think is not being prioritized? B) Why do you think this area is not being prioritized?

- All sectors cited many different reasons for why water, sanitation, and hygiene are not being prioritized. The main reasons given for water and sanitation were their perceived high cost, their technical difficulty, and the 'siloed approach' of the sector.
- By comparison, the most common reasons given for hygiene related to socio-economic factors, such as the lack of accountability for and ownership of its provision, combined with low levels of public understanding.
- Only education professionals said hygiene was **not** the least prioritized. This may suggest that the education sector has stronger experience of improving hygiene services, and a more advanced knowledge of its benefits.

Are different parts of WASH seen as more important than others?

WASH is a complex sector. This means it can often be regarded as bewildering by those outside the sector, with its potential value not appreciated. This can often mean that WASH professionals feel like their sector's agenda is simply not recognized or understood.

At the heart of that complexity is the fact that the WASH agenda is made up of three separate but related fields: water, sanitation, and hygiene.

For this reason, we asked survey participants to describe how important the different parts of WASH are to their work, on a six-point Likert scale from 'not important' to 'very important'.

Figure 5 shows that a strong majority of the sample think access to all three elements is very important to their work, led by water (82%), followed by sanitation (70%), and then hygiene (62%).

[Figure 5: How important do you think access to clean water, sanitation and hygiene are to your work?]

Which of water, sanitation and hygiene is least prioritized?

We asked professionals from outside of the WASH sector which *part* of the WASH sector they saw as prioritized least. The purpose of this was to understand how the sectors perceive the different aspects of WASH.

Hygiene was seen as the least prioritized of the sectors by 43% of participants, sanitation by 38%, and water by 19%.

The results were almost the exact inverse of the responses to the question about how important each part of the WASH sector is to the participants' work.

[Figure 6: Which of water, sanitation, and hygiene is thought of as least prioritized by society]

Why are different parts of WASH not prioritized?

We asked professionals from outside of the WASH sector *why* they think the different parts of WASH are not prioritized. There was a very large range of responses here. Even the most popular answers were only mentioned by between around 20% to 25% of respondents. Nevertheless, they are instructive. The top three for each element of WASH are below.

Table 7: Top 3 reasons why either hygiene, sanitation and water are not prioritized by society given by the sectors globally

Water	Sanitation	Hygiene
1. High cost (21%)	1. Challenges in technical delivery (26%)	1. Lack of accountability for its provision (20%)
2. Siloed approach to delivery (15%)	2. High cost (20%)	2. A lack of political returns seen by governments (19%)
3. Those impacted most are without a means of redress (15%)	3. A lack of urgency (15%)	3. A lack of understanding among the general public (18%)

“Water is an essential pre-requisite for good sanitation and hygiene but it costs more to deliver.”
Economic development professional, Asia

“Sanitation requires complicated technical expertise to develop properly.”
Health professional, Europe and North America

“Hygiene is most under-prioritized due to unclear responsibility and accountability assignment within Government Civil Services.”
Humanitarian response professional, Asia

Results by sector

Economic development

Quotes

"Clean water is crucial as so many diseases are linked to access to clean water. It is critical for the cycle of life as without decent healthcare, you can't have people working at their best so it's vital for economic development."

Economic development professional, Asia

"WASH issues have consequences for women. Young girls who have their period cannot go to school for several days because there is no decent sanitation. It is often the women who fetch water from the pumps or wells, which represents a waste of time and an additional burden for them, thus delaying women empowerment and development"

Economic development professional, Africa

"Enhancements in WASH would contribute to a safer work environment, help address employee health issues and improve employee retention whilst increasing overall workforce productivity. Having healthy employees helps avoid operational delays and makes it easier to recruit quality workers locally and abroad."

Economic development professional, Africa

"There is a direct link between poor health and the capacity people have to work, especially micro-entrepreneurs in the global South who are single-handedly running businesses and are likely to be providing financial support to their families. Health issues are the main cause of delinquency of loan repayments, which is a hugely relevant to financial inclusion."

Economic development professional, Europe & North America

Perceptions of WASH

Figure 8 shows that a strong majority of economic development professionals view access to clean water (89.6%), sanitation (81.3%) and hygiene (76.3%) as important or very important to their work. This is high, but it is notable that it contrasts with the near-universal level of agreement expressed by other sectors.

Figure 8 also shows that nearly a quarter of economic development professionals (23.7%) view hygiene as 'somewhat important' or 'of little importance' – a higher percentage than other sectors.

Figure 9 shows that the economic development sector is relatively evenly divided in its view of which parts of WASH are least prioritized by society. Just under a third of those interviewed said water (30%) was least prioritized, while 31% said sanitation and 39% said hygiene.

"A separation of WASH into the 3 standard components is somewhat artificial and detracts from the need for a bottom-up, holistic demand-led movement lead by communication, behavioral and political scientists."

Economic development professional, Asia

[Figure 8: The Importance of clean water, sanitation and hygiene to the economic development sector]

[Figure 9: Views of the economic development sector on which parts of WASH are least prioritized by society]

Sector priorities and benefits of WASH

Table 10 shows the top three most commonly cited priorities of economic development professionals from all countries represented in the survey. A third (31%) mentioned the delivery of sustainable economic development, nearly a third (29%) mentioned financial inclusion, and nearly a quarter (24%) mentioned access to education and skills development.

Table 11 shows the top three most commonly cited ways that economic development professionals think enhanced WASH would benefit their work. Nearly a third (29%) said enhanced WASH would benefit their sector because it helps to create healthy workforces who will increase productivity. Other common responses were WASH's ability to improve workplace conditions and improve gender equity to foster inclusive workforces.

Of all the responses given by economic development professionals, we found that a large majority (80%) were mentioned by at least three other people. This suggests there are a large number of similarities in the views of economic development professionals for how WASH could enhance or advance their work.

Table 10. Top 3 priorities of the economic development sector globally

Top 3 Priorities of the economic development sector	Support (%)
Sustainable economic development	31%
Financial inclusion	29%
Access to education and skills development	24%

Table 11. Perceptions of opportunities for WASH benefits in the economic development sector globally

Top 3 ways that enhanced WASH advances the economic development sector	Support (%)
Improves health of workforces & so increases productivity	29%
Improves workplace conditions	17%
Improves gender equity to foster inclusive workforces	15%

Benefits of WASH by region

Table 12 shows the top three most commonly cited ways that economic development professionals in each region think enhanced WASH would benefit their work.

Africa: Just under a third (28%) said enhanced WASH would benefit their work by improving the population's health and wellbeing. Just under a quarter (24%) mentioned employment stability and a fifth (20%) mentioned improvements to environmental health.

Asia: Just under a third (28%) said enhanced WASH would benefit their work by improving the population's health and wellbeing. 17% of professionals said by improving gender equity and 17% said by reducing the cost of healthcare.

Latin America: 14% said enhanced WASH would benefit their work by improving education attainment. 14% mentioned improvements to environmental health and 14% said by improving the population's health and wellbeing.

Europe & North America: Nearly half (44%) said enhanced WASH would benefit their work by improving the population's health and wellbeing. A third (33%) said by improving gender equity and one in ten mentioned its ability to improve child development.

Table 12. Perceptions of opportunities for WASH benefits in the economic development sector, by region

Region	Top 3 ways that enhanced WASH advances the economic development sector	Support (%)
Africa	Improve population health and wellbeing Deliver stable employment/ job security Reduce pollution	28% 24% 20%
Asia	Improve population health and wellbeing Improve gender equity Reduce financial burden of health bills	28% 17% 17%
Latin America	Improving education attainment Improve environmental health Improve population health and wellbeing	14% 14% 14%
Europe & North America	Improve population health and wellbeing Improve gender equity Improve child development	44% 33% 11%

Health

Quotes

"When we talk about disease prevention and mitigating infections, this cannot be done successfully without access to clean water. In particular, women and children have special demands for clean water."

