

Strengthening Government Capacity to Assess and Address Climate Risks to WASH Services in Cambodia

SUMMARY

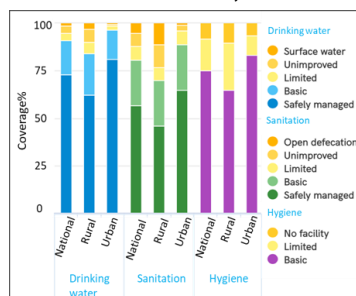
Cambodia has made a significant progress in increasing access to basic water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) services. However, climate change-induced disasters are disrupting services and hindering progress towards the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 6, particularly for vulnerable groups.

To ensure that WASH services are climate resilient, government and other sector professionals need the skills to carry out climate risk assessments and design solutions to make WASH programme more resilient. From 2022 to 2023, UNICEF supported capacity building for a core group of government officers to learn how climate change affects WASH services. The trainings enhanced knowledge, fostered cross-sectoral collaboration and policy integration, emphasizing inclusivity, context, and stakeholder engagement. Lessons learned included the importance of pre-training to familiarize participants with the topic, localized training materials to country context, and multi-stakeholder involvement for effective risk assessment and solution design.

Introduction

Access to WASH services in Cambodia has increased significantly in recent years (Figure 1). Between 2015 and 2022, access to basic water services in rural areas increased from 66 per cent to 73 per cent, and basic sanitation services increased from 46 per cent to 71 per cent. In urban areas, access increased from 90 per cent to 94 per cent for basic water services and from 81 per cent to 93 per cent for basic sanitation services (WHO/UNICEF, 2023).

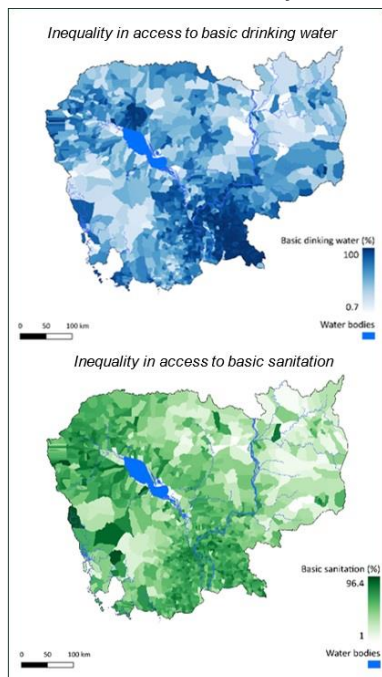
Figure 1: Household access to WASH services in Cambodia, 2022



Source: WASH/UNICEF JMP

Despite the progress, WASH services are frequently disrupted by climate-induced hazards, such as floods, droughts, storms and cyclones, and rising sea levels. These events damage critical infrastructure and contaminate water sources, further exacerbating existing inequalities in WASH access across the country (Figure 2) and increasing health risks. Vulnerable groups such as the poor, children, and marginalized communities suffer the most, especially those living in rural areas and challenging environments. WASH services need to be climate resilient to deliver equitable access nationwide, supporting the country's commitment to achieving SDG 6 and the human right to water and sanitation.

Figure 2: Level of access to basic drinking water sanitation services by commune



Source: NIS, 2020

Description of the intervention

Acknowledging the threat that climate change poses to WASH service delivery, Cambodia's Nationally Determined Contribution 2020 (NDCs) includes WASH sector adaptation and systems strengthening. These include building skills in adaptive and resilient actions for officers in the Ministry of Rural Development at national and sub-national levels to integrate climate change into rural development planning. The NDCs also emphasize the resilient and adaptive construction of rural water supply and sanitation facilities, along with the development of climate-responsive infrastructure for school buildings. However, other national policies, guidelines, and standards in the WASH sector do not incorporate climate change. Key line ministries, including the Ministry of Rural Development, have limited capacity to plan, implement, and integrate climate-resilient WASH programmes. Addressing these gaps is crucial for ensuring sustainable and climate-resilient WASH services nationwide.

Climate risk-informed training stands as a pivotal initiative within UNICEF's support to the Cambodian government, strategically addressing prevailing capacity gaps. This training specifically targets the National Core Group for Climate-Resilient WASH, a task force that was endorsed by Minister of Rural Development to act as the master trainers on climate risk-informed WASH programming and coordinate and work on climate resilient WASH for the Ministry. The National Core Group included 23 policymakers and technical officers from three technical departments of the Ministry including Department of Rural Water Supply, Department of Rural Health Care, and Department of Training and Research.

