



Women in WASH Opportunities and challenges for women's participation and leadership in the Indonesian WASH sector

Findings from a national assessment

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OBJECTIVE

The assessment on the situation of women working in the water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) sector in Indonesia, aimed to understand the roles women are currently undertaking, any barriers they face and opportunities to promote women's participation and leadership and contributions to the sector.

KEY LEARNING POINTS

1. There has been good progress of increasing numbers of women working in the Indonesian Government Civil Service as well as in other WASH sector organisations, with women being in the majority in some positions, such as in Community Sanitarian and Community Health Worker roles.
2. There has also been a positive trajectory of more women taking up middle management, and sometimes senior decision-making roles in the WASH sector, including in the Ministry of Health Environmental Health Directorate, the Health Promotion Directorate and in the Ministry of Public Works, Sanitation Directorate. But overall, more senior decision-makers in government are still male.
3. Barriers to women taking up more senior roles in the WASH sector, include challenges from ensuring work-life balance with family responsibilities, fear of being moved away from the family and sometimes a personal decision to not take on this level of position and responsibility. Some women may also leave the workforce to have children and may find it difficult to re-enter to move into senior level positions.

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE OF THE ASSESSMENT

The Women in WASH study is part of a larger gender and disability inclusion assessment in WASH, undertaken by UNICEF Indonesia, under the guidance of the Ministry of Health. This aims to establish how well the Indonesian WASH sector has considered and integrated gender and disability inclusion into its institutional WASH facilities and services, existing gaps and strategies to strengthen gender and disability mainstreaming efforts for sustainable WASH. This technical brief provides a snapshot on the current situation of women working in the WASH sector, aiming to understand the roles they hold and barriers to their engagement in roles where they are less represented, as well as opportunities to strengthen women's leadership in WASH. The study contributes to UNICEF's efforts to promote gender equality and women's empowerment in the WASH sector.

SCOPE AND APPROACHES

The assessment was undertaken between December 2021 and June 2022 and used both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. For the overall assessment, including the field work undertaken in 5 districts, a total of 423 people were interviewed. The interviewees included 183 males, 240 females, 55 school children and 97 older people and people with disabilities. As well as a desk study, a total of 205 activities were undertaken, including key informant interviews (KIIs), focus group discussions (FGDs), User short questionnaire surveys (SQs) and Accessibility, Equity and Safety audits (AESCs). Questions on women working in the WASH sector were incorporated into 41 of 49 KII and FGD consultation activities at national, provincial, district and health facility levels. A total of 73 participants (26 male, 47 female and 17 people with disabilities) were involved in the 42 consultation activities, 21 of the consultation activities dedicated to this subject and another 21 including these questions in addition to questions on the broader institutional assessment.

Participants were mainly working either at national level or in East Nusa Tenggara (NTT), East Java, Aceh or Central Sulawesi Provinces, although some participants came from other provinces in Indonesia. Challenges were faced in obtaining comprehensive employment data across institutions and organisations, although a range of case study examples were identified, from which a general picture can be seen.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Government of Indonesia laws and regulations

The Government of Indonesia, has increasingly integrated issues related to women into a range of its laws, regulations and guidelines across ministries over a number of years.

Various ministries have developed regulations and associated roadmaps and guidance related to gender mainstreaming¹ and gender planning and budgeting², and for the requirement to provide breast-feeding rooms and facilities³ and also for menstrual hygiene-related gender-segregated WASH facilities in offices.⁴

Other studies on women in the WASH sector in Indonesia

Most of the other documented studies on women working in the WASH sector in Indonesia have been prepared by the University of Technology, Sydney, the Universitas Indonesia and Yayasan Plan International Indonesia, under funding by the Water for Women Fund of the Australian Government. Three key studies undertaken by these partners included one on women in leadership in the Indonesian WASH sector (2021);⁵ a study looking at issues of diversity among female WASH entrepreneurs in Indonesia (2021);⁶ and a summary brief on working with women's organisations (2022).⁷ Apart from these three recent studies and a few older cross-country studies on women as entrepreneurs in the Indonesian WASH sector, there has been limited attention on this subject.

Women working in the Indonesian WASH sector

Benefits of women working in the WASH sector -

Women bring the sector a range of skills, knowledge and commitment. It increases the WASH sector's understanding of the needs of women and girls in institutions and communities, and with the potential to increase the focus on gender in programme designs and implementation. They also become role models for girls and other women, and this opens up more opportunities for female engagement in programmes, particularly where there are strong gender rules and norms, which result in women and men having to meet separately.

