

ACTION SHEET

5.1 Implement safe water/sanitation programmes

Sector: Water and Sanitation

Phase: Minimum Prevention and Response

Background

Safe drinking water and proper sanitation and hygiene practises are critical for survival in all stages of an emergency. In many emergencies, people are very susceptible to illness and death from water-borne diseases. Women and children are particularly at risk because they are usually the largest percentage of the poorest of the poor and comprise the majority in displaced populations; in many cultures men have priority in the distribution of limited food and drinking water.

When using communal water and sanitation facilities, women and girls are vulnerable to sexual violence. To minimise these risks, it is important to actively seek women's participation in water supply and sanitation programmes, especially when selecting sites, and constructing and maintaining the facilities. Design of water and sanitation systems, including information dissemination, must be based upon thorough understanding of the community, including sex-disaggregated data, gender analysis, and security considerations. Protection and security measures such as lighting and security patrols must always complement technically appropriate and equitable water and sanitation programmes.

Key Actions

The following actions apply to the water/sanitation sector, that is organisations implementing water/sanitation programmes. The water/sanitation sector identifies a focal point who participates regularly in the GBV working group and reports on the water/sanitation sector's achievement of the key actions. The water/sanitation sector focal point participates in cross-cutting functions led by the GBV coordinating agencies and working groups, as described in Action Sheets for Coordination, Assessment and monitoring, Human resources, and Information education communication.

1. Identify safety and security risks for women and girls that are relevant to water and sanitation systems to ensure the location, design, and maintenance programmes maximise safety and security of women and girls.

- Participate in the coordinated situational analysis (see [Action Sheet 2.1, Conduct a coordinated rapid situation analysis](#)) to gather relevant information about the community and situation related to sexual violence.
- Special attention should be paid to the needs of vulnerable groups of women and girls, such as single female-headed households, adolescents, unaccompanied girl children, etc.

2. Mobilise women and men to participate in the location, design, and maintenance of water and sanitation facilities.

- Do not let women be overburdened.
- Ensure all users, and particularly women and girls, participate in identifying risky hygiene practices and conditions, and that all users share responsibility to measurably reduce these risks.
- Establish water and/or sanitation committees comprised of 50% women. The committees are responsible for the maintenance of water and sanitation facilities.

3. Locate water points in areas that are accessible and safe for all, with special attention to the needs of women and children.

- Discuss the location of the pumps with all members of the community.
- As a guide, no household should be more than 500 metres from a water point.

4. Design or adapt hand pumps and water carrying containers for use by women and children.

5. In situations where water is rationed or pumped at given times, plan this in consultation with all users, but especially with women.

- Times should be set which are convenient and safe for women and others who have responsibility for collecting water.
- All users should be fully informed of when and where water is available.

6. Design communal bathing and washing facilities in consultation with women and girls to ensure that users have privacy and maintain dignity.

- Determine numbers, location, design, safety, appropriateness, and convenience of facilities in consultation with the users, particularly

women and adolescent girls (including whether facilities for males and females should be near each other or further apart).

- Facilities should be central, accessible, and well-lit in order to contribute to the safety of users.
- Bathing facilities should have doors with locks on the inside.

7. Design latrines in consultation with women and girls to maximise safety, privacy, and dignity.

- Consider preferences and cultural habits in determining the type of latrines to be constructed.
- Use sex-disaggregated data to plan the ratio of women's cubicles to men's. A rough guide is 3:1.
- Install latrines with doors that lock from the inside.
- Location of latrines should ensure that women and girls feel — and are — safe using them.
- Communal latrines should be provided with lighting, or families provided with torches.

8. Distribute suitable materials for the absorption and disposal of menstrual blood for women and girls who menstruate. (See [Action Sheet 7.4, Provide sanitary materials to women and girls.](#))

9. Inform women and men about the maintenance and use of water and sanitation facilities.

- Women and men should be fully informed of how to repair facilities and how to make/where to find spare parts.
- Determine timings of information sessions in consultation with the intended users, particularly women, so as not to conflict with their other responsibilities.
- Use/adapt information and promotional materials to ensure they are culturally acceptable and accessible to all groups (e.g. women, illiterate members of the population).
- Use participatory materials and methods that allow all groups to plan and monitor their own hygiene improvements. As a rough guide, in a camp scenario there should be two hygiene promoters/community mobilisers, one female and one male, per 1,000 members of the population.

10. Maintain awareness of involvement of women and men in hygiene promotional activities and ensure continuous sex balance on committees and among hygiene promoters.

- Ensure that women are not overburdened with the responsibility for hygiene promotional activities or management of water and sanitation facilities.
- Ensure that women and men have equitable influence in hygiene promotional activities and that any benefits or incentives are distributed equally among women and men.

Key Reference Materials

1. *Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response*. The Sphere Project, Geneva 2004.. Sphere, 2004. www.sphereproject.org
2. Toolkit on gender in water and sanitation. World Bank. [http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/lib.nsf/db900SID/LHON-5TVFSP/\\$FILE/WorldBank_gender_1998.pdf?OpenElement](http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/lib.nsf/db900SID/LHON-5TVFSP/$FILE/WorldBank_gender_1998.pdf?OpenElement)
3. Gender in water and sanitation checklist. Asian Development Bank (ADB). www.adb.org/gender
4. Gender and Water Alliance. <http://www.genderandwater.org/>
5. Gender guidelines for water supply and sanitation. AusAID. http://www.ausaid.gov.au/publications/pdf/gender_guidelines_water.pdf