Health professional, Africa

"[WASH] are key determinants in nutrition. Clean drinking water reduces diarrhoea incidents, as does improved hygiene, and this disease directly reduces nutrition. Poor sanitation can contaminate drinking water and cause other gastro-intestinal problems. Enhancements in sanitation are less directly important but there are some connections resulting from peripheral diseases."

Health professional, Europe & North America

"WASH provision can prevent communicable diseases, assist the delivery of safe health care and enhance agriculture which is integral to the provision of optimal nutrition which in turn enhances health"

Health professional, Africa

"Thus far, the main emphasis has been on supplying WASH facilities. Promoting household demand for WASH will also contribute to better maintenance of WASH facilities due to a sense of ownership."

Health professional, Asia

"From outside the sector, it seems hygiene is not as widely spoken about. You often see dramatic and eye-catching public health messaging but these nearly all focus on water and sanitation."

Health professional, Asia

Perceptions of WASH

Figure 13 shows that a strong majority of health professionals said that access to clean water (92%), sanitation (96%) and hygiene (96%) is important or very important to their work. More health professionals said hygiene and sanitation is important or very important to their work than water. This differs from other sectors, where most respondents said water is the most important aspect of WASH.

Figure 14 shows that only a small minority (8%) of professionals in the health sector saw water as least prioritized by society. Nearly half see hygiene (48%) and sanitation (44%) as least prioritized.

[Figure 13. The Importance of clean water, sanitation and hygiene to the health sector]

[Figure 14. Views of the health sector on which parts of WASH are least prioritized by society]

Sector priorities and benefits of WASH

Table 15 presents the top three most commonly cited priorities for survey participants working in the health sector. Two of these priorities might be described as 'typical' health priorities: disease prevention and access to healthcare. However, notably, nearly a quarter (24%) mentioned access to WASH as a priority – the only sector to do so. While it is possible that this result was influenced by sample selection or the clear focus of the survey, it is also reasonable to conclude that outside the WASH sector, it is health professionals that regard WASH most highly as a priority area of their work.

Table 16 shows the top three most commonly cited ways that health professionals globally think enhanced WASH would benefit their work. Over a third (36%) said enhanced WASH would benefit their sector because it prevents disease. Over a third (36%) mentioned its ability to help with the protection of marginalized groups and just under a third (28%) mentioned its ability to enhance nutrition.

Of all the responses given by health professionals, we found that a clear majority (71%) were mentioned by at least three other people. This suggests there are a large number of similarities in the views of health professionals for how WASH could enhance or advance their work.

Table 15. Top 3 priorities of the health sector globally

Top 3 priorities of the health sector	Support (%)
Disease prevention	44%
Access to WASH	24%
Equitable access to healthcare	20%

Table 16. Perceptions of opportunities for WASH benefits in the health sector globally

Top 3 ways that enhanced WASH advances the health sector	Support (%)

Disease prevention	36%
Protection of marginalized groups	36%
Enhancing nutrition	28%

Benefits of WASH by region

Table 17 shows the top three most commonly cited ways that health professionals in each region think enhanced WASH would benefit their work.

Africa: Half (50%) said enhanced WASH would benefit their work because it can help prevent disease. A quarter (25%) said it can help improve nutrition and a quarter (25%) said it can help the protection of marginalized groups.

Asia: Nearly half (40%) said enhanced WASH would benefit their work because it can improve nutrition. A fifth (20%) said by preventing diseases, and 1 in 10 said it can help the protection of marginalized groups.

Latin America: All of the health professionals interviewed in Latin America said enhanced WASH would benefit their work because it can help the protection of marginalized groups, and all also said that it can help improve the population's health and wellbeing.

Europe & North America: Nearly half (44%) said enhanced WASH would benefit their work because it can help prevent disease. Over a fifth (22%) said it can help improve public nutrition and around 1 in 10 (11%) said it can help reduce pollution, which can harm health.

Table 17. Perceptions of opportunities for WASH benefits in the health sector, by region

Region	Top 3 ways enhanced WASH advances the health sector	Support (%)
Africa	Disease prevention Improved nutrition Protection of marginalized groups	50% 25% 25%
Asia	Improved nutrition Disease prevention Protection of marginalized groups	40% 20% 10%
Latin America	Protection of marginalized groups Improved public health and wellbeing	100% 100%
Europe/ North America	Disease prevention Improved nutrition Reduced pollution	44% 22% 11%

Education

Quotes

"One of the key lessons learnt from the pandemic is that education will not be of quality if WASH is not good. The education sector agrees that it needs to make sure WASH resources are available to ensure education can be delivered in a COVID and post-COVID world."
Education professional, Africa

"A healthy and clean environment is essential for good work performance"
Education professional, Africa

"It would enable children to stay healthy, to improve school attendance, their ability to be educated and access to education for marginalized, like girls"
Education professional, Europe and North America

"Enhancements in WASH would improve menstrual hygiene for girls and teenagers in schools."
Education professional, Latin America

"Results would be evidenced at two levels; My performance as a lecturer, and the performance of my students. Water is a basic need, and faced with access limitations then myself and my students are bound to spend more time looking for water than attending to our core business of teaching and learning respectively."
Education professional, Africa

Perceptions of WASH

Figure 18 shows that a strong majority of education professionals believe WASH is important to their work. There was unanimous agreement (100%) that access to clean water is important or very important to their work. A strong majority also said that access to sanitation (94.8%) and hygiene (94.8%) is important or very important to their work.

Figure 19 shows that in the education sector, a majority (58%) of professionals described sanitation as least prioritized by society – more than any other sector. A minority (10%) said water was least prioritized and 'only' just under a third (32%) said hygiene was least prioritized – a notable 11% difference from the overall global figure (43%).

"It is not as simple to discuss sanitation issues, such as proper sewage disposal and ending open defecation."
Education professional, Africa

"Sanitation facilities are not regularly serviced or maintained both within the university as well as the public works outside the university. Budget limitations are cited by the university administration and as a result, sanitation receives less attention."
Education professional, Africa

[Figure 18. The importance of clean water, sanitation and hygiene to the education sector]
[Figure 19. Views of the education sector on which parts of WASH are least prioritized by society]

Sector priorities and benefits of WASH

Table 20 shows the top three most commonly cited priorities of education professionals from all countries represented in the survey. Nearly half (42%) said improving the quality of education, over a third (37%) said improving access to education for everyone, and over a fifth (21%) said gender equity.

Table 21 shows the top three most commonly cited ways that education professionals think enhanced WASH would benefit their work. Nearly a third (32%) said enhanced WASH would benefit their sector because it can improve gender equity in schools. Nearly a third (32%) said it

can improve educational attainment and over a quarter (26%) said it can improve educational attendance – both through better health.

Of all the responses given by economic development professionals, we found that a large majority (80%) were mentioned by at least three other people. This suggests there are a large number of similarities in the views of education professionals for how WASH could enhance or advance their work.

Table 20. Top 3 Priorities of the Education Sector Globally

Top 3 Priorities of the education Sector	Support (%)
Quality of education	42%
Access to education for all	37%
Gender equity	21%

Table 21. Perceptions of opportunities for WASH benefits in the education sector

Top 3 ways enhanced WASH advances the education sector	Support (%)
Improve gender equity in schools	32%
Improved educational attainment	32%
Improve educational attendance	26%

Benefits of WASH by region

Table 22 shows the top three most commonly cited ways that education professionals in each region think enhanced WASH would benefit their work.

Africa: Nearly half (44%) said enhanced WASH would benefit their work because it can improve educational performance. A third (33%) said it can enhance gender equity and a third (33%) said it can help increase educational attendance.

Asia: A third (33%) said enhanced WASH would benefit their work because it can enhance gender equity. A quarter (25%) said it can improve educational performance. Only two ways were most commonly cited because of the relatively small sample size.

