



Leaving No One Behind

This briefing note examines how SWA partners can work together to eliminate inequalities in access to water and sanitation, leading to a world where no-one is left behind.

About the SWA Briefing Papers

The SWA Briefing Papers analyse key development issues that are relevant for the partnership, exploring how these issues can be better understood and proposing some concrete action that can be integrated into the collaborative work of SWA's partners.

Rationale

The elimination of inequalities is one of SWA's Guiding Principles, and is also a basic human rights principle, critical for realising the human rights to water and sanitation and all other human rights. Further, the principle of eliminating inequalities or 'leave no one behind' is at the core of the SDGs. Understanding that "a focus on averages when setting development goals can mask serious problems"¹ is central to being able to identify those who are being left behind and finding solutions to address these inequalities. SDG 6 will not have been met if in 2030 there are individuals or groups that continue to have poor or no access to inadequate water, hygiene and sanitation services.

The SWA global multi-stakeholder partnership exists to mobilize its partners to better work together to achieve the SDGs including to ensuring that no one is left behind. It has undertaken to incorporate this principle into its activities to date, including at the 2014, 2016 and 2017 High-level Meetings. During the last 2014 Commitments cycle, there were several commitments made by SWA country partners with the specific aim of reducing inequalities.

As the partnership is increasing its focus at country level, SWA is receiving specific requests from partners for more guidance on how to operationalize the principle of Leaving No One Behind and the elimination of inequalities.

This Briefing Note offers SWA partners some concrete suggestions on the steps they could take and approaches they could embrace in order to transform this principle into a more tangible reality in their activities.

What does it mean to eliminate inequalities, to 'leave no-one behind'?

The principle of leaving no one behind and the elimination of inequalities means that the furthest behind must now be reached first, rather than aiming for the "lowest hanging fruit" as a way of achieving rapid success in meeting general targets. This principle should also be the key criterion for monitoring the performance of progress towards SDG6 and measuring its success. According to the ODI this "goes well beyond being just an anti-discrimination agenda; it is a recognition that expectations of trickle-down

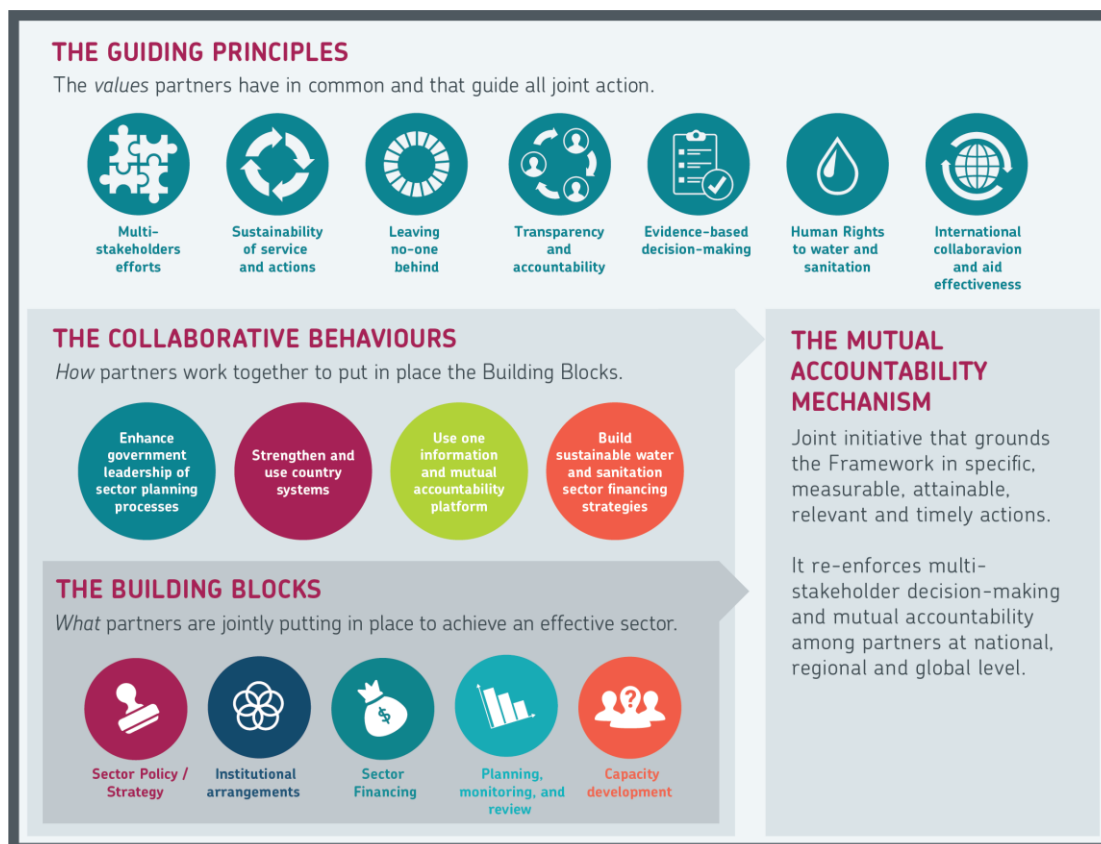
¹ <https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/resource-documents/11809.pdf>

