

WHY WATER, SANITATION AND HYGIENE MUST BE TOP OF YOUR  
**CLIMATE AGENDA**



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**Climate change has a tremendous negative impact on WASH services. But at the same time, the WASH sector presents a huge opportunity to contribute to global adaptation and mitigation goals, through the building of a climate-resilient, low-carbon WASH sector.**

This briefing note is aimed at planners, policy makers, and experts in both the climate sector and the water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) sector. It looks at the links between the two sectors, considers how both can benefit from closer integration, and highlights why an **increased focus on climate-resilient water, sanitation and hygiene is a critical element of taking action on climate.**

The Paris Climate Accords aim to strengthen the global response to the threat of climate change in the context of sustainable development and efforts to eradicate poverty. Climate change directly impacts communities through water in many different ways. **Water is the primary medium through which we feel the effects of climate change.** Droughts mean less water is available, creating conflict and inhibiting good sanitation and hygiene practices. Floods lead to water contamination, and heavy rainfall favours vector-borne diseases. Increased rates of glacial melting impact many millions of people that rely on it as a source of drinking water, and sea-level rise leads to the salinisation of aquifers in coastal areas used for drinking by a large amount of the global population. In addition, climate shocks mean repairs and upgrades to infrastructure, service disruptions, and increasing reliance on emergency operations, all of which cause huge economic costs to affected countries.

This intimate relationship between climate change and water means that **investing in climate-resilient WASH services is a vital part of solving the global climate crisis.** In the **Race to Resilience** and **Race to Zero** the, businesses, cities, regions, investors and civil society are acting fast to transform the prospects of billions of people. Beyond the finish lines a safer, healthier, more sustainable and cleaner world awaits.

**Supporting adaptation and climate-resilient WASH services** makes sense from a financial point of view, both for governments and users. It fosters community resilience by **reducing human, social, environmental and physical vulnerability.** It can also help reduce conflict in areas affected by water scarcity. It provides an opportunity to policy makers and service providers to rethink access to basic services, adhere to a circular economy and green growth, and improve several pending aspects of service provision.

There are also huge, so far largely **untapped opportunities for the sector to contribute reductions in greenhouse gas emissions.** These opportunities include improving water and energy efficiency in the sector, and by ensuring the use of renewable energy wherever possible for water and sanitation operations, as well as shifting to cleaner, more efficient sanitation and treatment processes for wastewater and excreta disposal.

The WASH sector can also contribute to the Paris Agreement goal of mobilising US\$ 100 billion per year to address the pressing mitigation and adaptation needs of developing countries. **The WASH sector is already investing in climate resilience.** Furthermore, the WASH sector is also **working to mobilise climate finance,** and to ensure that climate-resilient WASH is increasingly seen as both an essential and attractive investment.

In order to realise the **huge potential contribution of the WASH sector to global climate goals,** UNICEF calls for planners, policy makers and experts in the **climate and water, sanitation and hygiene sectors to come together,** to accelerate climate adaptation and mitigation by acting on the points set out at the end of this document.

# A CALL TO ACTION

## WHAT CAN SECTOR PLANNERS, POLICY MAKERS AND EXPERTS DO?

The potential contributions that the WASH sector can make to reduce climate impacts is enormous. In order to realise them, and to accelerate the climate adaptation and mitigation of global WASH services, planners and policy makers in both sectors can focus their efforts on several key areas for action:



**Alignment between sectors:** The WASH sector should be included and considered as a priority within climate policies, strategies, plans and budgets, and WASH line ministries should ensure that WASH policies, strategies and plans always adequately address climate resilience.



**Engagement between sectors:** Dialogue and engagement across sectors should be increased. The WASH sector is already implementing programmes that contribute to climate mitigation and adaptation, and many could go to scale and create far greater impact with additional, climate-focused funding. The WASH sector can also offer extensive advice on how to ensure community involvement and the use of appropriate technologies. Increased collaboration between climate and WASH experts can strengthen programming in both sectors, and ensure more efficient use of the resources available.



**Financing:** Alongside continued investment in the broader water sector, there should be a significant increase in global climate finance targeting basic (and climate-resilient) water supply and sanitation, which at the moment accounts for just 0.3 per cent of global climate finance investment. Low-income countries must be supported to access the finance needed for climate change adaptation. For example, grants should be better allocated to low-income countries, to offer strategic

support that develops local capacities and experiences, and instruments that facilitate access to loans (for example, de-risking) should be supported. The use of blended finance instruments in the WASH sector should be explored and increased, combining loans, grants and other means to finance climate-focused WASH investments. For example, national WASH programmes can be complemented with climate financing to cover specific, additional elements that address climate change adaptation and mitigation.



**Focusing on the most vulnerable:** Technical and financial support should be increased for adaptation in low-income countries; particularly in fragile contexts. Vulnerable communities are often hit hardest by the effects of climate change, and are therefore in critical need of increasing capacity for adaptation. Despite this, only 5 per cent of global climate finance is currently allocated for adapting to climate change.



**Researching and innovating:** Research and innovation on the links between climate change and water, sanitation and hygiene should be prioritised. For example, to improve our understanding the sanitation sector's contribution to greenhouse gas emissions (and how they can be minimised), or to develop better monitoring mechanisms for the sustainability of aquifers in developing countries, in the context of increased groundwater extraction.

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