Latin America: A third (33%) said enhanced WASH would benefit their work because it can improve the health of students and staff, a third (33%) said because it can enhance gender equity, and a third (33%) said it can help improve educational performance.

Europe & North America: Over two thirds (67%) said enhanced WASH would benefit their work because it can enhance gender equity and a similar number (67%) also said it can increase educational attendance. Only two ways were most commonly cited because of the relatively small sample size.

Table 22. Perceptions of opportunities for WASH benefits in the education sector, by region

Region	Top 3 ways enhanced WASH advances the health sector	Support (%)
Africa	Improve educational performance Enhance gender equity Increase educational attendance	44% 33% 33%
Asia	Enhance gender equity Improve educational performance	33% 25%
Latin America	Improve health of students and staff Enhance gender equity Improve educational performance	33% 33% 33%
Europe/ North America	Enhance gender equity Increase educational attendance	67% 67%

Humanitarian response

Quotes

“WASH provision can reduce disease and morbidity, improve health and resilience, and reduce conflict caused by shortages of water.”

Humanitarian response professional, Africa

“All three areas of WASH are vital in our work as NGOs in Cameroon. Our problem is that there is a major issue of population displacement but little funding to help us meet their basic needs. Without portable latrines, there are problems of open defecation and diseases, such as cholera and malaria. Girls are the first victims.”

Humanitarian response professional, Africa

“Cholera continues to threaten the lives of millions of people and yet with the provision of safe water and sanitation, so many lives can be saved.”

Humanitarian response professional, Europe & North America

“WASH is fundamental to ensure the survival and development of people who have been displaced from their original communities. The availability of water close to the home has a dramatic impact on reducing the incidence of water related diseases. And water related diseases contribute to malnutrition impacting early childhood development.”

Humanitarian response professional, Asia

“Hygiene needs significant investments, including time, because you need to address traditional norms and behaviors”

Humanitarian response professional, Africa

Perceptions of WASH

Figure 23 shows that humanitarian response professionals unanimously agree (100%) that access to clean water and sanitation are either important or very important to their work. A near unanimous number of humanitarian response professionals also believe hygiene (96.3%) is either important or very important to their work. This very high number could reflect the nature of

the work of the humanitarian response sector, addressing crises that very often affect communities' access to WASH services.

Figure 24 shows that just over a fifth (22%) of humanitarian response professionals think water is least prioritized by society. Just under half (41%) said hygiene and over a third (37%) said sanitation. These results are nearly in line with the overall global results.

Figure 23. The importance of clean water, sanitation and hygiene to the humanitarian response sector

Figure 24. Views of the humanitarian response sector on which parts of WASH are least prioritized by society

Sector priorities and benefits of WASH

Table 25 shows the top three most commonly cited priorities of humanitarian response professionals from all countries represented in the survey. Each had cross-overs with other sectors: 40% cited human rights as a top three priority, 37% cited public health in crisis zones, and 26% said climate change resilience.

Table 26 shows the top three most commonly cited ways that humanitarian response professionals globally think enhanced WASH would benefit their work. A clear majority (59%) said enhanced WASH would help prevent diseases spreading in crisis zones. Over half (52%) said it can help to protect vulnerable groups in crisis zones and over a third (37%) said it can lead to stronger communities.

Of all the outcomes given by humanitarian response professionals, we found that a relatively small number (37.5%) were also mentioned by at least three other people. This suggests that humanitarian response professionals discussed many different ways that enhanced WASH would advance their work.

Table 25. Top 3 priorities of the humanitarian response sector globally

Top 3 priorities of the humanitarian response sector	Support (%)
Protecting human rights	40%
Public health in crisis zones	37%
Climate change resilience	26%

Table 26. Perceptions of opportunities for WASH benefits in the humanitarian response sector globally

Top 3 ways enhanced WASH advances the humanitarian response sector	Support (%)
Disease prevention	59%
Protection of vulnerable groups in crisis scenarios	52%
Stronger community resilience	37%

Benefits of WASH by region

Table 27 shows the top 3 most commonly cited ways that Humanitarian Response professionals in each region think enhanced WASH would benefit their work.

Africa: A majority (67%) said enhanced WASH would benefit their work because it can improve the health and wellbeing of those in crisis zones. Over half (56%) said it can enhance resilience to future humanitarian crises and the same number (56%) said it can help their work to protect marginalized groups from harm.

Asia: Three quarters (75%) said enhanced WASH would benefit their work because it can protect marginalized groups from harm. Over a third (38%) said it could improve the health and wellbeing of those in crisis zones and a quarter (25%) said it can enhance resilience to future humanitarian crises.

Latin America: Three quarters (75%) said enhanced WASH would benefit their work because it can help alleviate poverty. Half (50%) said because it can improve the health and wellbeing of those in crisis zones and a quarter (25%) said it can help their work by reducing pollution in crisis zones.

Region	Top 3 ways Enhanced WASH advances the humanitarian response sector	Support (%)
Africa	Improve health & wellbeing in crisis zones Enhance resilience to future humanitarian crises Protect marginalized groups from harm	67% 56% 56%
Asia	Protect marginalized groups from harm Improve community health & wellbeing Enhance resilience to future humanitarian crises	75% 38% 25%
Latin America	Help alleviate poverty Improve health & wellbeing in crisis zones Reduce pollution levels in crisis zones	75% 50% 25%
Europe & North America	Enhance resilience to future humanitarian crises Protect marginalized groups from harm Improve health & wellbeing in crisis zones	71% 57% 57%

Europe & North America: The majority (71%) said enhanced WASH would benefit their work because it enhances resilience to future humanitarian crises. Over half (57%) said it helps to protect marginalized groups from harm and over half (57%) said it can improve the health and wellbeing of those in crisis zones.

Table 27. Perceptions of opportunities for WASH benefits in the humanitarian response sector, by region

Human rights

Quotes

"WASH is of central importance to ensure that the rights of all children are met, especially the most marginalized. Rights to health, education, good nutrition and to maximize human potential can only be met if WASH is available."

Human rights professional, Europe & North America

"There is a direct correlation between lack of access to WASH and action on all 3 of my top priorities. For example, civil conflicts e.g., in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, have caused a lack of equal access to water and other WASH services, which is a root cause of poverty and the work I do today."

Human rights professional, Asia

"It is a basic human right for all people to have access to safe drinking water, sanitation facilities and to be able to practice good hygiene. This right is not being met, especially for the poor, and is exacerbated by Covid 19 and global heating/droughts plus sea water infiltration of coastal areas."

Human rights professional, Asia

"Peace and security are often undermined by lack of WASH, but this fact is not being explained and publicized."

Human rights professional, Europe & North America

"The patriarchal nature of many societies results in men underestimating the importance of better hygiene as an essential contributor to women's rights maximization."

Human rights professional, Asia

"Sanitation and hygiene together are not prioritized because they are complicated to deliver and to sustain as the effort is multisectoral."

Human rights professional, Asia

Perceptions of WASH

Figure 28 shows the majority of human rights professionals view access to clean water (90%), sanitation (93%) and hygiene (90%) as important or very important to their work. One in ten (10%) of human rights professionals do not agree that hygiene or clean water are of significant importance to their work.

Figure 29 shows that nearly half (46%) of human rights professionals think hygiene is least prioritized by society. Over a third (37%) said sanitation and the minority (17%) said water.

Figure 28. The importance of clean water, sanitation and hygiene to the human rights sector
Figure 29. Views of the human rights sector on which parts of WASH are least prioritized by society

Sector priorities and benefits of WASH

Table 30 shows the top three most commonly cited priorities of human rights professionals from all countries represented in the survey. The most commonly cited priority was gender equity – mentioned by over a quarter (27%) of the sample. A fifth (20%) cited children's rights and a fifth (20%) cited inclusive sustainable development.