progress are naïve, and that explicit and pro-active attempts are needed to ensure populations at risk of being left behind are included from the start.”

This approach is supported by the WASH-related targets of the SDGs, specifically 6.1 and 6.2, the latter calling for ‘special attention to the needs of women and girls and those in vulnerable situations’. Significantly SDG 1.4 requires that States ‘By 2030, ensure that all men and women, in particular the poor and the vulnerable, have equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to basic services...’, and the accompanying indicator is to monitor the ‘Proportion of population living in households with access to basic services’.

As the focus SWA partnership’s work is to support countries in reaching the SDGs, this must include ensuring that countries prioritise access to basic services over improving services for a few. To this end, SWA country partners should identify marginalized populations based on the criteria of access to water, sanitation and hygiene, as well as wealth, and show leadership by developing adequate strategies for these populations. All the dimensions of marginality (availability, accessibility and affordability) should be taken into consideration while designing appropriate policies.

Integrating ‘Leave no-one behind’ and the elimination of inequalities into SWA’s Framework



Guiding Principles

1. Multi-stakeholder efforts

SWA’s identity is based on the belief that good public policies can only be designed and adequately implemented if they are the product of multi-stakeholder efforts – bringing together governments, but also civil society, private sector, development partners and academic institutions. Inequalities can only be eliminated if the voices of those who have been ‘left behind’ are heard. This requires inclusive multi-stakeholder efforts – which bring the main actors around the same table - as well as discussions that are dedicated to identifying which individuals and groups suffer from discriminatory access to services, and focused efforts to work with these individuals and groups to create relevant solutions. All SWA constituencies have something to offer, and collaboration increases the likelihood of success for all, and to achieve this, community organisations may need additional financial support and capacity building.

2. Sustainability of services and actions

It is not sufficient to ensure that everyone has access to services – they must also be sustainable, which means that policies, institutions, financial planning and budgets

are designed to operate and maintain services of all types. Only through full consideration of costs beyond construction costs can inequalities in access to services be eliminated. This includes ensuring that adequate taxes and tariffs are charged to those who can afford them, without political interference, and those who cannot afford benefit from some kind of support.

The failure of services will inevitably first be felt by those who are poor or who are vulnerable, as they will be least able to adapt their access to services when the necessity arises. In those countries where community-based water and sanitation organisations exist, ensuring sustainability and eliminating inequalities also requires financial support and capacity building to ensure their adequate functioning.

3. Elimination of Inequalities and minimum standards of coverage, access, use and effectiveness of services

Targeting the unserved, progressively eliminating inequalities and maintaining existing services should take precedence over improving services for the already served. Ensuring a minimum basic level of access to services is a powerful and effective tool to eliminate inequalities. Particular support is needed to address those countries and contexts that are most off-track for reaching the SDG targets.

