Leave No One Behind
Learning Day – sharing insights from World Water Week

Convened by the Australian WASH Reference Group and Water for Women

Melbourne
October 2019
On October 3 2019, the Australian WASH Reference Group and the Water for Women Fund hosted an industry-wide Learning Day in Melbourne to share insights from the Stockholm International Water Institute's 2019 World Water Week (WWW) and explore implications from key presentations for Australian WASH sector organisations.

World Water Week (WWW) is the annual focal point for the globe’s water sector. This year representatives from the Australian Government funded Water for Women Fund and Australian Water Partnerships attended WWW as ‘Australia – water partners for development.’

The theme for WWW 2019, held from 25-30 August 2019, was Water for Society: Including All (Leaving No one Behind).

World Water Week

The overall theme resonating throughout WWW was the need for improved governance and collaboration to drive better water stewardship.

This is now more urgent than ever, due to the existential threats that climate change poses at global, country and local levels. There was also recognition that water is a critical connector of people and central to the achievement of all the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The need for strengthened collaboration between all stakeholders to improve impact and ensure that no one is left behind was emphasised. Finding opportunities to operate outside ‘silos’ and identify solutions by working together was seen as an important way forward. Therefore, effective and sensitive partnerships for coordinated planning, policy development and programming, together with gender equality and social inclusion (GSI)-disaggregated data collection and monitoring are key to ensuring more equitable and sustainable outcomes for all in society.

These outcomes will not be achieved, however, without the empowerment of women, indigenous people, people with disabilities and other marginalised groups.

The Australian WASH Reference Group was formed in 2007 as a network of organisations working on water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) in developing countries. The WASH Reference Group has 38 members from 27 organisations, including non-government organisations, academic institutions and private consultants.

The Group works to improve the quality and quantity of Australian WASH contributions in international development, through supporting Australia’s response to the global sanitation, hygiene and water crisis.

The WRG is led by an Executive Committee (ExCom) with representatives from five organisations (WaterAid Australia, Plan International Australia, Institute for Sustainable Futures (ISF-UTS), Engineers without Borders, Monash University).

Water for Women is Australia’s flagship water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) program supporting improved health, equality and wellbeing in Asian and Pacific communities through socially inclusive and sustainable WASH projects. Water for Women is delivering 18 WASH projects in 15 countries together with 11 research projects over five years (2018-2022).

The Fund supports regular knowledge and learning events with Fund partners to facilitate the cross-fertilisation of ideas and strategies.
Water for Women @ World Water Week

1. The team who delivered Do No Harm presentations, reaffirming principles and practices in WASH
2. Team Australia booth at Tele2 Arena
3. Alison Baker presents at ‘Women & Youth: living apart together’ session
4. Leave No One Behind Learning Day begins
5. Juliet Willets shares her insights from the week
6. Group work during LNOB Learning Day in Melbourne

Sharing Insights from World Water Week
Following WWW 2019, the Learning Day was designed to share their insights from this week with sector representatives. Held at the Queen Victoria Women’s Centre Trust, the event was attended by more than 40 professionals representing DFAT, a wide range of civil society organisations and research institutions, the Water for Women Fund, Australian Water Partnership and other professionals working in the WASH sector.

Opened by Gerard Cheong from the Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Section, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and Prof Juliet Willetts, Research Director from The Institute for Sustainable Futures - University of Technology Sydney (ISF-UTS), the day provided an opportunity to reflect, discuss and debate a range of topics highlighted at WWW.

Overarching reflections from three of the Australian WWW attendees included:

"There were over 20 sessions in which Australians were involved at Stockholm this year. Sessions were developed and delivered in collaboration with different stakeholders and partners in the sector. This process of collaboration is what makes it truly valuable."

Juliet Willetts, ISF-UTS

“I was inspired by the number of young men and women committed to creating positive change around the globe, their willingness to work together to find solutions in a resource constrained environment. It gives me hope for the future.”

Alison Baker, Fund Manager, Water for Women Fund

“Accessibility to WASH facilities remains a huge issue across the world for people with a disability.”

Chelsea Huggett, Technical Lead – Equality and Inclusion, WaterAid

Topics discussed during the Learning Day included a number of themes and examples drawing from the experiences at WWW:

- The inclusion of women, youth and people with disabilities in WASH programming
- Do No Harm in WASH programs
- Climate change and social inclusion in WASH
The inclusion of women, youth and people with disabilities in WASH programming


The need to change social norms, attitudes and behaviours was explored both at WWW and during the Learning Day, recognising there is no one solution but a diversity of scenarios and approaches to improve the status of women, people with a disability and other marginalised communities – solutions need to account for local context.

The importance of practising strong and appropriate gender attitudes in grass roots organisations was also emphasised – we do need to practice what we are expecting communities to embrace. The need to include men and boys in any conversation around gender was highlighted as essential, likewise consistently including those people with a disability in conversations about those with a disability.

In summary, gender and social inclusion is the responsibility of everyone, but we must understand everyone’s perspective to find the pathway through to more inclusive practice.

