INVESTING IN GIRLS: MARKET OPPORTUNITIES BY SECTOR

Water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH)

Scale of WASH-related issues facing girls

Water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) is a critical area to invest in for adolescent girls. While great progress has been made in improving access to basic water and sanitation, less than 50% of the population in many sub-Saharan African and South Asian countries uses improved sanitation. Though lack of access to safe water sources and open defecation are primarily rural issues, urbanisation is straining water and waste management systems. In rural areas, girls often walk long distances to obtain water for their families. UNICEF estimates that in sub-Saharan Africa, one round trip to collect water averages 33 minutes in rural areas and 25 minutes in urban areas. In Asia, it takes 21 minutes and 19 minutes, respectively.[1] This chore curtails the amount of time girls have available for other household tasks, leisure activities, to be with their families or attend school.[2]

Inadequate water and sanitation services lead to waterborne diseases, which tend to disproportionately affect the poor and marginalised.[3] Girls act as the primary caregivers and cleaners in the household and are therefore (further) affected when family members fall ill. In some cultures, the only time available for girls and women to defecate outside without being seen is after dark. Night-time trips to fields or roadsides can put them at risk of accidents, physical attacks and sexual violence. This fear may cause girls to ignore their needs, increasing the likelihood of urinary tract infection, chronic constipation and mental stress.[4]

Lack of safe and private facilities, products and knowledge to manage menstruation are significant barriers to good hygiene. These factors, along with related social stigma, can discourage girls who are menstruating from attending school or work.[5] In addition, the ability to practice good hygiene depends on a girl's family situation. For example, in Bangladesh, unmarried daughters who are wage earning can spend part of their salary on soap, hair oil and cotton pads, while married women of the same age who are not allowed to work must rely on the 'individual thoughtfulness' of their husbands and in-laws.[6]

Key statistics[7]

	Urban			Rural		
Country	% of people using at least basic drinking water services[8]	% of people using at least basic sanitation services[9]	% of people practising open defecation[10]	% of people using at least basic drinking water services	% of people using at least basic sanitation services	% People practising open defecation
Ethiopia	77	18	7	30	4	32
Kenya	83	35	3	50	28	15
Rwanda	77	57	2	49	64	2
Tanzania	79	37	2	37	17	16
Uganda	73	28	2	32	17	7
Bangladesh	98	54	0	97	43	0
Myanmar	82	76	1	60	59	7
Nepal	89	53	6	88	45	35
Pakistan	92	74	0	86	48	19

Market opportunities in the WASH sector

A range of interventions – from local household products to national policy efforts – have been employed to improve access to and use of safe and dignified WASH solutions in South Asia and East Africa. Investors should look beyond products to consider gender, age and other social dimensions of demand and decision-making power within households.[11] Involving women and girls in the planning process helps to ensure that dignified and gender-sensitive sanitation solutions are developed with them.[12] Lack of tenure security and a cash-only livelihood are significant constraints for individual households in urban slums to invest in their own sanitation facilities.[13] Public–private partnerships may therefore also offer potential to benefit adolescent girls in this sector.

Impact of WASH investments on adolescent girls

A well-documented lesson in the WASH sector is that giving people knowledge is generally not sufficient to change deeply engrained behaviour and practices related to hygiene. Less documented are the hygiene practices of adolescent girls, specifically. However, available research suggests that an investment in the WASH sector can help girls to:

LEARN: Improved access to water that reduces time and effort to collect it may increase school attendance and concentration, as may access to separate good-quality WASH facilities in school.

EARN: Access to safe and convenient water supplies and sanitation helps to free up time to focus on livelihood activities, and prevents girls from losing critical days from work due to ill-health.[14]

STAY SAFE: Increasing access to water and sanitation facilities near the home may significantly diminish the risk of harassment and assault as well as associated mental stress.

