

UN WATER

WATER AND GENDER

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UNITED NATIONS

Without safe drinking water, adequate sanitation and hygiene facilities at home and in places of work and education, it is disproportionately harder for women and girls to lead safe, productive, healthy lives.

Across low-income countries, women and girls have primary responsibility for management of household water supply, sanitation and health. Often, fulfilling these roles precludes any other occupation or participation in education, and their marginalization is compounded by the indignity and insecurity of having nowhere private to go to the toilet. Addressing the needs of females in relation to water, sanitation and hygiene is a key driver in achieving gender equity and locking the potential of half of global society.

Challenges

In many countries, the presence or absence of a safe and sufficient water supply and improved sanitation facilities has a disproportionate effect on the lives of women

and girls for three main reasons. First, women and girls usually bear the responsibility for collecting water, which is often very time-consuming and arduous. Second, women and girls are more vulnerable to abuse and attack while walking to and using a toilet or open defecation site. And third, women have specific hygiene needs during menstruation, pregnancy and child rearing

Opportunities

At the local level, gender-sensitive approaches are helping to improve the suitability, sustainability and reach of water and sanitation services by both focusing on and involving women in the facilities' design, implementation and management. Embedding gender equity into policy at all levels will be crucial to achieving water and sanitation for all, which in turn will help advance many other parts of the SDG agenda, particularly education and work.

Facts and figures

- About three quarters of households in sub-Saharan Africa fetch water from a source away from their home and 50% to 85% of the time, women are responsible for this task. ([UNESCO, 2016](#))
- In South Africa, in poor rural households, women who fetch water and fuel wood spend 25% less time in paid employment. ([UNESCO, 2012](#))
- Reducing the time it takes to fetch water from 30 to 15 minutes increased girls' school attendance by 12% according to a study in Tanzania. ([UNICEF](#))
- About 44 million pregnant women have sanitation-related hookworm infections that pose a considerable health burden in developing societies. ([UNICEF](#))

Find out more:

IFAD (2012): [Gender and Water – Securing water for improved rural livelihoods](#)

UNDP: [Gender and Water](#)

UNICEF: [Gender and water, sanitation and hygiene \(WASH\)](#)

UNESCO [WWAP Overview of resources on gender-sensitive data related to water](#)

UN-Water: [Gender, Water and Sanitation – A Policy Brief](#)

UN Women: [Women and the Sustainable Development Goals](#)

WaterAid: [Water and Women](#)