- 1 For example: Decree of the Minister of Public Works and Public Housing, Number: 1515/KPTS/M/2020, Establishment of Gender Mainstreaming Team of the Ministry of Public Works and Public Housing, https://pug-pupr.pu.go.id/_uploads/Produk_Pengaturan/473%20SK%20PUG%20PUPR%202015.pdf; Responsive Gender | Kementerian PUPR; and Ministry of National Development Planning / National Development Planning Agency, Roadmap on Gender Mainstreaming in BNPB 2021-2024, <https://www.siapsiaga.or.id/knowledge-product/buku-roadmap-pengarusutamaan-gender-di-lingkungan-bn-pb-2021-2024/?msclid=1fbc0cf4b68d11ec837588d29565ec9b>
- 2 Instructions for the Implementation of Gender-Responsive Planning and Budgeting, for Local Governments, 270 / M.PPN / 11 / 2012NOMOR: SE-33 / MK.02 / 2012NOMOR: 050 / 4379A / SJNOMOR: SE 46 / MPP-PA / 11/2012, https://pug-pupr.pu.go.id/_uploads/PP/PPRG.pdf
- 3 For example: Circular Letter, No: 07/SEM/2011, Provision of a Special Room for Breast Milking (BREAST MILK) in the Ministry of Public Works, https://pug-pupr.pu.go.id/_uploads/Produk_Pengaturan/SEMENPU-07-2011.pdf
- 4 For example: Regulation of Employment of the Republic of Indonesia, Number 5 of 2018, Concerning Occupational Safety and Health of the Work Environment, https://jdih.kemnaker.go.id/asset/data_puu/Permen_5_2018.pdf
- 5 Soeters, S. Siscawati, M., Ratnasari, Anggriani, S., Nailah & Willetts, J. (2021) Women in Leadership - Reflections from the government WASH workforce in Indonesia, Summary Brief, ISF-UTS, Sydney, https://multisitestaticcontent.uts.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/sites/57/2021/12/08063953/UTS-ISF-UI-and-Plan_2021_Women-in-Leadership-Reflections-on-Government-WASH-Workforce_Summary-brief.pdf
- 6 Kumar, A. Siscawati, M., SeptianiAnggriani, Ratnasari and Nailah, Willetts, J. (2021) What will it take to strengthen diversity amongst female water, sanitation and hygiene entrepreneurs in Indonesia? Summary Brief, ISF-UTS, Sydney, https://multisitestaticcontent.uts.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/sites/57/2021/12/08062656/UTS-ISF-UI-and-Plan_2021_Strengthening-Diversity-in-Female-WASH-Entrepreneurs_Summary-brief.pdf
- 7 Siscawati, M., Ratnasari, N., Soegito, A., Ila, N., Grant, M., Willetts, J., Kumar, A and Davis, I (2022) "We cannot work alone": A study of WASH and gender equality civil society partnerships, Summary Brief, Universitas Indonesia and UTS, University of Sydney, <https://multisitestaticcontent.uts.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/sites/57/2022/02/22080928/UTS-ISF-CSO-Partnerships-Indonesia-Summary.pdf>



Gender-segregated toilets in a Puskesmas, Jember, East Java (Credit: PT Myriad Research, 2022)

Roles in which women are employed - Women working in the WASH sector are from a range of backgrounds. For example: environmental and civil engineering; public health; teaching; social sciences; management; agriculture; anthropology; social economy in agriculture, nutrition and planning.

Increasing numbers of women working in the Civil Service and in WASH roles in UNICEF and CSOs

There are increasing numbers of women in Civil Service roles, with a larger number of females than males, across the whole of Indonesia (females make up 53% of the civil service in Indonesia in 2021).⁸ There are also increasing numbers of women in middle management and coordination roles working in the WASH sector, in working in CSOs and UNICEF, and in Sanitarian and Community Health Worker roles at community level. UNICEF's WASH team currently has 50% of males/females and data from two international CSOs highlighted women in senior positions and between one third and two thirds of the WASH staff being female. In NTT Province 97% of Health Cadres are female and in East Java Province, Community Sanitarians and Community Health Workers were 81% and 68% female respectively.

⁸ <https://www.bkn.go.id/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/STATISTIK-PNS-Desember-2021.pdf>



Some women started as volunteers in humanitarian response, such as the Aceh Tsunami response, or in community health-related work, and then moved to district, provincial and national roles. Some started work in fields such as agriculture, environment, health, or education, and in organisations working across sectors, before moving more into WASH.

Roles in which women are less represented - Although there are increasing numbers of women in the WASH sector, there are still less women in senior decision-making roles in government, including in the Government of Indonesia WASH Working Groups. For example, across the civil service, only 10% of the top grade of staff are female. In the Provincial NTT WASH Working Group, females currently make up 20% of the membership, whereas in the same WASH Working Group in East Java, they currently make up 43% of the membership.

Senior government leadership roles by gender in the WASH sector

In some of the key ministry directorates working at national level in WASH (MoH, Environmental Health and Health Promotion and MoPW, Sanitation), women hold more senior leadership positions than males (females, 71%, 71% and 57% respectively). But there are less females working in senior positions in the MoPW in Water Supply (females 17%) and in the MoEC in the Primary School Directorate (females 30%).



Hand-washing facilities in a Puskesmas in Kupang, NTT (Credit: PT Myriad Research, 2022)



More women are working in WASH-related community roles in the health sector, than are holding roles within health facilities and less women working in field-based and construction roles for CSOs than males.