4. Transparency and Accountability

Transparency in all aspects of government, particularly pertaining to planning and budgeting for the elimination of inequalities, and accountability of all actors to adhere to plans and budgets is essential for ensuring that no-one is left behind. Those individuals and groups who do not have adequate access to water and sanitation must be informed of plans to improve their access to services, as well as be able to turn to a complaints mechanism if the plans are not realized, or not suitable. Accountability is also a key tool to supporting people to claim their Rights, as it helps governments become more responsive to the voices of the poor and marginalised populations and strengthens governments' capacity to create an enabling environment for service delivery, thereby contributing to the elimination of inequalities.

5. Evidence-based decision-making

Laws and policies are often written to be 'neutral' but have a more positive or negative outcome on particular population groups, whether due to gender, religion, indigenous status, geographical area or other difference. To counteract this, there must be experiential learning on how policies impact on people's access to water and sanitation to ensure that policies work for the elimination of inequalities, and not against this goal.

Introducing access to drinking water and sanitation as a fundamental human right in the political constitution or in the legal framework, makes compliance tacit.

Governments also need to gather evidence to identify who the marginalised groups are, and the reasons for their marginalisation in order to develop the best possible strategies to eliminate these inequalities.

6. Human Rights to water and sanitation for all

At the core of the human rights to water and sanitation is the principle of equality and non-discrimination. Progressively eliminating inequalities is a fundamental

step in the realisation of the human rights to water and sanitation. All actions towards realizing the human rights to water and sanitation must also work towards the elimination of inequalities and leaving no-one behind.

7. International collaboration and aid effectiveness

It is the obligation of governments to take leadership in the elimination of inequalities and this shall be done within available resources, whether they come from within the country through international development aid or through other sources. International cooperation, collaboration and aid should be aligned with government policies and plans and should support governments in their development efforts, and not hinder them.

Collaborative Behaviours

1. Enhance government leadership of sector planning processes

Government leadership is essential in the elimination of inequalities, but other partners will often have greater knowledge and experience in identifying and managing the elimination of inequalities.

The most marginalized individuals and groups should be involved in the planning and implementation of these policies. This may be through advisory sessions, or NGOs or the academy working closely with national and local government in devising the most appropriate policies and strategies.

2. Strengthen and use country systems

Country systems, such as public financial management etc. are essential for identifying where governments are placing their priorities.

Partners, particularly CSOs have a role in ensuring that these systems take cognizance of the needs of all people.

Rural and slum urban areas may need more assistance in developing the relevant country systems that benefit the poorest and most disadvantaged members of society.

3. Use one information and mutual accountability platform

While a government should maintain an information and mutual accountability platform, it is crucial that this platform is open to all residents to comment on and challenge where necessary.

CSOs and other non-government actors must also have the opportunity of providing information and clarifying where data may be inaccurate or incomplete.

4. Build sustainable water and sanitation sector financing strategies

Financing must be provided for programmes and projects that target individuals and groups with poor access to services, and these budgets must be monitored, to ensure that they are spent as budgeted.

Government investments whether from loans from development Banks or from international grants or through public-private agreements must contribute to increasing basic service coverage and must include considerations of maintenance and operation.

Affordability of services (including tariffs, but not limited to tariffs) must be carefully monitored and cross-subsidies put in place for low-income households, where necessary and appropriate.

Transparency and predictability in financing strategies are essential for ensuring that no-one is left behind.

Building Blocks

1. Sector Policy / Strategy

Policies should specifically consider how to address inequalities, including how to address the needs of the most marginalized individuals and groups.

Implementation strategies must include how inequalities can be addressed across all sub-sectors and in all regions, recognizing that these strategies may be very different depending on the type of inequality or discriminatory practice.

Checklist²

- a. Are there laws / regulations in place prohibiting discrimination?
- b. Are targets set through inclusive processes?
- c. Are there specific targets for improving services for marginalized and disadvantaged groups?

