

Working towards gender-responsive water, sanitation and hygiene at the organisational level

Gender

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Towards Inclusive WASH Sharing evidence and experience from the field



Why do we need water, sanitation and hygiene learnings at the organisational level?

Plan International's (Plan) global 2011 Gender Equality policy clearly establishes Plan International Australia (PIA)'s commitment towards gender equality in all of Plan's work (programs, partnerships and organisational culture) (Plan International 2011), and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) are no exception to this. Improving gender equality demands significant attention in every WASH intervention as gender relations are integral and cannot be separated from the effectiveness of WASH. Interventions are developed in response to a set of assumptions and approaches about achieving or contributing to change within a specific context. These ideas can also be more broadly described as the Theory of Change (ToC) (Guijt & Retolaza 2011). It is important to critically review different ToCs for gender equality used for WASH interventions. Doing so allows WASH practitioners to explicitly assess the effectiveness of gender equality strategies and assumptions utilised in WASH interventions. The shift from implicit to explicit is a significant basis of the learnings for this case study.

Location

» Vietnam



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Whilst it appears to be common that Civil Society Organisations undertake some form of reflection and learning on a project-basis through project evaluations, learning often seems to be missed at the organisational level. This has practical implications for an agency's WASH program and also across the agency as a whole. Such organisational learning goes beyond simply measuring and analysing the outcomes of individual projects but rather extends to regularly reflecting on our work. This perspective will enable the learning required to move forward to develop and implement more efficient and effective practice. An organisational approach to learning offers scope for institutionalising practice changes rather than restricting this to each time-bound WASH project.

During 2011, PIA analysed its ToC for gender equality across its WASH portfolio and also re-evaluated what this means for the agency's programs. The gender ToC for WASH developed for this reflection states that: 'PIA-supported WASH projects support the advancement of gender equality at practical and strategic levels.'¹ While practical and strategic needs can be defined separately, they are usually interconnected and often part of a continuum (for example practical gains can lead to strategic outcomes).

This case study shares the key reflections and learnings of the PIA WASH review of its ToC for gender equality to promote the importance of institutionalising gender learnings at the organisational level and to continue to build an inclusive WASH practice.

PIA's organisational learning process

The PIA program's monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework builds on contemporary approaches to M&E that view learning and accountability as an important tenet to improving effective practice at multiple levels of the organisation. Unearthing the

¹ Hunt (2011) describes practical and strategic levels as: "**Practical needs** refer to immediate needs of women, girls, men and boys for survival which do not challenge existing culture, tradition, the gender divisions of labour, legal inequalities or any other aspect of female's lower status or power. **Strategic interests** focus on advancing equality between males and females by transforming gender relations in some way, by challenging female's disadvantaged position or lower status or by focusing on/challenging men's/boys' roles, responsibilities or expectations."

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assumptions that underpin individual, program and organisational practice and exploring results and how they happened can result in significant shifts in thinking and practice. In other words, unpacking the change process and the implications for improved practice. For example, PIA has developed a critical self-inquiry process, known as the Reflective Annual Process (RAP), which provides staff with an opportunity to reflect on the quality of their programs in a way they would not necessarily otherwise do in their everyday work. It recognises that learning is an ongoing and evolving process and acknowledges the importance of organisational learning for individual staff capacity-building as well as on an institutional basis (such as maintaining, sharing and shaping institutional knowledge to strengthen practice).

The WASH RAP methodology

The PIA WASH team reviewed supported projects, particularly the Vietnam and Tanzania WASH projects funded by AusAID. This case study focuses on the learnings from the Vietnam project. This analysis included a review of project documents (for example design documents, M&E frameworks, evaluation reports) and interviews with Plan WASH field staff to obtain their views of changes and enablers. The PIA WASH team analysed this information to better understand what changes occurred, how and why they occurred, and where each project focused its resources to address gender issues. This process also included a review of findings resulting from the pilot of a gender and WASH monitoring tool developed for the Vietnam WASH project (refer to Case Study 15 in this publication).

