

Empowerment in WASH Index



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Key messages

- The Empowerment in WASH Index (EWI) is a new survey-based tool to measure women's empowerment and gender outcomes in the WASH sector.
- EWI can help to fill key gender data gaps in the sector.
- EWI can be used to inform better design of WASH interventions, and to monitor and evaluate WASH-related gender outcomes.

This brief presents a new Empowerment in WASH Index (EWI) that is designed to measure empowerment in the WASH sector. We describe how the EWI tool is constructed using a series of indicators, and a case study applying the EWI in Burkina Faso.

Gender and WASH connections

Women and girls are disproportionately impacted by poor WASH services due to both social norms and biological factors. Gendered division of labour often means that women and girls conduct more WASH-related work, such as collecting water for the household, cleaning WASH facilities, and caring for sick family members. These activities contribute to the burden of unpaid domestic work and are thought to limit time for income generation, education and leisure. Safe WASH services are also particularly critical for women and girls during menstruation, pregnancy and nursing.

Provision of adequate WASH facilities is often thought to be the solution to WASH-related gender disparities. But technical solutions alone, while important, do not address decision-making power or control over resources. Women who have less say in their household or community, such as in selecting and managing WASH services, may not have access to services that meet their needs. It is clear that achieving SDG 6: Clean Water and Sanitation is inextricably linked to progress in achieving SDG 5: Gender Equality, yet there is a lack of data for tracking progress on these goals. By providing sex-disaggregated data on the gendered dimensions of WASH services, EWI can help fill this data gap.

Measuring empowerment

Empowerment is crucial, both as a stand-alone goal and for achieving other development objectives. A number of approaches have been developed to measure women's empowerment. Tools to capture global gender disparities include the Gender

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Empowerment Measure (GEM), which measures participation in economic and political life, and the Gender Development Index (GDI), which measures gender differences in human development. At the country level, however, these tools are limited because they do not directly measure individual empowerment or household and community power relations. Approaches using individual level data have been developed, including the Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index (WEAI), which directly measures empowerment of men and women in the agricultural sector (Alkire et al. 2013). The WEAI has been used both to monitor interventions and to inform the design of gender-integrated interventions and policies.

Despite the important links between WASH services and gender equality, measurement of empowerment related to WASH has so far been limited, especially compared to other areas of development such as access to financial services, reproductive health, and agriculture and nutrition. Monitoring tools have tended to focus on household access to different levels of WASH services, with little attempt to measure progress in achieving gender and social equality outcomes.

Empowerment in WASH Index

The Empowerment in Wash Index (EWI) measures agency, participation and empowerment in the water and sanitation sector. The Index is made up of indicators to assess empowerment in relation to WASH roles and responsibilities as well as broader society (see Table 1). Data on each indicator is collected using a survey that targets both male and female decision-makers in households. The indicators address empowerment at individual, household and community levels, as described below:

Individual level: Because personal values and attitudes inform agency, this indicator assesses whether respondents believe they could make their own decisions if they wanted to, regardless of who currently makes household decisions. Assessment at this level focuses on domestic water collection and management, expenditures, and participation outside the household.

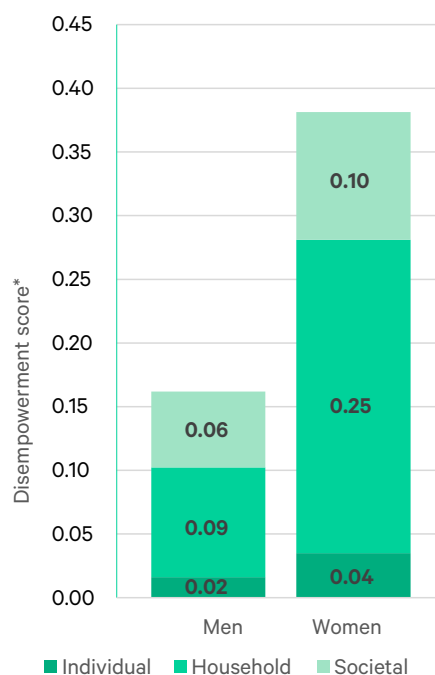
Household level: Empowerment at the household level includes indicators focused on instrumental agency, relating to power to make decisions on WASH roles and responsibilities, expenditures, and participation in community activities. Other indicators assess control of assets and workload, which influence ability to participate in decision-making or achieve desired goals. Indicators also measure access to WASH-related information and sharing of that information within the household, such as information on citizens' rights to WASH services.