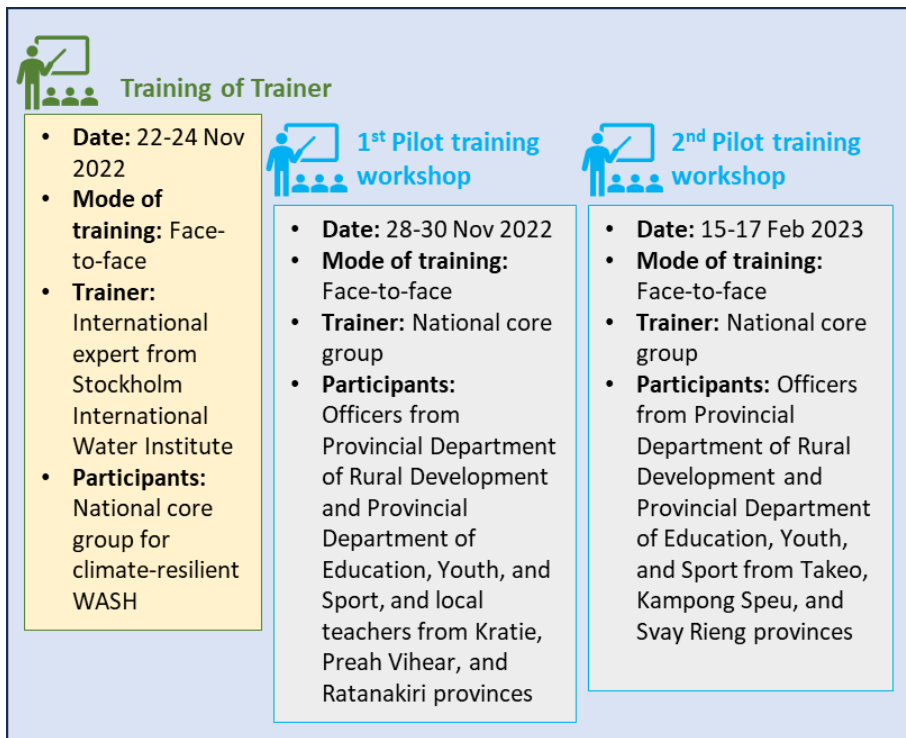
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The training was intended to build their capacity to conduct climate risk assessments and evaluate climate response solutions. By doing so, it aims to

foster the mainstreaming of climate-resilient WASH programmes¹ throughout Cambodia.

Figure 3: Summary of climate risk informed training approach



Source: Ministry of Rural Development – UNICEF – SIWI, 2022

The climate risk-informed training had two objectives:

1. Build capacity of the national core group for climate-resilient WASH by enhancing understanding at the intersection of WASH and climate change, providing insights into

climate and policy review processes, and fostering comprehension of climate finance mechanisms.

2. Train the national core group for climate-resilient WASH on risk assessment and appraisal of solutions, equipping them with effective methodologies, empowering them

¹ The process to develop a definition of climate resilient WASH is underway at the global level. UNICEF and the Global Water Partnership use a specific criteria to assess WASH services as

climate resilient. See pages 4 and 5: [Strategic Framework for WASH Climate Resilient Development \(2022 Edition\)](#)

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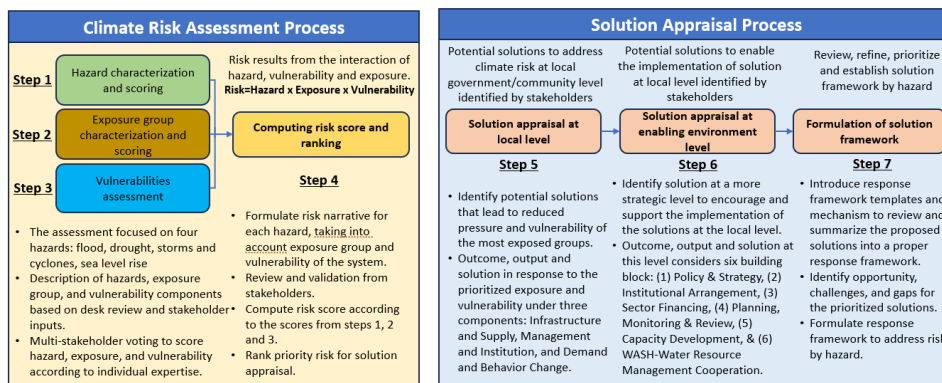
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for implementation, and facilitating capacity building at the sub-national level.

