

Accelerating adaptation finance for climate resilient WASH in Asia and the Pacific



Water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) is essential to supporting community climate resilience, particularly ensuring that no one is left behind. Marginalised communities disproportionately experience the harsh impacts of climate change due to existing socioeconomic vulnerabilities and fragile water sources that often fail in the face of droughts, floods and extreme weather. Women and girls are often excluded from decision-making even though they play important roles as custodians of water and community caregivers.

Why WASH?

WASH is a critical entry point for reducing community vulnerability to climate impacts, closing gaps on gender, education, prosperity and health inequalities.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change identifies providing **water and sanitation services as one of the most effective measures to reduce climate vulnerability**. However, financing for climate resilient WASH services is not effectively reaching the most marginalised groups.

It is now clear that the US \$100 billion annually committed to help developing countries work on adaptation and mitigation falls significantly short of the funding required. At COP26 during the first-ever 'Needs Assessment Report', the cost of 78 Nationally Determined Contributions was estimated at US \$5.9 trillion, and 12 National Adaptation Plans were estimated at US \$135 billion. Yet the world's annual total climate finance has not gone above US \$681 billion. **Of that, only US \$12 billion has gone to water adaptation and only 0.1% of that amount to basic WASH.**

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WaterAid along with iDE, International Rescue Committee, University of Technology Sydney's Institute for Sustainable Futures, Plan International, and RTI International undertook a study based on secondary data from a desk review and primary data from interviews with key climate finance stakeholders to understand the barriers faced by Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in accessing funds for climate resilient WASH, and opportunities for funders to improve accessibility.

What are the challenges?

Financing is not reaching initiatives for marginalised groups and those who have capacity to deliver

Accessing **climate adaptation financing for WASH projects has been a challenge for CSOs due to a number of procedural, design and systemic barriers**. A lack of standard monitoring and poor linkage of WASH and climate adaptation means it is often not prioritised by donors and difficult to demonstrate impact.

Most of the CSOs involved in the research expressed that the **complexity and length** of proposal development processes was a significant barrier to applying and often resulted in a low value proposition. The **resource intensiveness** and significant amount of documentation and climate data required for a project means that local CSOs who are connected to remote communities and would otherwise be competent to deliver and implement WASH projects are often not successful in securing funding. This can **prevent funding reaching the most marginalised** and remote communities with the most appropriate solutions.

Other challenges identified by CSOs included **the need to detail all project activities and design solutions upfront**. This requirement often makes it difficult to engage with communities and facilitate ownership of their needs, as the community must be the core part of developing the solution. **Identification of project deliverables upfront by donors and NGOs means that the work is not iterative, community driven**, and sensitive to cultural processes and needs. This can often result in disengaged communities and marginalised groups who may feel that their voice is not heard during project development and delivery phases.

Finally, a **lack of visibility** among governments and donors is another barrier CSOs face, meaning they have **limited exposure** and information on funding opportunities. At times, the scale of the programmes means that focus on particularly **remote areas is neglected**, and this is often where the most marginalised people are situated. CSOs generally either rely on their international office to source funding information, their relationships with government departments or other organisations which they have worked with in the past. As such, smaller CSOs who may be connected to remote communities but do not hold these relationships are often excluded from accessing funding opportunities. **Several donors involved in the research also mentioned that they are often unaware of who to approach**, and rely on existing relationships for funding opportunities.

What can be done?

Donors must improve financing access for climate resilient WASH

Targeting financing where it is most important and reaches marginalised communities is essential. **WASH should be recognised as an integral component of any climate adaptation project** and be targeted in programs that also incorporate disaster management, food security and environmental conservation. Recognising these nexus issues through an ecosystem-based approach allows for holism and acts as an entry point to address gender equality, education, health and economic livelihoods.

Flexibility in project design is vital, especially for climate focused projects, as results such as behaviour change, water availability and data management often take time to materialise. This also allows for projects to be led by the community, as the process is iterative and relies on the community understanding their needs. Short timeframes with rigid structures and pre-defined activities mean that communities are not given the opportunity and time to discuss and identify their needs, resulting in a lack of engagement from the community and marginalised groups.

Donors should value local skillsets and modify proposal requirements to allow local CSOs who are ready to implement a chance at securing funds for climate resilient WASH projects. **Donors should also consider providing support to such organisations who lack resources to submit high-quality proposals but are otherwise capable of delivering adaptation solutions**. This could include training on proposal submission, addressing English language and translation requirements, and capacity building on monitoring and evaluation processes.

