Strengthening WASH systems with partnerships between WASH and gender equality organisations in Timor-Leste

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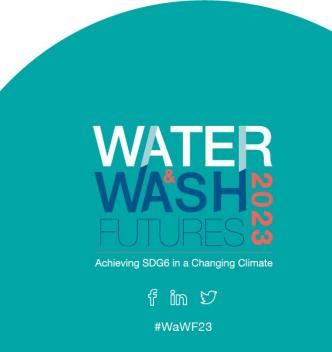
WaterAid and UTS-ISF

Timor-Leste and Australia

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Background

WASH context in Timor-Leste

- Significant progress in increasing water supply coverage, sanitation progress is lagging. 57% of households have at least basic sanitation services; 28% of households have basic hygiene services (JMP 2021).

- Persistent urban-rural disparities.

- The capacity of both rights-holders to claim their rights to WASH and duty-bearers to deliver is currently limited.

Background

Key opportunities and space for strengthening the rights-based approach:

- Decentralization of power and responsibility for public services to the municipalities

- High level government commitment to social audit of government services

- Demonstrated effectiveness of programs to achieve open defecation free (ODF)

- Willingness from the government to collaborate with CSOs and communities to reach "Hygienic" status of sanitation ladder, which implies beyond "ODF" and improved outcomes for all.

To investigate this relationship, WaterAid and UTS-ISF conducted research together to respond to two key questions:

1. What are the drivers, benefits, and challenges of engagement between WASH sector CSOs and gender equality organisations?

2. How can CSOs partner more effectively to maximise WASH, gender equality and inclusion outcomes?

Findings: Benefits of Partnerships

Increased participation and inclusion

- Increased participation of marginalised groups
- Increased access
- Increased knowledge and services

Mutual learning and capacity building

- Increased equality within partner organisations
- Mutual learning
- Government collaboration
- Partnership scope increased
- Capacity development
- Strengthened response to Gender Based Violence (GBV)

Benefits reported by CSO interviewees (n = 23) of partnerships between WASH and gender equality and inclusion organisations

Findings: Benefits of Partnerships

Shifts in gender norms, perceptions and responses

- Norms change around WASH roles
- Enhanced capacity to achieve strategic plan
- Increased data collection capabilities
- Increased networks
- Contribution to a stronger and more resilient WASH system

Benefits reported by CSO interviewees (n = 23) of partnerships between WASH and gender equality and inclusion organisations

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Findings: Challenges of Partnerships

Organisational barriers

- Misaligned strategy

- Human resources limitations

- Staff changes

- Confidence and technical knowledge

- Practicalities of sharing resources

Weak links in the WASH system

- Misperceptions

- Transactional approaches

Challenges reported by CSO interviewees (n = 23) of partnerships between WASH and gender equality and inclusion organisations

Findings: Challenges of Partnerships

Power dynamics and relationship aspects

- Short-term funding models

- Staying in one's lane

- Finding time to collaborate

- Concerns about sustainability

- Communication issues

- COVID-19 challenges

- Hidden agendas

Challenges reported by CSO interviewees (n = 23) of partnerships between WASH and gender equality and inclusion organisations

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How are CSO partnerships and changing harmful gender and disability norms related?

Process for supporting norms change

Step 1: Resourcing, organisational backing and planning

Step 2: Understanding social norms

Step 3: Embedding social norms

Step 4: Do No Harm

Step 5: Create a critical mass to support the new social norms and practices beyond the community

Step 6: Maintenance of the new positive norm

Step 7: Monitoring of the norm

By resourcing RHOs we are strengthening civil society working on norms change

RHOs can help you to understand the harmful social norms relevant to the context, and what some strategies are to address these

RHOs can help you to anticipate any unintended consequences and possible backlash to actions

RHOs can help to identify relevant and appropriate indicators to monitor over time, and can help with data collection and analysis

RHOs are part of a broader movement and can help to build critical mass, as well as maintain the new positive norm

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Recommendations for more effective collaboration

Setting foundations and shared vision

- Alignment in strategic priorities
- Setting clear commitment, agreement with responsibilities.
- Effective joint planning at design stage.
- Ideally ensure the approach is to a direct need identified in the community.
- Building on unique strengths, bringing together complementary roles.
- Share best practices.

Partnership practices

- Regular, open communication and review of partnership status.
- Taking time for CSOs to to strengthen trust.
- Support building of a deeper understanding of universal WASH and systems.
- Considering joint data sources and knowledge sharing (e.g. a central database of disaggregated WASH data).

Building on complementarities

- Elevation of community needs into national advocacy efforts.
- Strengthen CSO forums to be coordinator.
- Review funding arrangements to ensure donor organisations support CSO priorities.
- A gender organisation referred to the Timorese fighting spirit as a strength to draw on to create effective collaborations.

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Thank you! Obrigado ua'in!

Research learning materials are here: https://waterforwomen.uts.edu.au/partnerships/