2. Institutional arrangements

Strong institutional arrangements are essential for holding duty bearers to account for the delivery of services, and as such are key for the elimination of inequalities.

Institutions must be assigned specific responsibilities with respect to delivering and monitoring services for those who have historically had inadequate access to services

Multi-stakeholder platforms make it possible for the most marginalized to participate in developing the right institutional frameworks (e.g. participation of community-based organizations in Joint Sector Reviews).

Checklist

- a. Do all relevant institutions explicitly aim to eliminate inequalities in their terms of reference?
- b. Do institutions function transparently and in a participatory, non-discriminatory manner?
- c. Where countries are undergoing decentralization processes, do newly formed institutions adequately consider the elimination of inequalities?
- d. Are regulators able to monitor the elimination of inequalities and react accordingly

3. Sector Financing

Financing must be provided for programmes and projects that target individuals and

² The UN Special Rapporteur's Handbook on Realising the human rights to water and sanitation also contains checklists on the areas of action. Including on equality and non-discrimination, which could help partners to think through their activities.

groups with poor access to services, and these budgets must be monitored, to ensure that they are spent as budgeted. This include monitoring whether subsidies are reaching the intended recipients.

Affordability of services (including tariffs, but not limited to tariffs) must be carefully monitored.

Checklist

- a. Are there sufficient funds dedicated to the elimination of inequalities?
- b. Do tariff structures make provision for affordability of services?
- c. Are available budgets spent in a timely and transparent manner?
- d. Are funds for 'software' sufficient to ensure institution and capacity building?

4. Planning, monitoring, and review

Monitoring and review of sector performance must include identification and monitoring of access to WASH, and the actions that the sector (including service providers) take to ensure that everyone is able to access affordable and safe services.

Data must be disaggregated according to identified inequalities, including gender, disability, age, specific ethnic or indigenous groups, language, geographic location, occupation, and poverty.

Checklist

- a. Are planning processes participatory and multi-stakeholder?
- b. Are there adequate indicators to monitor inequalities?
- c. Is there an institution mandated to monitor inequalities?
- d. Is relevant data disaggregated and made public?

5. Capacity development

Increase awareness of human rights and the elimination of inequalities for all stakeholders, including community organisations and ensure that they are aware of their responsibilities to achieve these.

Checklist

- a. Are office-bearers educated in the importance of the elimination of inequalities and the relevance for human and economic development?
- b. Are there public awareness campaigns on discriminatory practices and how to address them?

Integrating 'Leave no-one behind' and the elimination of inequalities into SWA's global and regional activities

The partnership works at international, regional and at national levels, and SWA partners can adopt different actions at each level to eliminate inequalities.

This will include integrating approaches to eliminate inequalities into its webinars, High-level Meeting ministerial dialogues and sessions at international and regional conferences.

Mutual Accountability Mechanism

A significant part of the Mutual Accountability Mechanism is to support SWA's partners in developing the necessary multi-stakeholder platforms to have meaningful discussions about how SWA's partners can hold each other to account, not only to achieve the commitments that are decided upon for the Mutual Accountability Mechanism, but also for the realization of the SDGs and other national priorities. The multi-stakeholder platform is essential in order to create the opportunity for discussions that include all interest groups, including civil society and research and learning institutions, but also that puts the elimination of inequalities at the center.

High-level Meetings

Sanitation and Water for All's High-level Meetings are an opportunity to discuss specific issues that are of interest to partners. Exploring how to strengthen partners' work, exchange good practices and identify bottlenecks with respect to the elimination of inequalities should be integrated into all discussions at the High-level Meetings.

Knowledge management, webinars, the SWA tools portal

Sanitation and Water for All is promoting several different knowledge management tools, including webinars, and a tools portal, and will also set up a platform for the Mutual Accountability Mechanism, so that partners can share information about the commitments they have made and whether they are being met. All knowledge management tools will have specific information about how to integrate the elimination of inequalities into activities.

