Water for Women is partnering with SNV Netherlands Development Organisation (SNV) to deliver a five-year project in Bhutan - Beyond the Finish Line - Sustainable Sanitation and Hygiene for All, which aims to provide equitable, universal access to safely managed sanitation and hygiene for more than 214,000 people by December 2022.

In 2021, this project was awarded an Innovation and Impact grant to further strengthen the use of new evidence, innovation and practice in sustainable and inclusive water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) and, in doing so, contribute to improved learning and practice globally.

This Innovation and Impact project is being led by SNV Netherlands Development Organisation in partnership with the University of Technology Sydney, Institute for Sustainable Futures (UTS-ISF), CBM Australia, Bhutan Network for Empowering Women and Ability Bhutan Society. This project will build more sustainable WASH outcomes through strong partnerships, developing capacities and strengthened leadership.

Transformative leadership for inclusive WASH in a post-COVID world
The COVID-19 pandemic has increased the pressure on households and tested leaders. Evidence suggests more inclusive and gender transformative pathways to WASH leadership are needed to navigate future challenges, including potential pandemics and climate change.

In the last decade, significant progress has been made towards improving rural sanitation and hygiene in Bhutan. However, evidence shows that this success has not yet yielded equal benefits for poor households and disadvantaged groups, while there are further inequities related to income, gender and remoteness of households.

Through the Innovation and Impact project, partners are building on their experience of working to strengthen the national rural sanitation and hygiene program and the capacity of national and local governments, private sector and civil society organisations (CSOs), with greater emphasis on how leaders improve gender equality, social inclusion and climate change resilience.

Leveraging existing partnerships with the Royal Government of Bhutan, Bhutan Network for Empowering Women and Ability Bhutan Society, the project is consolidating and scaling up SNV Bhutan’s three leadership initiatives: ‘Leadership for Change’, ‘Making Rights Real,’ and ‘Transformative Leadership’, to the wider health, local government and CSO sectors in Bhutan. Activities include training, coaching and mentoring for health workers and people with disabilities, and the establishment of a network comprising local government, CSO and organisations of persons with disabilities to support mentoring and learning exchange.

The process is applying key learnings from research led by UTS-ISF with diverse inspirational WASH leaders in government and civil society to build the potential for ‘transformative leadership’; that is, leadership that addresses and changes gender and inclusion norms, amongst both female and male leaders.

In collaboration with CBM Australia and Ability Bhutan Society, the project is extending approaches to engage people with disabilities from within the CSO sector and supporting the development of more inclusive networks and alliances.

Together with UTS-ISF and taking an action research approach, the initiatives are being documented and synthesised to amplify the positive lessons for wider use. The project is strengthening leadership in WASH, developing capacities and partnerships and thereby building more sustainable WASH outcomes.

The Australian aid program is investing in innovation and learning to deepen impact in Bhutan through the Innovation and Impact grants. By supporting partners to further their innovation and impact, we can not only improve WASH outcomes in the South Asia region, but also contribute to improved WASH policy and practice globally. Water for Women is proud to be partnering with SNV Netherlands Development Organisation, University of Technology Sydney, Institute for Sustainable Futures, CBM Australia, Bhutan Network for Empowering Women and Ability Bhutan Society.

Links to: Beyond the Finish Line: Sustainable Sanitation and Hygiene for All in Bhutan