

# Towards transformation Water for Women FUND strategy *(Summary)*





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# Acronyms

Acronym	
<b>CSO</b>	Civil Society Organisation
<b>DFAT</b>	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
<b>GSI</b>	Gender and Social Inclusion
<b>OECD</b>	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
<b>RO</b>	research organisations
<b>SGM</b>	Sexual and Gender Minorities
<b>WASH</b>	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
<b>WfW</b>	Water for Women
<b>WSSCC</b>	Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council

# 1. Fund Goal

*Improved health, gender equality and well-being of Asian and Pacific Communities through inclusive, sustainable WASH.*

# 2. Vision

*The collective work of the Water for Women Fund (Fund) leads and inspires the global WASH sector to adopt evidence-based socially transformative practice to contribute to eliminating inequalities and achieving sustainable positive change for all.*

The Fund is committed to gender equality and social inclusion (GSI) in line with global commitments in WASH and beyond, and further contributing to the well-established evidence base regarding the connection between inclusive, equitable and sustainable WASH, and improved gender equality and social inclusion outcomes (WSSCC et al, 2006).

The Fund's GSI approach supports the ambition of the SDGs to 'leave no-one behind'. The Fund recognises gender as a fundamental and globally universal dimension of inequality and denial of rights, while also recognising other dimensions of inequality and rights, such as disability, age, sexual and gender minorities (SGM), ethnic minorities, and people living in extreme poverty and/or remote communities. The Fund supports efforts to address different forms and contributors to poverty, marginalisation and inequality.

# 3. Core concepts

On 23 July 2010, the United Nations General Assembly formally recognised the human right to water and sanitation. This has been defined as the right of everyone to sufficient, safe, acceptable and physically accessible and affordable water for personal and domestic uses. Making this a reality requires transformative thinking and approaches that are based on "Do No Harm" principles that are contextually appropriate.

The strategy is based on the core concepts of transformation and transformative practice.

## 3.1 Transformation

This is both a process - *something that can be done* - and an *outcome* that can be achieved. Transformative process fosters meaningful inclusion of the marginalised in mainstream activities and decisions. By genuinely listening to new voices, we can create deep and lasting change. By supporting opportunities for greater levels of voice and influence by the oppressed or marginalised, we can disrupt and change the mainstream way of doing things. Thus, a cycle of change is set in train, leading to transformation (outcome).

### 3.1.1 Transformative practice

This is an explicit intention to transform unequal power relations. This goes beyond improving the *condition* of the lives of women and other marginalised groups. It seeks to improve their social *position* (how they are valued in society) as well as the full realisation of their rights. It actively promotes redistribution and sharing of power and control over decision-making, resources and benefits. Transformative practice, which will vary in response to different contexts, leads to transformative outcomes.

## 4. Principles

The strategy identifies seven principles to guide our collective GSI thinking and practice. They are closely interlinked and key to achieving transformative change.

### Principle 1: Hold ourselves accountable

Transformation starts with ourselves. Social transformation is not something we can ‘do to’ others – we must live it ourselves. Positive societal change can only happen if we are prepared first to challenge and change ourselves, individually and collectively. We must recognise and address our individual biases, be honest about our own power and privilege, and listen deeply and respectfully to the lived experience and perceptions of others. We must challenge the attitudes, cultures and behaviours within our organisations. This can only happen if our transformative capacity, expertise, work and partnerships are resourced.

### Principle 2: Do No Harm and address violence

Any WASH or other program can potentially result in negative consequences, particularly for marginalized people, who may inadvertently be exposed to increased stigmatisation or risk of gender-based or other targeted violence. The Fund sees ‘harm’ as a continuum, understanding that discriminatory attitudes are the underlying cause of violence and other severe harm. To ‘do no harm’ requires deep understanding of the complex dynamics of people’s lives. It requires robust program monitoring systems, responsive to unintended consequences. Accepting violence as a daily reality in the lives of women and marginalised people, transformative practice recognises the importance of understanding the causes and dynamics of such violence. It requires understanding of and linking with survivor-centred and rights-based prevention and responses services for advocacy and referral.