Table 31 shows the top three most commonly cited ways that human rights professionals globally think enhanced WASH would benefit their work. A third (30%) said enhanced WASH would help elevate the rights of marginalized groups. The sample also frequently mentioned that WASH can help deliver Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 3 ("To ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages") (17%) and build inclusive communities (13%).

Human rights professionals gave the broadest range of answers of any of the sectors to the question of how enhanced WASH can benefit their sector. Only 21% of answers to this question were mentioned by at least three other people. This suggests there is a large number of potential

perceived benefits that could be explored by WASH communications to appeal to those working in the health sector. It also indicates that it is particularly important to understand the specific perceptions of the target audience, if crafting WASH messages to engage the human rights sector.

Table 30. Top 3 priorities of the human rights sector globally

Top 3 priorities of the human rights response sector	Support (%)
Gender equity	27%
Children's rights	20%
Inclusive sustainable development	20%

Table 31. Perceptions of opportunities for WASH benefits in the human rights sector globally

Top 3 ways enhanced WASH advances the sector	Support (%)
Elevate the rights of marginalized groups	30%
Ensuring the right to healthy life / SDG 3	17%
Build inclusive communities	13%

Benefits of WASH by region

Table 32 shows the top three most commonly cited ways that human rights professionals in each region think enhanced WASH would benefit their work.

Africa: A quarter (25%) said enhanced WASH would benefit their work because it can help to alleviate poverty, a similar number (25%) said it can help with the safeguarding of vulnerable groups and the same number again (25%) said it can help their work to build inclusive communities.

Asia: Over a third (39%) said enhanced WASH would benefit their work because it helps to deliver SDG 3 and nearly a third said it helps to build inclusive communities (31%). Nearly a quarter (23%) mentioned that it helps their work to alleviate poverty.

Latin America: Nearly four in ten (37.5%) said that enhanced WASH would benefit their work because it helps to deliver SDG 3. A quarter (25%) said it can help their work to build inclusive communities and a similar number (25%) said it helps with the safeguarding of vulnerable groups.

Europe & North America: A clear majority (60%) said enhanced WASH would benefit their work because it helps with the safeguarding of vulnerable groups. Four in ten (40%) said it aids the delivery of SDG 3, with multiple references to the health and well-being of children, and a similar number said it helped to build inclusive communities

Table 32. Perceptions of opportunities for WASH benefits in the human rights sector, by region

Region	Top 3 ways enhanced WASH advances the human rights sector	Support (%)
Africa	Alleviate poverty Safeguard vulnerable groups Build inclusive communities	25% 25% 25%
Asia	Delivery of SDG 3 Build inclusive communities Alleviate poverty	39% 31% 23%
Latin America	Delivery of SDG 3 Build inclusive communities Safeguard vulnerable groups	37.5% 25% 25%
Europe & North America	Safeguard vulnerable groups Delivery of SDG 3 (particularly for children) Build inclusive communities	60% 40% 40%

Climate change

Quotes

“One of our priorities is rainwater harvesting using different technologies to improve agricultural production and resilience to the effects of climate change.”

Climate change professional, Africa

“Enhancements in water access may result in gains for the climate... but equally, because of climate (change), enhancements are made much more difficult.”

Climate change professional, Europe & North America

“Advancements in WASH are very important for human well-being. Healthy people are needed for healthy functioning societies. Healthy people tend to be better caretakers of the environment, they think more sustainably.”

Climate change professional, Africa

“Water availability would ensure food security and support sustainable livelihoods for agriculturists, fisheries, et cetera.”

Climate change professional, Africa

“Water is a central piece in the climate story – rising sea levels, disappearing glaciers, reduction in freshwater availability. While water is more directly linked to climate, sanitation and hygiene are linked to the consumption of water.”

Climate change professional, Asia

“Prioritizing access to water and sanitation would prevent people from polluting water sources with waste and that would improve environmental and human health.”

Climate change professional, Latin America

Perceptions of WASH

Figure 33 shows a very large majority of climate change professionals agree that access to clean water (90%) and access to sanitation (85%) is either important or very important to their work.

Nearly a quarter (22.5%) of climate change professionals said that hygiene was not of significant importance to their work – a much higher result than in other sectors. This suggests that climate change professionals may be less receptive to messaging focusing on hygiene issues, compared with other sectors. To engage climate professionals on hygiene, communications are therefore likely to need a particularly targeted focus. This could mean, for example, highlighting how hygiene communications campaigns can foster community behaviour change – something that is likely to appeal to those working in the climate change sector.

Figure 34 shows that, nearly half (45%) of those questioned, think hygiene is not prioritized by society and 40% think sanitation. Only 17% said they think water is not prioritized.

Figure 33. The importance of clean water, sanitation and hygiene to the climate change sector
Figure 34. Views of the climate change on which parts of WASH are least prioritized by society

Sector priorities and benefits of WASH

Table 35 shows the top three most commonly cited priorities of climate change professionals from all countries represented in the survey. These are resilience to climate change (30%), ecosystem conservation (30%) and climate change mitigation (23%). All three of these priorities are areas where WASH improvements can offer significant help to address, indicating significant opportunities for engagement.

Table 36 shows the top three most commonly cited ways that climate change professionals globally think enhanced WASH would benefit their work. A third (33%) said by improving the health of communities and the ecosystems they live in. A fifth (20%) said by improving food security and some (15%) said by helping vulnerable communities adapt to climate risks. This 15% figure is interesting, because it suggests that relatively few climate change professionals perceived a direct beneficial link between WASH improvements and climate resilience / mitigation – indicating a clear area for WASH communications to explore.

Climate change professionals gave a broad range of answers to the question of how enhanced WASH can benefit their sector. Under a third (30%) of answers to this question were mentioned by at least three other people. This suggests there is a large number of potential perceived benefits that could be explored by WASH communications to appeal to those working in the climate change sector. It also indicates that it is particularly important to understand the specific perceptions of the target audience, if crafting WASH messages to engage the climate change sector.

Table 35. Top 3 priorities of the climate change sector globally

Top 3 priorities of the climate change sector	Support (%)
Resilience to climate change	30%
Ecosystem conservation	30%
Climate change mitigation	23%

Table 36. Perceptions of opportunities for WASH benefits in the climate change sector globally

Top 3 ways enhanced WASH advances the sector	Support (%)
Improving the health of communities and ecosystems	33%
Improving food security	20%
Helping vulnerable communities adapt to climate risks	15%

Benefits of WASH by region

Table 37 shows the top three most commonly cited ways that climate change professionals in each region think enhanced WASH would benefit their work.

Africa: Well over a third (39%) said enhanced WASH would benefit their work because it can help to improve ecosystem health. A quarter (25%) said it can help improve food security and 15% said it can help build resilient communities.

Asia: Around three in ten (29%) said enhanced WASH would benefit their work because it can improve ecosystem health, and a similar number said it could help build resilient communities (29%). And 14% said enhanced WASH helps to improve community wellbeing.

Latin America: Just under a third (31%) said enhanced WASH would benefit their work because it helps to improve community wellbeing. Around one in five (18%) said it can help enhance food security and just over one in ten (13%) said it helps vulnerable communities adapt to climate risks.

Europe & North America: A quarter (25%) said enhanced WASH would benefit their work because it helps vulnerable communities adapt to climate risks, with the same number saying it would improve community wellbeing, and the same number again saying it would enhance food security.

Table 37. Perceptions of opportunities for WASH benefits in the climate change sector, by region

Region	Top 3 Ways Enhanced WASH Will Advance the Health sector	Support (%)
Africa	Improve ecosystem health Food security Build resilient communities	39% 25% 15%
Asia	Improve ecosystem health Build resilient communities Improve community wellbeing	29% 29% 14%
Latin America	Improve community wellbeing Food security Help vulnerable communities adapt to climate risks	31% 18% 13%
Europe & North America	Help vulnerable communities adapt to climate risks Improve community wellbeing Food security	25% 25% 25%

3.2 Engaging other sectors (Question 5)

We asked each sector what sort of messages, arguments, or data would motivate their networks to engage more with WASH. This was to further inform WASH communicators about what messages could be most effective with other sectors.