In addition, the PIA WASH team reflected on the role of gender policies and strategies in WASH interventions. The team then used the framework developed for PIA by an external gender specialist for the RAP as a means

of analysis for the overall program RAP for PIA.² As noted by the gender specialist, this framework was developed from *Gender at Work* and women's empowerment approaches common to gender analysis.

The WASH team also utilised the support of the external gender specialist as a critical helper who provided useful feedback through certain points of the reflections, which helped to guide thinking and learning. Further, a RAP peer review workshop was organised that brought together all members of the PIA program team, representatives from other departments within the organisation, field representatives and external development specialists. This RAP peer review workshop provided opportunities for the WASH team for cross-sharing, direct feedback and organisational reflections amongst fellow peers. It is important to note that the analysis and reflections for the WASH RAP do not constitute a rigorous piece of research. Rather it was designed to stimulate reflection and further the PIA WASH team's learning of how gender equality has been advanced (or not) within PIA-supported WASH projects. Ultimately the learning result is a commitment to change practice.

Gender equality findings in PIA's WASH program RAP

Overall, the WASH RAP ToC analysis revealed that more practical than strategic gains were evident in WASH project outcomes. This finding was supported by evidence found across the WASH projects that PIA supports including Plan Vietnam's project. This project showed a significant reduction in women's time and labour for carrying water (with many subsequent positive effects), an increased level of women's involvement in household WASH decision-making and community meetings alongside men, and increased sharing of domestic WASH work (Figure 1 and 2). Changes like these are important improvements of practical gender

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² This framework was developed by Dr Juliet Hunt to analyse findings on gender equality and consists of the following four basic inquiry questions that could be unpacked and linked back to the ToC and the Plan gender policy:

1. What gender equality results were demonstrated or observed during the RAP enquiry?
2. What strategies or activities contributed to achieving gender equality results?
3. Was there adequate sex-disaggregated information (quantitative and qualitative) available?
4. Was there any increase in capacity among Plan, its partners or communities for promoting gender equality, empowering women and girls, or engaging with men and boys to promote gender justice?

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Figure 1
Woman speaking at a community meeting, Quang Ngai Province, Vietnam

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Figure 2
Wife and husband working together to collect construction materials to build a toilet, Quang Tri Province, Vietnam

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needs, and to an extent work towards broader strategic changes, although further reflection revealed that these were still limited. For example, it was found that whilst women’s household decision making had increased, ultimately it was men who still had the final decision making at the household level. However, the nature of projects is that they are time bound and perhaps a longer term timeframe would result in greater strategic outcomes. Opportunities to address deeper gender issues can often be missed within shorter timeframes due to competing project priorities.

Ultimately, the key learning for us was that it is the combination of explicit and pre-planned targeted activities within projects that create the recipe required to provide opportunities for gender equality. This means staff should use different approaches and strategies alongside regular follow-ups with project implementers and incorporating quality gender training (that has been appropriately adapted and practically related to the project) into the project training strategy. Being explicit upfront about gender equality goals within WASH programs contributes to obtaining buy-in and ownership. Combined with this, there needs to be genuine

organisational support and commitment to invest, foster and ingrain this development within the institution.

Key strategies for achieving change

Partnering with women’s organisations

The WASH RAP found that one key enabler to improve gender equality for PIA-supported WASH projects has been partnering with women’s organisations as local gender advocates. Whilst it cannot be assumed that all women’s groups at the local level are active, this was the case for Plan Vietnam’s WASH program; here the Women’s Union (WU) expressed aspirations to improve gender equality. In this case partnering with WU at the local level aligned with their organisational focus. Further, WU also reported that they had developed many WASH skills from being involved in the project, particularly around hygiene promotion (Figure 3).