### Principle 3: Understand and challenge power and privilege

Social exclusion must be understood in the context of multiple hierarchies of power based on gender, class, race or religious superiority, colonialism, age, ability, sexuality and others. These hierarchies have deep historical roots, are reinforced by deeply entrenched attitudes and norms, and by discrimination and violence. Policies, services and programs are largely designed by, and (consciously or unconsciously) in the interests of, those who belong to more powerful groups. Situations and needs of marginalised groups are often deprioritised, and marginalised people face barriers to advocating for fairer policies and systems. A transformative approach will challenge unequal distribution of privilege and power, shifting from ‘power over’ to ‘power with and within’. This links in with the concept of ‘allyship’.

### Principle 4: Address inevitable resistance and backlash

Promoting the rights of marginalised people takes place in the context of, and can come up against, complex cultural, political and economic interests. Resistance can be seen as active or passive avoidance of change, while backlash is often understood as more extreme and aggressive forms of resistance. Resistance can come from people of any gender, individually or collectively, in any setting, and can take many forms (either implicitly or explicitly). Understanding that resistance is inevitable and being prepared for it is the starting point for developing effective strategies to address it.

#### Principle 5: Think and act holistically

Holistic thinking is essential to transformative WASH practice. Sustainable development, including WASH, calls for recognition of the interconnectedness between diverse human and other factors. The 2030 Agenda and SDGs are framed around five pillars: *people, planet, prosperity, peace and justice, and partnership*. None of these can be considered in isolation. Together, these aspects form a useful framework for a holistic approach to transformative WASH. It is also useful to consider the implications of practice for people 'here and now', people 'elsewhere' and for future generations (OECD, 2016).

#### Principle 6: Place the right people at the centre

It is essential that marginalised people are at the centre of, and lead the way in, their own development. Useful concepts here include 'nothing about us without us', 'intersectional inequalities' and 'allyship'. This principle requires availability of sufficient skilled expertise and that we work closely with and resource rights-holders organisations that represent marginalised people. It means using both 'mainstream' and 'twin track' approaches; and recognising the different capacities, situations and needs of people at different stages of their lives. While this Strategy takes an integrated approach to inclusion, it sees moving towards gender equality as a fundamental concern and the interests of women and girls as paramount.

#### Principle 7: Push the boundaries of transformative practice

The Fund creates an opportunity to collectively identify and strengthen evidence-based practice on some of the most challenging aspects of GSI-transformative practice. The top two priority issues identified by Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) who responded to a survey, were 'do no harm and respond to violence' and 'addressing resistance and backlash'. Other issues discussed were 'transformative organisations', 'integrating approaches to intersectional disadvantage', 'expanding thinking and practice on disability in WASH', and 'addressing sexual and gender minority rights in WASH'. Other issues were raised during development of the Strategy, resulting in agreement to incorporate 'engaging men and boys as partners for change' as a cross-cutting dimension of each of the boundary-pushing issues. Identification of ways that the Fund can collectively push the boundaries of transformative WASH practice will be continuously reviewed through the life of the Fund.

## 5. Ambition and Goals

The overarching GSI ambition for the Fund is to contribute significantly to an overall shift towards more transformative practice in WASH. The Fund Coordinator, and Fund partners (CSOs and research organisations (ROs)) will work towards achieving this ambition through the Fund's collective work against the three strategic GSI goals:

### *Goal 1: Catalyse and support change towards inclusive and transformative WASH*

This goal relates to the diverse GSI in WASH work that CSOs are committed to, as indicated in their PDDs and research plans.

### *Goal 2: Generate and communicate knowledge, learning and evidence*

This goal relates to GSI-related knowledge, learning and building the evidence-base for GSI transformative practice. Learning will be derived both from CSO and RO activities.

### *Goal 3: Help push the boundaries (PTB) of socially transformative practice in WASH*

This goal relates to selected new and emerging issues that CSOs and the Fund Coordinator want to 'spotlight' through collective learning. This will focus on issues agreed within the collective, such as those initially proposed and then prioritised under Principle 7 above.



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