

Align to Accelerate:

towards a core set of indicators and common monitoring and review framework for WASH systems

Halfway through the *United Nations Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (2030 Agenda), billions of people still lack access to safely managed drinking-water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH). Accelerating progress on the coverage of safely managed WASH services is underpinned by the strength of the systems that deliver and sustain them.

WHO and UNICEF, in close collaboration with the World Bank and other partners, are leading a joint initiative to define and agree upon core indicators to monitor the strength of WASH systems and a common monitoring and review framework through a process of sector-wide multi-stakeholder consultation.

A systemic change in approach is needed for WASH. The move away from “project-based” approaches and service delivery towards country-led strengthening of national and local WASH systems has been identified as a necessary change for several years in the sector. This evolution of the WASH sector, from an emphasis on construction of infrastructure and ad hoc behaviour change engagement alone towards a recognition that the ultimate goal is delivery of safely managed WASH services that are sustained over time, is resulting in convergence towards a ‘*WASH systems strengthening approach*’.

However, at present, the various efforts to describe the components of WASH systems have not yet converged on a common understanding or approach. There is currently a co-existence of various similar, but different, conceptual frameworks and definitions. Main challenges are linked to the overwhelming number of key elements and the difficulty of identifying “vital signs” to act upon.

Moving toward a common approach. A government-led sector-wide approach to monitoring the strength of WASH systems using national monitoring systems is needed to enable decision-makers to accurately monitor progress and track system performance, assess current strengths and weaknesses, identify investment requirements, plan remedial courses of action, and ensure transparency and accountability. Two interrelated elements can facilitate a sector-wide shift towards national monitoring of the strength of WASH systems at country level:

- **A globally agreed set of core indicators** to monitor the strength of WASH systems, covering inputs/processes/outputs in addition to outcomes and impact, that can be integrated into national monitoring systems. Standardized indicators that incorporate important cross-cutting issues like climate and disaster resilience will also be included. In addition to bolstering national monitoring systems, a core set of WASH systems indicators agreed with regional and global partners can help streamline and standardise country reporting.
- **A common monitoring and review framework** to guide countries to define a relevant set of national indicators to monitor the strength of WASH systems, which includes the core indicators. It will assist countries to put in place national monitoring systems that can provide data and information on the strength of WASH systems for government-led review mechanisms such as a joint sector review, sector performance reports, government and stakeholder decision-making processes including development of WASH sector policies, strategies and plans, as well as monitoring national commitments, such as those in the Heads of States Initiative.¹

¹ Heads of States Initiative, <https://www.sanitationandwaterforall.org/heads-state-initiatives>

What will the initiative do? A strong common monitoring and review framework can support a broader sector-wide shift towards a ‘*WASH systems strengthening approach*’.

The objectives of this joint initiative are:

- To steer a process for the development of a set of agreed core indicators and a common monitoring and review framework to monitor the strength of WASH systems.
- To pilot in a few selected, but diverse country settings: data collection, data visualization and data use by national and regional/global actors in several countries, based upon a localized approach using the set of core indicators and the common monitoring and review framework.
- To support governments and partners in the establishment of a process for regular national monitoring and review of the strength of WASH systems through an evidence-based joint sector review-type process, based on a set of national indicators that will include the core indicators.

The joint initiative will produce the following outputs:

- An agreed set of core indicators that can be integrated into the national monitoring system by governments to measure the strength of WASH systems.
- A common monitoring and review framework to be used by national governments to analyse progress on the strength of WASH systems using the core indicators and undertake periodic sector reviews to identify progress and any shifts in priority actions.
- Guidance to countries on how to conduct an analytical review using the core indicators, including visual representations that reflect the core indicators in a way that is easy to understand and allows comparisons over time and between countries and can be used by national governments in review mechanisms and decision-making processes.
- A process for monitoring relevant core indicators through the UN-Water Global Analysis and Assessment of Sanitation and Drinking-Water (GLAAS) country survey and other existing monitoring mechanisms, including a roadmap for an eventual transition to government monitoring systems.

How will it work? WHO and UNICEF will convene and coordinate the initiative in close collaboration with the World Bank and other key partners, as well as with key sector platforms and partnerships and in close consultation with national governments and diverse global, regional and local stakeholders, including those from other sectors.

The initiative will be implemented in a four-phased approach:

- Phase 1: Background discussion paper and preparatory work: [May to December 2024](#).
- Phase 2: Consultations and development of core indicators and common monitoring and review framework: [September 2024 to March 2025](#).
- Phase 3: Pilot testing and finalization of core indicators and common monitoring and review framework: [January 2025 to September 2025](#)
- Phase 4: Upscaling led by countries with aligned support from development partners. [September 2025 onwards up to 2030](#)

Contribute to this joint initiative:

Call for evidence: Share any relevant frameworks and indicators to inform the initiative at washmonitoring@who.int by 19 July 2024

Read the Concept note: [Strengthening water, sanitation and hygiene systems – towards a core set of indicators and common framework](#)

Join the mailing list: Sign up [here](#) to stay informed of the initiative’s progress, upcoming events and webinars