BE HEALTHY: Clean drinking water and improved sanitation reduces illness, maternal mortality and preventable deaths of children. Proper sanitation and menstrual health and hygiene facilities also enhance women and girls' sense of self-worth and wellbeing through improved privacy and dignity.[15]

Examples from SPRING WASH businesses

SmartPaani is a private company in Nepal that provides sustainable water management solutions, including rainwater harvesting, water filtration and wastewater treatment, in order to tackle the shortage of clean, safe water. Through SPRING, the company developed a business model to reach base-of-pyramid communities and enable girls and their families to get easier access to clean water. To do this they provided an improved clean water solution to schools, which can also serve as a community water filtration and purification hub, combined with WASH education and training for local women entrepreneurs. Positive impacts are as follows:

- Girls gain long-term access to safe, clean drinking water at school.
- Girls exposed to WASH messages increase their awareness and share information with their families, leading to better WASH practices and reduced illness among girls and their families.
- Children sharing WASH knowledge may encourage families and teachers to buy SmartPaani's filters for home use from the company's locally trained women entrepreneurs.

Drinkwell is a clean water company in Bangladesh. During SPRING, the business established a partnership with Dhaka WASA, a local water utility serving over 18 million users in urban Dhaka. By installing clean water pumps throughout Dhaka, Drinkwell is not only benefitting girls by improving their health, but also creating added benefits of reducing the need to boil water (typically done by girls and women in the middle of the night when gas pressure is higher), thereby freeing up time and allowing more sleep.

For more information about Drinkwell, see our publication: Scaling social business through design thinking.

This brief is a combined summary of the SPRING East Africa and South Asia region-specific WASH briefs, which will be published in September 2019.

Notes

1 UNICEF (2016). 'Collecting Water is Often a Colossal Waste of Time for Women and Girls.' Press release. Available: https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/unicef-collecting-water-often-colossal-waste-time-women-and-girls. Accessed 2 August 2019.
2 Ibid.
3 Mahbub ul Haq Human Development Centre (2014). 'Human Development in South Asia 2014 – Urbanization: Challenges and Opportunities.'
4 Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (2015). 'Women, Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Brief.' Sida. March.
5 Mehta, L. (2013). 'Ensuring Rights to Water and Sanitation for Women and Girls.' Paper for the 57th UN Commission on the Status of women.
6 Joshi D., Fawcett B. and Mannan F. (2011). 'Health, Hygiene, and Appropriate Sanitation: Perceptions of the Urban Poor.' Environment and Urbanization 23(1): 91–111. DOI: 10.1177/0956247811398602.
7 All statistics are percentage of population, 2015.
8 WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme (JMP) data retrieved from http://data.worldbank.org/. 'Basic drinking water services' refers to an improved water source within 30 minutes round trip collection time. Improved water sources include: piped household connections, public taps or standpipes, boreholes or tube wells, protected dug wells, protected springs, rainwater, tanker trucks and bottled water. Unimproved sources include unprotected dug wells and unprotected springs.
9 JMP data retrieved from http://data.worldbank.org/. 'Basic sanitation services' refers to a private improved facility that separates excreta from human contact. Improved facilities include: flush/pour flush to piped sewer, septic tank or pit latrine; composing toilet or pit latrine with slab. Unimproved sanitation facilities include pit latrines without a slab or platform, hanging latrines and bucket latrines.
10 JMP data retrieved from http://data.worldbank.org/.
11 Ahmed S. (2009). 'The CLTS Story in Bangladesh: Chronicles of a People's Movement'
Miller G. and Mobarak A.M. (2013). 'Gender Differences in Preferences'; Khanna T. and Das M. (2016). 'Why Gender Matters in the Solution towards Safe Sanitation?'
12 Khanna T. and Das M. (2016). 'Why Gender Matters in the Solution towards Safe Sanitation?' Global Public Health 11(10): 1185–1201.
13 Joshi D., Fawcett B. and Mannan F. (2011). 'Health, Hygiene, and Appropriate Sanitation: Perceptions of the Urban Poor.' Environment and Urbanization. 23(1): 91–111. DOI: 10.1177/0956247811398602.
14 Mehta L. (2013). 'Ensuring Rights to Water and Sanitation for Women and Girls.' Paper for the 57th UN Commission on the Status of Women.
15 Ibid.

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