However, there was also a perception among some project implementers that it was more effective when hygiene messages were targeted at women as they are typically

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Figure 3
A woman from an ethnic group standing proudly in front of her low-cost toilet, Quang Tri Province, Vietnam

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responsible for most of the WASH-related domestic work and are usually the main family caretaker. Further reflection illustrated that views such as this serve to inadvertently reinforce traditional gender roles, and may subtly inhibit the emergence of a positive enabling environment for women's practical and strategic gender gains.

Local ownership of gender policies and strategies

The role of organisational and program gender policies and strategies can be significant, as they can be a major enabler that provide opportunities for project stakeholders to explicitly agree and commit to shared gender equality goals. On the other hand, without important socialisation and local contextualisation of these documents, policies can often be ignored. The review of PIA-supported WASH projects, particularly drawing from the learnings

in Vietnam, strongly suggests that project implementers are more likely to identify with and respond to gender policy requirements if they are locally analysed and result in clear practical actions which are then validated by project staff, partners and community members. This is improved further when there is continuous and persistent follow-up dialogue to keep gender on the agenda, allowing time for policy to be translated into practice.

The review highlighted the importance of ownership to enable staff and project stakeholders to own gender strategies and to ensure they are indigenised. In particular, the roles of gender champions among project staff, partner staff and community members can be critical to helping create this ownership, and their commitment to making change happen should be harnessed at every possible opportunity.

Implications for WASH practice and organisational change

Participation is just the first step

A key learning from the WASH RAP was that participation is the key gender strategy being used by PIA-supported WASH projects. Quality participation, not just quantity of participation (of both women and men), is an essential starting point that provides space which can be built upon to bring about change, particularly for practical gains. Whilst we did not find evidence that participation alone results in an advancement of gender equality, we did find that it serves to provide the foundation for other forms of gender strategies beyond participation, such as more equitable sharing of roles for WASH and power relations. Importantly, increased participation did not occur by accident in PIA-supported WASH projects, but instead resulted from a combination of activities and approaches designed to increase more equitable decision-making and influence.

Gender-responsive partnerships

The RAP highlighted factors that contribute to an enabling environment for authentic partnership. This includes the importance for ongoing dialogue and reflections

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between partners, allowing adequate time for strengthening of organisational and individual relationships and fostering shared ownership of gender equality policy commitments. The RAP stimulated healthy discussions within the agency about where gender equality goals sit within the partnerships between PIA and partner field offices. There is often an assumption that partnerships should be inherently equal. However, it is important to recognise that there are inherent power differences. Power relations are often an unspoken part of a partnership; ultimately all parties need to learn to work in authentic partnership to function and be able to achieve their shared vision including respect for different strengths and contributions. This is true for advancing shared organisational commitments for gender equality between PIA and Plan International field offices to ensure changes are institutionalised and therefore sustainable. Authentic partnership includes clearly articulating and fulfilling roles, responsibilities, and expectations on each side. For example, one practical way is outlining gender equality commitments through agency documents such as role statements. Hence there may be greater benefits when gender equality expectations and responsibilities are explicit in both organisational partnerships as well as projects.

Learnings into Action

Based on the reflections and learnings, the PIA WASH team affirmed that the WASH interventions we support with partner field offices are contributing to advancing gender equality both practically and strategically, but also affirmed the underlying need as an agency to be explicit about our expectations around gender equality in partnerships. The PIA WASH team developed a simple diagram to guide WASH project work towards advancing gender equality (refer to Figure 4). The intention of this diagram is to provide guidance to managers and implementers to strengthen gender-responsiveness of WASH projects that PIA supports through a set of practical and realistic steps. This is

based on the learnings from the WASH RAP, particularly focusing on enablers. Hence it should be taken as a tool for ongoing dialogue and discussion for thinking and practice around change processes, rather than an exhaustive compliance list or 'silver bullet'. Monitoring and reviewing of progress should be done in a collaborative and participatory way with project implementers. It takes into account that changes to practices often happen as a gradual process, and as such it proposes a staged process. Further, it helps mobilise Plan's Policy on Gender Equality for WASH programs.