Headline findings, Question 5

Some highlights from the responses to Question 5 are below.

Question 5: What messages, arguments, or data do you think would motivate your networks to give higher priority to water, sanitation and/or hygiene?

- **Economic development** professionals recommended messaging that links to fiscal returns using robust data, and the use of words such as 'profitability'. In addition, their suggestions focused on the risk of WASH inaction (the financial cost of inaction, in particular).
- **Health** professionals primarily recommended emphasis of the near-term risks of poor access to WASH services, as well as aspirational messaging.
- **Education** professionals recommended aspirational messaging and stressed communications of the cost benefits / return on investment that WASH provision delivers for their sector.
- **Humanitarian response** professionals primarily suggested messaging that emphasizes the near-term risk of poor access to WASH services, as well as messaging that communicates the connection between WASH and safety.
- **Human rights** professionals focused their messaging recommendations on how WASH provision creates safer societies, particularly for marginalized groups such as women.
- **Climate change** professionals' messaging recommendations predominantly related to focusing on water out of the elements of WASH.

Many of the sectors gave recommendations that were not sector-specific, but across the sectors, suggestions for WASH messaging could be grouped into five broad areas. These were to focus: on the cost benefits of WASH; on the risks of inaction; on how WASH can enhance security and safety; on water only, when appropriate; and on WASH as an aspiration. These areas are explored in more detail below.

Highlight the cost benefits of WASH

Many professionals stressed the use of messaging that shows the cost benefits (or return on investment) that WASH delivers. Recommendations were made to highlight WASH as a potential engine for economic growth. Such messaging is well-understood and often deployed by the WASH sector. Responses from professionals questioned suggested that external audiences are highly receptive to clear economic and financial arguments for WASH.

In Africa, for example, around half of education and health professionals (44% and 50% respectively) recommended that messages include a clear cost benefit analysis of WASH investment.

In Asia, 50% of health professionals and a quarter of education professionals recommended messages that included robust data showing how investment in WASH meets their sector's goals. This appeared to be seen as slightly less important in Latin America.

"Communicate on the links between taxes and WASH public services. This requires campaigns explaining to citizens how the taxes they pay are being used and how it contributes to the country's development."

Education professional, Africa

The sectors slightly diverged in their recommendations for how the cost benefits of WASH should be presented. Education and health sector professionals in particular often recommended linking the cost benefits of WASH to improved community wellbeing, while economic development professionals often recommended highlighting benefits in terms of fiscal returns (for example 'for every \$1 spent on WASH now, \$x will be saved over a ten-year period').

For example, half (50%) of education professionals in Asia and around one in five (21%) health professionals in Asia recommend messages that describe the benefits of WASH investments for communities. And every health professional interviewed in Latin America recommended that WASH communicators mention community gains of WASH investments.

Economic development professionals predominantly recommended the fiscal returns that WASH offers, rather than community-focused benefits. This only differed in Latin America, where economic development professionals did recommend linking investments in WASH with returns to the community.

"I would want to see hard data on the relationship between lack of hygiene and certain diseases and how these diseases lead to poor educational outcomes and that leads to poor economic performance."

Economic development professional, Europe & North America

Perhaps unsurprisingly, economic development professionals across most regions, including a third of respondents from Europe & North America (66.6%), recommended WASH communicators use hard data to show the investment potential of WASH. Recommendations for messaging included understanding and addressing investor appetites for risk, the benefits of WASH to the private sector, and explicit use of the word 'profitability'.

"Messages need to demonstrate economic profitability, including explaining why investing in WASH can make investors earn money to show them that WASH is not a sub-sector but a sector with many economic opportunities."

Economic development professional, Africa

"In the private sector it is important to show the profitability of the social projects to attract them to invest. Also consider messages around joint ventures between foreign enterprises and the local private sectors showing how they have shared the [investment] risks, and also brought in money. The messages should also be targeted to specific private sector institutions such as sector associations, and not be general messages."

Economic development professional, Africa

Underline the risks of inaction

Many participants in the survey recommended messaging that communicates risk. In particular those in the economic development sector recommended messaging that shows the risks of inaction on WASH, the risks that poor WASH services present to other sectors' wider ambitions, and financial risks caused by poor WASH.

For example, over half (52%) of economic development professionals in Europe & North America suggested messaging that shows how poor delivery on WASH can undermine work being done by the sector.

"What people don't realize is the impact of poor sanitation, or un-clean water. Any kind of messaging is essentially about impact - how does something affect my life if I don't invest? We should talk about the risks associated with not having access to clean water, decent sanitation. We don't hear about this."

Economic development professional, Asia

“The message is that, unless we tackle issues of clean water, and clean surroundings, every other scheme in the context of nutrition and health won’t be useful. Without WASH, all efforts otherwise would be a waste. This needs to be the crux of the message.”

Economic development professional, Asia

Professionals from sectors that work closely with communities, such as education and health, recommended messages that show the risks of poor WASH on people, highlighting the human costs of poor WASH. **This suggests how important it is for WASH communications to consider and reflect the nature of the target audience’s work.**

“You should say that poor WASH is as much of a risk to children’s development as gang violence or other issues in the community.”

Education professional, Latin America

Some professionals mentioned risk timescales. Humanitarian response and health professionals recommended messaging emphasizing poor WASH as an imminent risk, while some human rights and economic development professionals suggested that highlighting the long-term risks of poor WASH was important.

“The private sector tends to focus on short-term risks but WASH-related issues generate medium-term risks which will be far more damaging and cause even more financial losses.”

Economic development professional, Africa

Emphasize the links to safety and security

Participants in the human rights, humanitarian response, and education sectors recommended messages that connect WASH to safety. They suggested messages that describe how improving WASH can protect peoples’ personal security and provide safe spaces, in particular for marginalized groups such as women, LGBTQ+ people, and other vulnerable groups. Close to a third (30.7%) of human rights professionals in Asia, for example, recommended messages that illustrate WASH as a way to protect women.

“For feminist networks, making WASH an issue of addressing gender-based violence, equity, and addressing discrimination, by bringing to the fore a values-based approach would work.”

Human rights professional, Asia

“Link WASH to the rights of vulnerable groups and women...It’s important to link WASH back to the beneficiaries always, and their improved personal security as a result” of enhanced WASH provision.”

Human rights professional, Africa

“We don’t always talk about stigma and shame in the WASH conversation...It’s about deploying messages that make this invisible stigma, visible...For example, when you’re thinking about access to toilets for TRANS people, you can either zoom out and speak about the inequity of access to toilets for marginalised groups, or you can really zoom in and discuss the implications of how the lack of access to toilets has a tangible impact on a TRANS person’s everyday life, which people can empathise with.”

Human rights professional, Europe & North America

Humanitarian response professionals recommended messages that show how WASH makes societies safer. In Africa, nearly a third (32%) of humanitarian response professionals questioned recommended messages that focused on community safety. One professional described how improved water access “reduces conflict and violence, while improving health, and therefore overall community resilience”.

Focus on water, when appropriate

Some sectors – especially those in climate change and humanitarian response – recommended that messaging should emphasize water over sanitation and hygiene to effectively engage their colleagues with WASH. By comparison, a clear majority (80%) of economic development professionals suggested that messaging should consider WASH as a whole.