Community level: Water and sanitation interventions are often designed and managed with community input, so participation in these activities can influence their outcomes. EWI indicators address whether respondents feel comfortable speaking up in public on implementation of WASH services, or to make complaints to local leaders or authorities about services. Group membership is also assessed; that is, the extent to which people are involved in community associations.

HOW CAN EWI BE APPLIED?

For monitoring and evaluation. Information on each indicator is combined into an EWI score which can be used to monitor changes in empowerment from an initial baseline. The score can also be disaggregated to track progress on particular indicators, which helps to communicate complex information about women's empowerment and gender equality outcomes in a way that is easier for decision-makers to understand and apply.

Figure 1: Comparison of how individual, household and societal indicators contribute to disempowerment in WASH for men and women respondents in Banfora. A larger bar indicates greater contribution to disempowerment.



*Disempowerment score is 1 minus EWI score, and ranges from zero to one, where higher values indicate greater contribution to disempowerment

To design better interventions. The tool can be used for diagnostic assessments to understand existing areas of disempowerment, which can inform the design of gender-integrated WASH interventions that target these areas, which may be context specific.

Who can apply it?

Development organizations and donors can use EWI to monitor and evaluate WASH interventions, or to plan and design interventions. It can also be used by researchers to investigate connections between empowerment and WASH services or other development outcomes such as health and well-being.

How is the Empowerment in WASH Index constructed?

The approach for constructing the EWI was adapted from the Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index (Alkire et al. 2013). This approach calculates who is empowered, and how much they are empowered in order to create an index. Respondents are scored on 12 indicators based on whether they achieve a particular threshold (e.g. the respondent gives a high level of input into decisions on household water management). Empowered respondents are identified as those that have achieved a minimum of 75% of the indicators. This means that while a respondent may achieve a particular indicator, such as household decision-making in WASH, he or she would still be considered disempowered if not enough other indicators are achieved. A comparison is made between empowerment scores for men and women from the same household to calculate a gender parity index (GPI).

Case study – informing implementation of a WASH master plan in Burkina Faso

The EWI tool was applied in Banfora, Burkina Faso, in collaboration with IRC and local WASH authorities, who are developing and implementing a 2018–2030 strategic master plan for water and sanitation services (Commune de Banfora 2018). We collected data from 600 respondents in 20 rural and peri-urban communities. The findings showed that men respondents were more empowered than women respondents in WASH (see Table 1). Women were more disempowered at the individual, household and community levels (see Figure 1). Among disempowered respondents, the level of achievement was 48% for women and 57% for men, showing that women have further to go to reach empowerment.

Table 1: Case study findings in Banfora, Burkina Faso

	Women	Men
Percentage of empowered respondents	26%	63 %
Percentage of indicator achievement by disempowered respondents	48%	57%
EWI score	0.62	0.83
Percentage of households without gender parity	82%	
Average empowerment gap between respondents in a household	30%	

How to increase women's empowerment in Banfora

The indicators that contributed most to disempowerment for women in Banfora were:

- input into household decisions on expenditure for water and sanitation
- input into household decisions to participate in community WASH activities
- work balance
- comfort in interactions with WASH authorities or local institutions to make complaints about services.

Because the Index revealed which factors contribute most to women's disempowerment, the municipality can target these factors as it implements the master plan. Not only can the quantitative information that the EWI provides help stakeholders to prioritize factors that contribute to disempowerment, the data can also help make the case for taking gender disparities in WASH seriously.



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Links between WASH services and empowerment

The research team used the EWI results in Banfora (applying a Pearson's chi-squared test) to investigate the links between provision of safe water and sanitation services and levels of empowerment levels. These results showed that more empowered women than disempowered women used a water source on premises or an improved sanitation facility. In addition, fewer empowered women compared with disempowered women paid by container for water, compared with other arrangements such as annual fees. These findings indicate that empowerment has important implications for WASH service delivery.

Conclusions

Although safe water and sanitation are widely believed to be critical for women's empowerment and gender equality, there have been limited efforts to measure empowerment in the WASH sector. But because the EWI can collect this information, it can support assessments to capture both positive or negative gender outcomes of interventions, and help identify the pathways through which interventions and services can increase empowerment. This means that greater progress can be made towards universal access to WASH services and reducing related gender disparities.

The Empowerment in WASH Index provides a new approach to measure and monitor empowerment and WASH-related gender outcomes. Next steps for developing the EWI will include cross-cultural comparisons and validation of the tool, as well conducting intersectional analysis to provide information on how women's empowerment in WASH intersects with other social factors such as age and ethnicity.

References

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