Positive examples of women in WASH - Most women shared that they usually feel encouraged in the sector, that their opinions are listened to and that they feel that they have had similar opportunities to male colleagues. Women also felt the recruitment process is generally fair and positions are open to them, although occasional experiences were shared about how males tend to get more opportunities for field work, where some women would also appreciate more opportunities to undertake field work. Some organisations have maternity and paternity leave and provide facilities for breastfeeding and to support child-care. However, this is thought to vary across organisations, being less likely for smaller organisations and at lower levels of government. Some organisations have codes of conduct and training in preventing harassment and abuse, although again this is likely to vary across organisations.

Barriers to the recruitment, employment, promotion and retention of women - These include, the gendered image of WASH, with it still often being perceived as engineering focussed and hence a male-dominated sector and less access to technical education and skills for females. Challenges are also faced due to the remoteness of field locations and difficulties for some women to use motorbikes, although some women shared that they felt comfortable in riding a motorbike and travelling to remote locations. Some women face concerns from their families when working in insecure areas.

Female staff working in the field including in remote areas

Female staff from a non-government organisation, shared their experiences of working in the project offices and working in the field, including travelling to remote areas. Sometimes journeys by motorbike, can be 3 or 4 hours and the roads can be very bad, particularly in the rainy season. Sometimes they travel with a male colleague and sometimes they travel alone. On one occasion, a female staff member had to walk her motorbike for 2 miles, after it broke down in a rural area.

Some young women working in the sector leave their positions when they marry to move with their husbands, and others face challenges in balancing work and family and child-care responsibilities. Some women chose to not take on senior roles, even when they have the opportunity to apply, preferring to prioritise more of a work-life balance and to reduce the risk that they may be moved away from their family in more senior posts. Some younger women working in more senior positions, have sometimes faced challenges from negative attitudes from older male colleagues who



they supervise; and gender-related cultural norms in communities and under-estimation of women’s capacities, can lead to mistrust of women’s technical skills.

“Stigma also occurs towards younger women (under 30) who are thought of to not have enough experience and knowledge and so are particularly under-estimated” (National level stakeholder).

There are also challenges in monitoring of progress related to women’s engagement in the WASH sector, due to the huge number of districts, cities and islands.

Women who have had less opportunity to education and who come from more disadvantaged groups, are also less likely to be employed in the WASH sector and to move into senior leadership roles. For example, it is very difficult to identify any women or men with disabilities, who are working as employees in the WASH sector.

See the companion Technical Brief on: ‘People with disabilities working in the WASH sector’ for further information.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Encourage women to apply for, and stay in the WASH sector, including in senior decision-making roles.
2. Build the confidence of women to work on technical issues and for others to respect their capacities.
3. Understand and support the practical and operational needs of women to engage in the sector, including related to maternity and paternity leave, breast-feeding, child-care, and menstrual hygiene and safety when travelling in the field.
4. Undertake advocacy within the WASH sector, including with senior leadership, to change stereotypes on gender roles and responsibilities.
5. Integrate gender and wider social inclusion into all trainings.
6. Increase learning and sharing between partners on GESI, including examples of good practices.
7. Support the sharing of information on role models and establish mentoring systems, particularly to support and encourage women to take on more senior roles.
8. Support by the Indonesian government for free child-care, could encourage more women to take on, and remain in, senior positions.

OVERVIEW OF WOMEN WORKING IN THE INDONESIAN WASH SECTOR

REPRESENTATION ROLES	REPRESENTATION GAPS	RECRUITMENT, EMPLOYMENT, PROMOTION & RETENTION	
		POSITIVE EXPERIENCES	BARRIERS
<p>Background: Engineering, public health, teaching, social science, management, agriculture, anthropology, nutrition and planning</p>	<p>Although there are increasing numbers of women, there are still less women in senior decision-making roles in government, including in the WASH Working Groups.</p>	<p>Women generally feel encouraged, that their opinions are listened to and that they have opportunities similar to male colleagues.</p>	<p>Gendered image of WASH</p>
<p>Representation: Increasing numbers of women in civil service roles including in middle management and coordination roles, in CSOs and UNICEF and in sanitarian and community health worker roles.</p>	<p>More women work in sanitation than in water supply</p>	<p>Women felt the recruitment process is fair and positions are open to them</p>	<p>Geographical and transportation</p> <p>Family-work balance</p> <p>Insecurity in the field</p>
<p>Progression: Some started as volunteers in humanitarian response, in community work, then district, provincial and national roles. Some started through work in other fields such as agriculture, environment, health or education before WASH.</p>	<p>More women working in community roles than in health facility roles</p>	<p>Sometimes organisations have maternity and paternity leave and provide facilities for breastfeeding and to support child-care</p>	<p>Negative attitudes to younger women</p> <p>Less women willing to take on senior roles</p> <p>Cultural norms and under-estimation of women's capacities in communities</p>
	<p>Less, but increasing numbers of women in engineering and technical roles, particularly work in field-based technical roles related to construction</p>	<p>Some organisations have codes of conduct and training in preventing harassment and abuse</p>	<p>Challenges to mentoring - scale</p> <p>Less access to skills and education</p>