



Clean water and sanitation (SDG6)

*Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all*⁵⁹

Challenges to clean water and sanitation – the global picture

- Billions of people still lack access to clean water and sanitation and, vitally, access to sanitation is key to stopping the spread of Covid-19.
- “Availability and access to water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services is fundamental to fighting the virus and preserving the health and wellbeing of millions” ([United Nations, March 2020](#)).⁶⁰

Challenges to clean water and sanitation – local community perspectives

The residents of informal settlements are especially vulnerable to health risks arising from lack of freshwater and sanitation. By definition, informal settlements are where public services are inadequately planned and provided.

In Mumbai, India, typical houses are only 200-400 square feet and most people rely on public toilets, according to [Sheela Patel of Slum Dwellers International](#).⁶¹ There was insufficient sanitation here before the pandemic – neither enough water, soap and cleaning supplies, nor electricity to keep the toilet blocks in functioning order, she reports. A recent decision by the municipality not to charge for the use of the toilet blocks left them without revenue for maintenance and “nobody has any answers,” Ms Patel said.

The Sustainable Development Goal for clean water and sanitation also covers solid waste and its appropriate management, stating: “By 2030, improve water quality by reducing pollution, eliminating dumping and minimising release of hazardous chemicals and materials, halving the proportion of untreated wastewater and substantially increasing recycling and

safe reuse globally.” Several Voices from the Frontline told of how waste collection and management services were initially suspended as a result of Covid-related lockdowns, leading to deleterious amounts of solid waste clogging cities’ streets and waterways (at worse levels than previously). “By the time the lockdown was eased, the whole city and its streams and rivers were filled with garbage,” says [Eva Mokoena, the chairperson of African Reclaimers Organisation, Johannesburg](#), South Africa.⁶²

Grassroots solutions for achieving clean water and sanitation

Latrine construction. An effective route to meeting communities’ sanitation needs is suggested by an initiative in Uganda. Here, Women’s Climate Centres International (WCCI) runs a ‘one-stop centre’ that equips community members with construction skills including how to build and safely manage innovative sanitation technologies, such as ecological toilets, lined Ventilated Pit Latrines, and double leach toilets. A [story from Twehayo Naume of Kabulasoke](#)⁶³ in Gomba District, Central Uganda, tells how her training enabled her to meet vital community needs and provided the critical income her family desperately needed.

“Many people gave me work to construct improved toilets for them. I was overwhelmed with so many job opportunities but was struggling to meet the market demand individually.”

Twehayo Naume, Kabulasoke, Uganda

To meet the extensive demand, Ms Naume went on to train groups of young women and men from her county in latrine construction skills. She then worked to match supply and demand, by encouraging households to form clusters of ten and [pool their finances](#)⁶⁴ to purchase improved latrines. Village Health Team members guide the households to select



Twehayo Naume has trained other young people in Kabulasoke, Uganda, to provide their community with sanitation facilities that include functional hand washing provision. © Godliver Businge

appropriate sanitation designs and contact available trained masons to expedite construction.

Soaps, gels and hand hygiene. Among the Voices from the Frontline stories, it is evident that NGOs and networks of grassroots organisations are playing key roles in the provision of seed capital for local people to purchase the raw materials for production of soaps and hand gels, as well as skills training and sometimes the direct provision of raw materials.

In an informal settlement of Zimbabwe's capital Harare, called Hatcliffe, the Safe and Inclusive Cities project [provided raw materials for soap-making](#)⁶⁵ to young entrepreneurs. This increased young people's sales and savings, as well as boosting uptake of soap use at community water points.

In [Siaya, Kenya](#),⁶⁶ and [also in Kampala, Uganda](#),⁶⁷ women's groups obtained soap-making supplies from NGOs and federations of grassroots groups, and then distributed the soap widely in their communities.

Freshwater points. Hundreds of millions of people around the world still lack access to reliable freshwater supplies, and the pandemic has only heightened

the need to address this challenge. Communities are highly motivated to improve supplies and have been raising their voices for improved levels of government services, especially to informal settlements. In Hatcliffe, the informal settlement in Zimbabwe, local youth leader [Steven Nyamapfeka arrives first thing in the morning](#)⁶⁸ to instruct residents to wash their hands before touching the borehole handle, and to sanitise the handle between uses. Residents of the area have asked the Ministry of Health to increase the supply of chlorinated water.

"My group has managed to distribute hand washing soaps near community boreholes to promote hygiene. We also influenced community leaders to regularly disinfect and monitor the water points to ensure safety. These public spaces have improved. Chaos is avoided as people adhere to protocols set by the leadership."

*Lonica Kenneth, Hatcliffe settlement, Harare, Zimbabwe*⁶⁹

“As the team commenced their work, they received a donation from Women’s Climate Centers International (WCCI). They worked together, made more soap ready for distribution and bought a few 5-litre cans to make tippy taps. Later on, they distributed over 300 litres of soap with donations from well-wishers and distributed face masks and some food items to over 50 households.”

Rosemary Atieno, Community Mobilization for Positive Empowerment (COMPE)⁷⁰

Solid waste management. Organising a massive clean-up campaign to remove the solid waste littering streets and waterways in Johannesburg, South Africa has become a mission for the African Reclaimers Organisation. “We did the campaign for two reasons: first to clean up the city and environment and, second, to legitimise our existence to the city dwellers. Waste reclaimers have always been looked down upon and were never given the proper recognition, legality and respect by the citizens. We wanted to change that notion,” said director Eva Mokoena.⁷¹ It will require additional resources, such as a large waste truck, to fulfil the group’s ambitions for the massive clean-up, but they are fundraising hard to meet their goals.

In Colombia, waste pickers there, too, are subject to social discrimination because of their livelihood. Like their South African counterparts, waste pickers were sent home at the outset of the pandemic and lost income – even as solid waste piled up and became a growing public health hazard. Here, waste pickers worked through their existing associations to lobby the government successfully to allow them to get back to work.

“Realising that staying at home wouldn’t be an effective survival strategy, a significant number of waste picker organisations, most of which are members of National Association of Waste Pickers (ANR),⁷² started organising themselves and advocating for recognition as essential service providers. It allowed them to have an organisational platform to have a common voice to call for clear rights, as well as a clear sectoral response to the new threat. Finally on 22 March 2020, the first national decree was issued

recognising their work as an essential service. The national government established the safety protocols that the organisations should follow. As a result, waste picker organisations that followed these protocols were able to move on the streets for limited hours, even during the lockdown. The recognition as public service providers and formal remuneration have bolstered the financial resilience and stability of waste pickers’ livelihoods in the face of Covid-19 and future uncertainties,” reported Federico Parra.⁷³

Enabling actions to support and work with community solutions

- ➔ Redouble efforts to extend freshwater supplies for drinking and sanitation to communities that do not yet have reliable supplies, and assess and plan water supply and allocation in light of changing climatic patterns (e.g. supply to reservoirs, groundwater recharge, etc.).
- ➔ Train community groups in hygiene practices so that they can spread accurate information and effectively create more hygienic arrangements (e.g. for hand washing) in their communities.
- ➔ Provide small entrepreneurs and community groups with raw materials for production of hygiene materials such as soap and hand gels, which local people can then use for income generation while also promoting public health.
- ➔ Train individuals in construction techniques for safe, environmentally-friendly and locally appropriate latrines and sanitation infrastructure.
- ➔ Provide formal labour rights to waste pickers and formal negotiating rights to their labour unions/associations.
- ➔ Train waste pickers in Covid-safe hygiene protocols and protect the most clinically vulnerable of them (e.g. elderly) from exposure to potentially contaminated materials.