Climate change professionals in every region recommended messages that relate to water usage, such as the damaging effects of water wastage. For example, close to four in ten globally (37%) recommended that WASH communications should emphasize water as a finite resource. Over half (56%) of climate change professionals in Latin America recommended messages that exclusively focused on water. Interestingly, no climate change professional in Latin America made messaging recommendations referring to sanitation or hygiene. This suggests that the climate change sector is focused heavily on water, and that messaging on sanitation or hygiene is less likely to engage the sector unless a clear link is made to appeal to them, firmly based on knowledge of the target audience and their priorities.

"You need to speak in terms of carbon footprint and emissions reductions to have cut through with my colleagues. It's clear this starts with messages on water and how it must be conserved."
Climate change professional, Africa

Humanitarian response professionals also described how a secure supply of clean water in crisis zones is a more pressing need than sanitation and hygiene. WASH messages are likely to be more effective if they understand and reflect this immediate need.

For example, a large majority (80%) of humanitarian response professionals in Latin America and a third (33%) of those in Africa recommended messages focused solely on water.

"We must insist on the consequences: when there is no clean water there are more diseases. More diseases means more suffering in crisis zones."
Humanitarian response professional, Latin America

Importantly though, this also suggests an area of opportunity for increasing understanding and engagement between sectors. Targeted WASH communications clearly explaining the wide benefits improving both sanitation and hygiene in humanitarian response, for example, could help inspire action that both enhances that response, and increases access to WASH for some of the most vulnerable communities.

Make WASH aspirational

Many professionals recommended that messaging on WASH should be aspirational and illustrate that enhanced WASH will change peoples' lives for the better. By making better access to WASH something that communities aspire to (and understand is their right), demand for better WASH increases. It becomes something that professionals across all sectors can see the benefits of, and appreciate as a universal duty to help realize.

One health professional in Asia recommended that messages should "not be medical in themselves but communicate how WASH will meet their medical goals". This sentiment was echoed most by education and health professionals. For example, half (50%) of all health sector professionals globally and half (50%) of education sector professionals in Latin America recommended messaging that articulates how WASH helps communities thrive.

"The relationship between sanitation and health should move from a scientific discussion to one of community aspiration. Communities should feel inspired to want better WASH and be sold the idea of how they can be living a better, healthier, and more enhanced life with improved WASH. WASH comms should therefore shift from a science perspective, to an aspirational perspective."
Health professional, Africa

Some professionals in Europe & North America recommended specifically connecting WASH to higher household income: nearly half (45%) of education professionals there, for example, recommended such messaging.

"The [WASH sector's] main emphasis has been on supplying WASH facilities and not enough on channelling higher demand from families as they get richer."

Education professional, Asia

4. Findings: Reaching up to high-level decision makers

As well as considering how water, sanitation and hygiene are seen by professionals working in other sectors, the research also looked at how WASH communications could make the most effective and convincing calls to engage decision-makers and inspire government action.

Many of the respondents to the survey have spent lifetimes calling on governments to act on their own particular areas of focus. This section details how participants in the survey recommended professionals advocating for WASH should engage with leaders and decision-makers at the highest levels.

All the professionals working in sectors outside the WASH sector were asked what messages, arguments, or data they thought would motivate governments to give higher priority to water, sanitation and/or hygiene (this was Question 6 of the primary survey). Their responses were supplemented by data from a supplementary round of interviews with individuals working in, or who have worked in the past, at the highest levels of executive office or close to heads of state (more detail on the methodology can be found in Appendix 1). The purpose of this additional round of interviews was to provide additional context for how national policy agendas are established and influenced – and where WASH may be able to gain a stronger foothold.

4.1 Engaging high-level decision-makers

The results of the interviews suggest that messaging to engage those at the highest levels of decision making can be grouped around five key areas that could help increase the effectiveness of WASH communications. These areas are described below.

Focus on leaving a legacy

Participants in the survey recommended messages that show political leaders how WASH can be part of establishing a political legacy.

Messages should communicate what the long-term political gains of WASH investment can be, and how they can be remembered as a historically significant achievement of their tenure in office.

Such messaging was recommended by a clear majority (60%) of the humanitarian response professionals in Europe & North America, nearly a third (29.5%) of economic development professionals globally, and a fifth of economic development professionals (20%) in Africa.

"Political leaders want to leave a legacy and concrete, long-lasting WASH schemes are a great way to ensure this. Water provision strengthens democracy as it allows people to see the government cares for them and gives them a stake in the future."

Human rights professional, Asia

"The stake of WASH enhancements should be tied to political gains for politicians."

Economic development professional, Africa

"It will leave you with a positive legacy as WASH infrastructure is long-lasting."

Humanitarian response professional, Europe & North America

Similar sentiments were also echoed by some of the participants who worked closely with heads of state.

"Governments that make the investment in WASH today can reap the political rewards tomorrow".

Former advisor to a European government

"It is not lucrative enough. They [governments] don't see it as a political opportunity."

Former advisor to a Latin American government

Present WASH as an investment in security

Many people in the survey – particularly those working in education and human rights – recommended that WASH should be communicated to governments as a security issue, specifically in relation to the security of communities.

One in three (30%) of human rights professionals globally and nearly half (46%) of education professionals globally mentioned safety or security in their recommendations for messaging to governments.

"There is a need to frame WASH as an issue of safety and public security, whether it's clean water consumption, swimming, safety from effluent pipes breaking, or safety from cross contamination from animal effluence from farming...they need to be able to demonstrate that WASH is safe and reliable."

Human rights professional, Asia

Security or safety was also mentioned by people who have worked closely with heads of state in countries experiencing conflict or extreme poverty, including advisors from countries in Latin America and Africa. They suggested presenting WASH as a security issue in order to help engage governments with the protection of marginalized groups, such as women and vulnerable people.

"It's important to link WASH back to protecting vulnerable groups and women and their improved personal security as a result... [In African states] most people do not feel the presence of the government at all, and states are fragile. When a state's presence is felt more strongly in communities, this can help to improve a state's overall security. WASH enhancements become evidence of the state positively contributing to the development of the country and to the stability of the region. "

Human rights professional, Africa

Leverage political timelines

Many professionals recommended messages that aligned WASH to political lifecycles. For example, using three-to-five-year timeframes for planning WASH communications to engage governments, to mirror the political terms of office of the target audience. This recommendation was particularly raised by those working in health, economic development, and humanitarian response.

"WASH-specific targets should be broken down into shorter time frames (three or five years) to coincide with terms in office of political leaders"

Economic development professional, Africa

In particular, many of those interviewed recommended that WASH is depicted as a voter issue and is something that could influence peoples' decisions at the polls.

"It is extremely important to define concrete measurable WASH targets for three-to-five-year timeframes, to coincide with politicians' terms in office, so they can use the progress achieved in their terms as arguments for re-election."

Humanitarian response professional, Asia

Similar views were often echoed by those who have worked closely with heads of states.

"The government is governed by a national planning and budgeting cycle. This cycle is aligned to the five-year political cycle. This arrangement allows for effective execution of political aspirations of the government in power."

Advisor to an African government

"A topic like WASH is a 'post-bag' issue that effects peoples' everyday lives – it's something they will contact their local representative about and remember when they go to the polls if governments get it wrong."

Advisor to a European government

Apply a broad perspective and 'systems thinking'

It was recommended that WASH communications reflect a systems approach in their messages to political leaders – particularly by those working in the human rights and humanitarian response sectors.

This means communicating WASH in relation to current political and global agendas, such as climate change, the global pandemic, child malnutrition, or gender equity. WASH should be presented as a necessary pre-requisite for current issues that receive higher political priority, in order to motivate governments to prioritize WASH.

This would help address the challenge identified by respondents of the perception of WASH (and in particular water) taking a siloed approach, which limits its prioritization among political leaders.

"Try to depict or visualize a systems approach: showing linkages between WASH and other government priorities, such as climate change and reducing inequalities, then show the entry points that you can make progress on."