The training aims not only to empower the national core group with comprehensive knowledge and skills but also to establish a cascading effect of knowledge transferring from the national to the sub-national level through the training of trainer modality, ensuring that the capacity to address climate risks in the WASH sector is disseminated and strengthened at all levels. This multifaceted approach aligns with the overarching goal of advancing climate-resilient WASH across Cambodia.

The training process commenced with capacity building at the national level through a Training of Trainers (ToT) session, followed by subsequent pilot training at the sub-national level. In executing this approach, the national core group for climate-resilient WASH, comprised of policy and technical officers from the Ministry of Rural Development and the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport assumed a dual role, acting as both implementers and trainers, responsible for sharing acquired knowledge at the sub-national level through two specifically designed pilot training workshops.

Figure 4: The overarching climate risk informed training concept involves a comprehensive risk assessment process and participatory solution appraisal method



Source: Ministry of Rural Development-UNICEF-SIWI, 2022

These sub-national level workshops aimed to disseminate knowledge and skills to officers at the provincial level, establishing a robust mechanism for knowledge transfer and capacity building across various governance tiers. This cascading training modality aims to ensure the effective implementation of climate-resilient WASH across different level from the national to the sub-national level and throughout the country, creating a sustainable and widespread impact (Figure 3).

The Strategic Framework for WASH Climate Resilient Development, initially introduced by the Global Water Partnership and UNICEF (UNICEF and GWP, 2017), was streamlined into a practical climate risk-informed training package. This training resource served as the primary instructional material, offering a systematic and accessible approach to enhancing climate resilience within the WASH sector.

The training package included a step-by-step climate risk assessment process, which built upon

a comprehensive analysis, integrating desk studies and participatory consultations, designed to engage key stakeholders responsible for and involved in WASH service delivery. This inclusive approach ensured a strong understanding of climate-related challenges and facilitated the identification of solution frameworks for climate-resilient WASH from local to sub-national, and national levels (Figure 4).

Outcomes

Training outcomes

The training in climate risk-informed WASH has increased capacity in the Cambodian WASH sector in several ways.

Understanding the links between WASH and climate change: The National Core Group gained knowledge in the impacts of climate change on WASH and the interconnection between the two, helping them understand the dynamics and challenges posed by climate change to WASH services in the country. The training has also helped sector professionals understand the importance of climate resilient WASH in achieving the SDG6.

Strengthened collaboration between WASH, Health and Education sectors: The engagement of multiple ministries and departments – including the Ministry of Rural Development’s Department of Training and Research, Department of Rural Water Supply, Department of Rural Health Care, and the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport’s Department of School Health – stimulated cross-sectoral collaboration. The involvement of representatives from multiple departments helped to ensure a well-rounded understanding and collaborative effort towards climate-resilient WASH including in identifying solutions for different sub-sectors such as WASH in schools and health care facilities.

Technical capacity in climate risk assessments and climate-resilient WASH implementation

approaches: Technical staff from both ministries developed their skills and knowledge to implement climate-resilient WASH programmes and are also able to disseminate this technical capacity to the sub-national level. This technical capacity building is essential for the effective planning, implementation, and maintenance of WASH infrastructure in the face of climate change impacts.

Photo 1: ToT workshop in October 2022 in Phnom Penh, presided by H.E. Chreay Pom, Chair of the national core group for climate-resilient WASH, and the Director General of Technical Affairs of the Ministry of Rural Development



Source: UNICEF Cambodia/2022/Danet Hak

Capacity for integration of WASH and climate policies and plans: The training developed capacities to integrate climate-resilient WASH principles into national policies. Policymakers who have attended the training are now better equipped to incorporate climate considerations into decision-making processes, enhancing integration of WASH in climate policies and vice-versa and leading to increased national capacity for climate-resilient WASH programmes.