Sanitation and Water for All will also strengthen peer to peer learning between countries and organizations and for knowledge exchange on how to target inequalities, providing opportunities to share best practices on how to develop policies and financing measures to tackle inequalities.

To support this, Sanitation and Water for all, based on its partners expertise and together with its partners, will seek to provide capacity building / training to SWA partners on the elimination of inequalities and sector strengthening, potentially through 'inequalities advisors'.

Steering Committee Meetings

Sanitation and Water for All's global policy is directed by the Steering Committee. There is an opportunity to discuss issues relating to the integration of the elimination of inequalities into partners' activities through increasing the Steering Committee members understanding of why the elimination of inequalities is important for the partnership, and what this requires of the Steering Committee in terms of direction. It is also important to facilitate the participation of the most marginalized people in these meetings, such as the through the participation of a representative of a community-based organization.

UN processes and High-Level Political Forum

Sanitation and Water for All partners should take the opportunity of examining their activities in the elimination of inequalities, its engagement s on key United Nations processes around the importance of WASH/ inequalities and sector strengthening, and particularly for the High Level Political Forum.

Integrating Leave no-one behind and the elimination of inequalities into national level activities

Sanitation and Water for All must enhance their inclusive policies and budgets in order target inequalities.

Below are some approaches that SWA partners could consider:

1. *Participation*: Strengthening participatory approaches, specifically including marginalised groups in processes designed to plan for achieving the SDGs (e.g. at Joint Sector Reviews or similar).
2. *Inclusion*: Ensuring the participation of the most marginalized individuals and groups in all work, i.e. in working groups, partnership meetings, high-level meetings and raise their capacity to engage.
3. *Access to information*: Ensure information on special measures for marginalised individuals and groups is accessible to those groups.
4. *Accountability*: Collaboration between SWA partners to integrate the elimination of inequalities into commitments for the Mutual Accountability Mechanism.
5. *Monitoring*: Developing indicators to monitor disparities and progress in eliminating them (e.g. by wealth category, gender, geography, ethnic/religious/social, geographical location).
6. *Evidence*: Carrying out poverty analysis to increase the understanding of where and who the poor and vulnerable are and which barriers they face in achieving WASH access.
7. *Visibility*: Providing arguments for WASH to be prominent in poverty elimination strategies and at sector events.
8. *Policy, strategy, and planning*: Encouraging all SWA country partners to include specific policies, standards and targets for the elimination of inequalities, including identifying specific marginalised / disadvantaged / discriminated against groups that are to be prioritised – for example - women, people with disabilities, specific language groups, etc.

9. *Decentralization and local authorities:* Working more closely with the ministries or departments of local government to promote information-sharing and capacity-building on human rights and the elimination of inequalities. Creating stronger local structures and allocating resources that are specifically aimed at eliminating inequalities.
10. *Financing:* Creating a financing strategy that includes ensuring that marginalized groups and individuals have access to services.
11. *Budgeting:* Creating specific budget lines that are used to address inequalities and ensure that these are spent as intended.

Conclusion

Achieving water and sanitation services for all, everywhere and forever requires the prioritisation and fast-tracking of actions for the poorest and most marginalised people.

This means that proactive efforts are indispensable to make sure that vulnerable and marginalized populations are included and prioritized from the beginning – so as to avoid an expansion of the gap between the haves and have nots.

It calls for acknowledging and addressing discriminatory practices that are long-standing and often entrenched within societies. It also requires rethinking current investments in water and sanitation services, which tend to be made towards low-risk urban environments, rather than in poor settlements, whether rural or urban because these may not show a ‘good’ economic return or may be seen as high-risk investment.

The SDGs require inclusive policies, targeted at those people most in need. Marginalised and disadvantaged individuals and groups are key actors of change, who can work with others to drive and deliver policies that are relevant to their needs. The people who are in most need of government assistance and support will be those who cannot afford or are otherwise not in a position to invest their own resources (time and financial) to acquire water and sanitation services.

Developed by SWA, August 2018
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