From a disability perspective, Chelsea Huggett shared the accessibility challenges experienced in Stockholm and the need for people with a disability to be much better considered in future learning events. Considerably more progress is required to honestly address these issues. The video, “Local Experiences for global learnings on disability inclusive WASH”, shared on the day further highlighted the issues of inclusive WASH to participants.

WATCH ‘Local Experiences for Global Learnings on Disability Inclusive WASH’ (UNICEF)

Following the presentation, participants were grouped for discussion and to share collective efforts in leaving no one behind in inclusive WASH, what is working and, more importantly, to start addressing what they needed to do differently to improve their work in the gender and social inclusion space.
Do No Harm in WASH programs

Joanna Mott and Di Kilsby, Gender and Social Inclusion Advisers, Water for Women Fund

This session commenced with a Water for Women Fund video based on piloting of the International Women’s Development Agency’s Do No Harm Toolkit in a WASH context in Fiji through the Water for Women funded Habitat for Humanity Project. It provided a basis for exploring Do No Harm principles and approaches based on learning to date, including approaches being applied, by partners, at different levels under the Water for Women Fund. The toolkit emphasises five important principles for integrating Do No Harm in women’s empowerment:

1. Supporting women victims/survivors of violence
2. Transforming gender inequality
3. Increasing women’s participation in programs
4. Changing men’s attitudes and behaviours that support gender inequality and violence against women
5. Partnering with experienced violence against women providers

As reflected by Sarah House at the collaborative Do No Harm session at WWW (involving Water for Women Fund partners, the Fund Coordinator team and the Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council (WSSCC) the following are critical to developing localised approaches to Do No Harm:

- Understanding the context
- Understanding difference – by gender, age, abilities, other social grouping
- Understanding power dynamics - who is less able to speak and the vulnerabilities they face
- Nothing about us without us!

It was emphasised that doing no harm is everyone’s responsibility. To explore different aspects of Do No Harm, five groups were set up to discuss practical approaches to addressing the issue. These built on similar discussions hosted by Water for Women Partners and the WSSCC in Stockholm.

Highlighted within the presentation was the need to have strategies in place in inclusive WASH programming to minimise the risk of unintended consequences as a result of women and marginalised groups becoming more empowered and actively participating in WASH decision-making and service delivery.

Participants in the Do No Harm pilot with Habitat for Humanity, IWDA and local partners in Nativi village, Fiji
Climate change and social inclusion in WASH
Gerard Cheong, DFAT and Juliet Willets, ISF-UTS

“You can’t address climate change without water. Water is central to anything that we want to do... Climate change is water change, there’s no doubt about that.”

Torgny Holmgren, Executive Director, Stockholm International Water Institute

Gerard Cheong from DFAT provided an overall perspective on the SDGs and the need to address the increasing risks due to climate change:

“There’s a strong appetite for gender and socially inclusive WASH. We are building good evidence for its importance. We need to find common platforms to meet the challenge of increasing water scarcity & ensuring strong water management - we need to make it last.”

Gerard Cheong, DFAT

Juliet Willetts, ISF-UTS, then provided a comprehensive overview of the climate-related sessions and subsequent discussions that were prevalent throughout WWW. As she aptly pointed out, climate change was central to the narrative of WWW. The presentation also provided reflections from Sofa Session at WWW in which Juliet Willetts (ISF-UTS), Peter O’Connor (DFAT), Antoinette Kome (SNV) and Dennis Malambo (Lusaka Water and Sanitation Company) participated entitled:

WATCH: Climate change and social inclusion in sanitation: tension, contradiction, opportunity?

Policy instruments such as the Paris and 2030 Agenda were highlighted along with the key mechanism for countries to outline their climate actions. The need to integrate climate science into water and sanitation policy, explore mitigation actions of sanitation, and understand the links between climate change, health and WASH were also presented. Stockholm WWW provided a rich set of opportunities to explore different aspects of climate change. Following the presentation, Learning Day participants had an opportunity to explore how they could start to integrate climate change into their work, as well as identify gaps and areas where collaborative work would benefit the sector.

A key message from this session was not to fear the future and the uncertainty posed by climate change, but rather build on what we know, and draw from previous lessons and experience to look ahead and find solutions.
The day culminated in a lively discussion on the implications of findings in these areas for the contribution of Australian aid to inclusive WASH in the region.

Throughout the day, opportunities to forge new relationships with key partners in the Australian WASH sector and to strengthen existing relationships was consistently evident. The WASH Reference Group, Water for Women Fund and the Australian Water Partnership are all committed to improving learning and practice in the water resource and WASH sectors, particularly integrating a Leave No one Behind perspective. It is hoped that this first joint Learning Day has inspired thinking and provided insights on how to improve practice. Partners continue to look for opportunities to collaborate on future learning days, events and platforms and share knowledge products to maximise the contribution and impact that our efforts are making.

**The next steps?**

**Relevant links**

**READ** the overarching conclusions from World Water Week

**ACCESS** the Do No Harm learning brief

**WATCH** the Do No Harm pilot

Find out more at waterforwomenfund.org