Impact in the WASH sector

The trainings with the sub-national approach has provided important impacts for the WASH sector including:

Context-specific solutions: Climate risks and their impacts exhibit considerable variation across different localities. Engaging local stakeholders is crucial to developing response frameworks and solutions that are finely tuned to the specific context. These context-specific approaches consider the unique interplay of environmental, social, and economic factors in each area. The provincial risk assessment and response framework serves as a distinct roadmap for every province, guiding their transition toward climate-resilient WASH services.

Photo 2: A group work to assess the risk and appraise solutions during a provincial level training in Kampong Cham province in November 2022

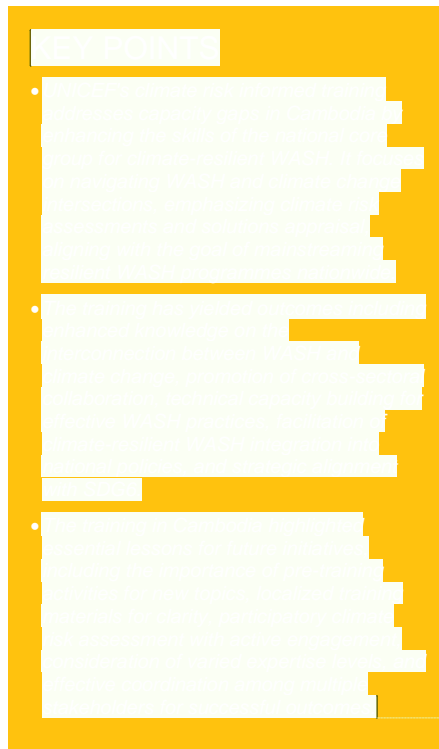


Source: UNICEF Cambodia/2022/Danet Hak

Strengthened cross-sectoral coordination: The training not only adds value but also strengthens cross-sectoral coordination. Acknowledging that climate resilience in the WASH sector is intricately linked to various other sectors, the training fosters collaboration and coordination among diverse stakeholders. For instance, school directors and provincial WASH officials worked together to assess the climate risks within their provinces including in the school context, and jointly developed solutions and action plan to address the risks in a collaborative manner.

Strengthened governance in the WASH sector: The training has contributed to the enhancement of WASH sector governance by fostering a more participatory and informed decision-making process. Involving stakeholders at all levels,

including the grassroots, has promoted transparency, accountability, and better governance practices. For instance, at the national level, the core group is clear about their role and responsibility as the master trainers to transfer the knowledge to the sub-national level and provide continuous technical support on climate resilient WASH-related interventions. At the provincial level, provincial officers have a clearer view of their accountability when it comes to the development of the solutions and provincial action plan, avoiding duplicating roles and responsibilities both within and across the sector, such as WASH in institutions.



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Lessons Learned

Climate risk-informed training conducted in Cambodia has yielded valuable lessons and best practices that can guide future initiatives. The following key insights have emerged from this intervention:

Prerequisite activities for new topics: The concept of climate-resilient WASH is relatively new for training participants; hence, it is crucial to conduct pre-training activities that familiarize them with the topic, helping enhance their ability to absorb and comprehend new knowledge and laying a solid foundation for the upcoming training.

Localized training materials: Given the diverse expertise levels of training participants, clear communication is essential. To facilitate this, it is crucial to develop training materials in local languages and ensure clear explanations, recognizing that language plays a crucial role in fostering consensus and understanding, especially among participants with varied expertise.

Participatory and inclusive approach: The effectiveness of the participatory approach depends on participant engagement. Therefore, it is crucial to ensure inclusiveness and active engagement of participants during the training. Involving multi-stakeholder engagement from grassroots levels ensures diverse perspectives are considered and enhances the accuracy and relevance of the assessment ensuring sustainable solutions that address community-level needs and challenges.

Next Steps

Priority next steps include:

- Cascading the training to the provincial level through the national core group, to ensure the further dissemination of knowledge, and enabling stakeholders to

conduct climate risk assessments at the provincial level, generating localized reports on WASH vulnerability and climate resilient response framework (Apr 2024).

- Development of an e-learning platform to foster broader accessibility and enhance the dissemination of climate risk management knowledge and skills through the entire country (Nov 2024).
- Embedding the climate risk-informed training as part of in-service training for Ministry of Rural Development officials, mainly those working on WASH (Dec 2024).
- Advocating for investment from the sub-national investment plan in the identified solutions from the provincial response framework (2025).

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