Climate change professional, Europe & North America

"The provision of water, sanitation and hygiene needs to be piggy-backed onto existing major political agendas, for example COVID-19, climate change and gender equity."

Human rights professional, Asia

The systems approach suggestion was particularly popular with humanitarian response professionals in Europe & North America, where close to half (43%) recommended communicating WASH in this way.

"We need to 'piggy-back' WASH promotion on to bigger political agendas, such as, climate change or tackling COVID-19."

Humanitarian response professional, Europe & North America

Those who have worked for heads of state said WASH must be connected to governments' priorities of the day, rather than as a standalone issue, in order to cut through and gain attention.

"Prioritization by the current government has been based on national indicators of governance, inclusion (education, empowerment), and other indicators such as nutrition."

Advisor to an African government

"There isn't really a single policy home for WASH – it's crosscutting."

Advisor to a European government

Use strong, effective data

Data-driven messaging was recommended by many of those interviewed – especially those in the education, health, and economic development sectors. For example, every (100%) health professional in Latin America recommended the use of data to communicate the importance of WASH to engage governments and high-level decision makers, as did three quarters (75%) of education professionals in Asia.

Specific recommendations about the kinds of data the WASH sector should use include:

- Cost-benefit analyses of WASH enhancements across broad policy areas such as climate, nutrition, and skills development.
- The presentation of specific public health outcomes and their relationships to the socio-economic development of populations, for example, malnutrition, or cognitive development.
- Comparative analysis of the education and health outcomes of countries with similar levels of development but WASH services that range from poor to good.

"Governments are only motivated by one thing - how to stay in power. If politicians can be convinced that this is what matters to their constituents, if we show them the data and can highlight what's in it for them, these things can be resourced, and could have an impact."

Economic development professional, Asia

"Use data that shows the cost/ benefit of WASH promotion on public health outcomes, malnutrition and human capital promotion should be aimed at ministers of finance. Gender disaggregated data on the links between water and education results should be targeted to Ministers of Education and politicians promoting gender equity. Links between WASH and COVID-19 transmissions and infectious diseases should be aimed at ministers of health."

Climate change professional, Europe & North America

Those who have worked closely with heads of state agreed. They highlighted the value that political leaders place on numerical development outcomes. Therefore, demonstrating the significant impact of WASH on human capital using current, robust data can improve their prioritization of water, sanitation and hygiene.

"Prioritization by the current government has been evidence-driven..."

Advisor to an African government

"Data can help ministers and their advisors make the case to their finance departments who are holding the purse string."

Advisor to a European government

5. Recommendations for future research

Key findings from this study suggest there are several opportunities for further research. For example:

- Sector- and geography-specific studies could be conducted to gain a deeper understanding of the variations in perceptions of (and engagements with) WASH.

- Messaging recommendations from this research could be tested, including on small, sub-regional and/or sub-sector focus groups, to assess their effectiveness.
- Other study types than a perception study could be implemented, to build on the findings of this research.
- More detailed surveys on the separate elements of WASH (water, sanitation and hygiene) could be undertaken to sharpen communication strategies for each component of WASH.

Appendix 1: Methodology

Selecting the sample

BEC and SWA set a target of reaching 200 high-level professionals for the study. Sub-targets were then set for the number of interviewees needed from each region, according to the size of the region's population.

The six sectors chosen were selected because to give the broadest and most relevant views from global development professionals from outside the WASH sector. A small number of professionals with experience in the WASH sector were permitted to contribute to the study, on the condition that their current work is now outside of the sector. The sample for each of the sectors is shown below.

Figure 38. Sample size by region

Region	Sample size
Africa	64
Asia	59
Europe & North America (working domestically)	16
Europe & North America (working abroad)	21
Latin America	40

Supplementary to the interviews with sector professionals, a further round of interviews was conducted with individuals who are working, or have worked, within the highest levels of executive office or close to Heads of State. This supplementary survey provided additional context for how national policy agendas are established and influenced, and where WASH may be able to feature.

	Climate change	Economic development	Education	Health	Human rights	Humanitarian response
Africa	13	25	9	4	4	9
Asia	7	18	7	10	13	7
Europe & North America	5	9	3	9	5	7

(domestic & abroad)						
Latin America	7	16	3	2	8	4
Total	40	59	19	25	30	27

Figure 39. Sample size by region and sector

Sourcing the sample

BEC and SWA sourced high-level professionals to be interviewed through their respective global networks. Interviewees were also invited to recommend others from their own professional networks, who met the sample criteria. Around 10% of the sample were sourced in this way. It should be noted that this means a degree of snowball sampling was used.

Interviewing the sample

BEC conducted the 200 interviews using a team of communications specialists based around the world. Interviews were mostly conducted in English, however those conducted in Latin America were largely conducted in Spanish or Portuguese, and then translated into English for BEC to analyze. A small number of interviews were conducted in another native language and translated by the interviewer (for example, most interviews in western Africa were conducted in French). Each interview lasted between 30 minutes and 1 hour.

Nearly all of the interviews took place virtually or by telephone, either using a video conferencing software, such as Zoom or Microsoft Teams, or using cellular data. Exceptions to this were made for interviewing those working in areas with very challenging connectivity issues, such as crisis zones in the Middle East and some parts of central Africa. For example, one interview was conducted by leaving voice notes in response to questions sent via WhatsApp, which were then transcribed by the interviewer. A small number of interviews were written responses conducted via email or using Google Forms. In these cases, the interviewer would follow up with the interviewee with follow-up questions, to capture as much data as possible.

Interviewees were asked if they gave permission to have their interviews recorded. For those that consented, interviewers would use either video recordings or audio recordings. The purposes of this was to aid the transcribing of the interview and support the overall accuracy of results. Recordings were then appropriately destroyed on completion of the study. The interviewers used Google Forms software for inputting and storing the data, which was housed in a confidential online database and securely managed by BEC.

Study timeline: A three-phase process

Phase One: The first four weeks of the project were dedicated to researching and designing the survey questions, which involved BEC hosting a workshop with SWA representatives and other global WASH experts. The next two weeks were spent finalizing the survey's design and setting up the survey tools. During this same period, the team of expert interviewers was finalized and the list of those being invited to interview was drafted by BEC and SWA, before being vetted by SWA.

Phase Two: In Week 6 and Week 7, invitations were sent by SWA and BEC for an initial round of interviews, which took place during Week 8. The expert interviewers were invited to give feedback on the effectiveness of the survey questions, based on their initial interviews. Small adjustments were then made to the survey design based on this feedback, to enhance its effectiveness. Invitations were then distributed to the entire list of professionals selected for interview and the official interviewing commenced. During Week 13, intermediate results were

reviewed and analyzed by the BEC team and presented to a small number of SWA representatives and their partners, where the results were discussed. At this point, a separate survey was also developed to interview the smaller sample of individuals who are working, or have worked, within the highest levels of executive office or close to Heads of State. Interviewing concluded at the end of February 2022, and BEC presented a skeleton of the draft final report to SWA.

Phase Three: BEC processed the data from all 200 interviews, analyzing according to region and sector to provide the survey outputs. The final report was then drafted and presented to SWA.

Appendix 2: Notes and considerations

- Perception studies are valuable tools for gathering expert opinion to analyze complicated topics. They are not designed to provide comprehensive strategic insights, or a landscape of institutional opinion, but rather offer a snapshot of opinion, gathered through concentrated interviewing.
- The purpose of the study was to reach non-WASH professionals, and to understand how their perceptions and analysis of the WASH sector may differ to WASH sector professionals. These results are not intended to be (and should not be taken as) indicative of public perceptions. People's responses to the questions may differ considerably from the reality of the situation, or from how their organizations officially position themselves.
- Some invitations to interview were declined due to the professional claiming they could not speak authoritatively on the topic of WASH. In these cases, BEC would respond to the invitee by explaining the original intention of the study and try to secure them for an interview.
- At times, respondents caveated their answers by expressing that they were not working closely enough to WASH issues to authoritatively speak on the topic. Interviewers were asked to stress that the purpose of the study was to focus on their opinions and perceptions, rather than on WASH itself, so their perceived lack of WASH knowledge did not make their answers any less valuable.
- The team of expert interviewers were briefed thoroughly on the objectives of the study and the intended design of the survey questions. However, it is possible that the interviewees' responses to the interview questions may vary depending on factors such as the interviewer's delivery of the question, language barriers, and connectivity.
- Some of the interviewees were able to give more of their time for interviewing than others, meaning more data was collected from some of the interviews than others. Interviews lasted between 30 minutes to over an hour.
- Where interview data had to be translated into English from another language which was not the native tongue of the interviewer, it is possible that some nuances of meaning may have been lost. BEC carefully monitored the quality of translated versions and sought clarifications from the interviewers, where needed.
- The chosen regions of Africa, Asia, Europe & North America, and Latin America were kept purposefully broad for practical reasons. However, it should be noted that these are hugely diverse geographies that do not speak with one voice. In addition, well-studied sub-regions like Middle East & North Africa (MENA) had to be separated into Africa and Asia for the purposes of this study.

- The Europe & North America sample contains professionals who work ‘domestically’ in the region, as well as those who are based in Europe & North America but are working internationally across many regions. The Europe & North America sample therefore can be expected to contain some views that extend beyond the region itself.
- Professionals who were working remotely from a region were counted in the actual region of their expertise or where their work was primarily based. For example, if an individual was stationed in Canada but their work focused on southern Africa, they were counted in the Africa sample, rather than the Europe & North America sample.
- The regions that people were assigned to represent did not necessarily reflect their nationality. For example, a professional could be Venezuelan but working in Asia, and was therefore counted in the Asia sample. It is important to note that the data reflects the professional viewpoints of those in each regional sample, rather than personal views which could be informed by their nationalities.
- The supplementary interviews conducted with individuals who are working, or have worked, within the highest levels of executive office or close to Heads of State had a small sample size. While this was partly due to factors such as time constraints and restrictions in access, it was also because the purpose of the supplemental interviews was to enrich the data from the primary interviews, rather than for the responses to stand as a separate study. Analysis was conducted to ensure quotes were identified that supplemented the findings from the sector professional interviews for each region.

Appendix 3: Regional sector priorities and perceived WASH benefits

Below are some additional tables showing sector priorities broken down by region, set against the perceived benefits of improved WASH.

Figure 40. Economic development

Region	Top 3 priorities (Economic development sector)	Support (%)	Top 3 perceived benefits of enhanced WASH (Economic development sector)	Support (%)
Africa	Enhancing education & skills Financial inclusion Sustainable economic development	32% 28% 24%	Improve population health and wellbeing Deliver stable employment/ job security Reduce pollution	28% 24% 20%
Asia	Financial inclusion Sustainable economic development Enhancing education & skills	33% 33% 29%	Improve population health and wellbeing Improve gender equity Reduce financial burden of health bills	28% 17% 17%
Latin America	Security of resources Infrastructure investment Improve rural livelihoods	71% 42% 14%	Improving education attainment Improve environmental health Improve population health and wellbeing	14% 14% 14%

Europe & North America	Financial inclusion Sustainable economic development Sustainable infrastructure	56% 44% 22%	Improve population health and wellbeing Improve gender equity Improve child development	44% 33% 11%
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Figure 41. Health

Region	Top 3 priorities (Health sector)	Support (%)	Top 3 perceived benefits of enhanced WASH (Health sector)	Support (%)
Africa	Disease prevention/ community health Education Equitable access to healthcare	50% 50% 25%	Disease prevention Improved nutrition Protection of marginalized groups	50% 25% 25%
Asia	Disease prevention Poverty alleviation Equitable access to healthcare	30% 20% 20%	Improved nutrition Disease prevention Protection of marginalized groups	40% 20% 10%
Latin America	Equitable access to Healthcare Disease prevention	100% 100%	Protection of marginalized groups Improved public health and wellbeing	100% 100%
Europe & North America	Disease prevention Equitable access to healthcare Research & development	33% 22% 22%	Disease prevention Improved nutrition Reduced pollution	44% 22% 11%

Figure 42. Education

Region	Top 3 priorities (Education sector)	Support (%)	Top 3 perceived benefits of enhanced WASH (Education sector)	Support (%)
Africa	Quality education Access to education for all Gender equity	67% 44% 22%	Improve educational performance Enhance gender equity Increase educational attendance	44% 33% 33%
Asia	Academic development Education resource funding Gender equity	25% 25% 25%	Enhance gender equity Improve educational performance	33% 25%
Latin America	Access to education for all Quality education Research	67% 67% 33%	Improve health of students and staff Enhance gender equity Improve educational performance	33% 33% 33%
Europe & North America	Access to education for all Quality education Early education	67% 33% 22%	Enhance gender equity Increase educational attendance	67% 67%

Figure 43. Human rights

Region	Top 3 priorities (Human rights sector)	Support (%)	Top 3 perceived benefits of enhanced WASH (Human rights sector)	Support (%)
Africa	Gender equity Promote peace Reduce inequality	50% 50% 50%	Alleviate poverty Safeguard vulnerable groups Build inclusive communities	25% 25% 25%
Asia	Gender equity Children's rights Right to health	31% 31% 31%	Delivery of SDG 3 Build inclusive communities Alleviate poverty	39% 31% 23%
Latin America	Reduce inequality	37%	Delivery of SDG 3	37.5% 25%

	Safeguarding civil liberties Integrating communities	25% 25%	Build inclusive communities Safeguard vulnerable groups	25%
Europe & North America	Gender equity Promote peace Safeguarding civil liberties	60% 40% 40%	Safeguard vulnerable groups Delivery of SDG3, especially for children Build inclusive communities	60% 40% 40%

Figure 44. Humanitarian response

Region	Top 3 priorities (Humanitarian response sector)	Support (%)	Top 3 perceived benefits of enhanced WASH	Support (%)
Africa	Sustainable livelihoods Access to finance Public health	44% 44% 33%	Improve health & wellbeing in crisis zones Enhance resilience to future humanitarian crises Protect marginalized groups from harm	67% 56% 56%
Asia	Public health Protection of Marginalized people Climate change resilience	38% 25% 25%	Protect marginalized groups from harm Improve community health & wellbeing Enhance resilience to future humanitarian crises	75% 38% 25%
Latin America	Infrastructure recovery Public health Climate change resilience	50% 25% 25%	Help alleviate poverty Improve health & wellbeing in crisis zones Reduce pollution levels in crisis zones	75% 50% 25%
Europe & North America	Climate change resilience Public health Distribution of aid	50% 29% 14%	Enhance resilience to future humanitarian crises Protect marginalized groups from harm	71% 57% 57%

			Improve health & wellbeing in crisis zones	
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Figure 45. Climate change

Region	Top 3 priorities (Climate change sector)	Support (%)	Top 3 perceived benefits of enhanced WASH (Climate change sector)	Support (%)
Africa	Ecosystem conservation Climate change resilience Emissions reductions	62% 39% 31%	Improve ecosystem health Food security Build resilient communities	39% 25% 15%
Asia	Ecosystem conservation Climate change mitigation Emissions reductions	43% 29% 29%	Improve ecosystem health Build resilient communities Improve community wellbeing	29% 29% 14%
Latin America	Ecosystem conservation Infrastructure Protection of marginalized groups	88% 25% 19%	Improve community wellbeing Food security Help vulnerable communities adapt to climate risks	31% 18% 13%
Europe & North America	Transition to green economy Raising climate ambitions	50% 50%	Help vulnerable communities adapt to climate risks Improve community wellbeing Food security	25% 25% 25%

	Climate change mitigation	50 %		
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