Moving forward with organisational learning from implicit to explicit

Organisational learning requires ongoing processes to ensure learnings are continuously captured and fed back into strengthening program practice. The RAP process recognises the effectiveness of collective learning put into action including bringing together development practitioners to share and reflect together, recognising where improvements need to be made, and identifying, upholding and benchmarking evidence of best practices. PIA's learning on gender equality does not stop with the 2011 RAP. Gender equality is a ongoing focus of not only our WASH program, but across the agency's programs, to track the agency's progress on improving gender equality.

For the WASH program, utilising the ToC approach for WASH ensured we focused on critically reviewing the strategies and assumptions underpinning PIA-supported interventions. This included making the implicit explicit. Overall the RAP allowed the WASH team to have ownership and direct our enquiry efforts to where we would find 'gendered' learnings most useful and relevant to our own everyday work and partnerships with field office WASH interventions. This particularly relates to nuances and subtleties in daily practices and individual projects and programs that are often not fully illustrated in formal evaluations.

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Figure 4 Guidance on working towards gender-responsive WASH projects

Step 1: The foundation for working towards gender-responsive WASH projects

The following actions are important to benchmark and track gender progress, to review progress regularly to ascertain if the project's ToC for advancing gender equality is working (and if not to take corrective measures), and for project implementers to have understanding, capacity and ownership over gender advancements contributed by the project. All actions should have ongoing dialogue, persistence and follow-up.

<p>Action 1. Situation assessments/ baselines should be gender-sensitive to include: a) Documented views and experiences of women, men, girls and boys in regards to participation, decision-making at household and community level, WASH roles and responsibilities at household and community level, and leadership opportunities. b) Identify champions (e.g. local leaders) who are well-positioned to champion and influence positive gender outcomes and explore how they could be supported. Possible monitoring This provides the benchmark to track gender equality progress.</p>	<p>Action 2. Projects should have a set of easily measurable gender equality indicators to assess the nature and extent of change (based on the gender-sensitive situation assessment/ baseline). Possible monitoring This provides the benchmark to track gender equality progress.</p>	<p>Action 3. Key secondary data and indicators to be disaggregated by sex and age, and analysed. Possible monitoring This provides the benchmark to track gender equality progress.</p>	<p>Action 4. Review progress of gender-related outcomes at certain agreed project milestones (e.g. within annual review meetings), address gaps and agree on follow-up actions. Practical and strategic gains should be reviewed. If monitoring activities, indicate that different strategies are needed to enhance gender impact, then the design should allow for corrective actions. Possible monitoring Review progress against benchmark regularly (e.g. annually).</p>	<p>Action 5. Participatory gender training, which has been appropriately contextualised and adapted to target project staff, partners and other influential project stakeholders (e.g. villager leaders, government staff). This training should be practical for ownership whereby learnings are put into action when walking out of the training e.g. linking with project activities and outcomes and their individual roles. Training should take place at project commencement. Ensure follow-up support, capacity building and reinforcement of key concepts (e.g. refresher trainings, mentoring, etc). Possible monitoring Monitoring could be captured during the regular review process.</p>	<p>Action 6. Dedicate annual specific budget allocations for activities or initiatives designed to positively influence gender outcomes within the project. Possible monitoring Progress can be reviewed annually prior to preparing the following year's budget.</p>
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Move to Step 2



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Figure 4 Guidance on working towards gender-responsive WASH projects (Continued)**Step 2: Building on the foundation**

It is important to build on the foundation as progressing practical and strategic gender changes can be a long-term process and requires a combination of targeted activities.

All actions should have ongoing dialogue, persistence and follow-up.

Design Stage	Implementation Stage	Monitoring and Evaluation
<p>Action D1. Work with project stakeholders to document and make explicit the project's expectations about advancing gender equality, particularly women's and men's roles. Provide copies to all stakeholders to promote awareness, adherence and ownership. The responsibilities of each project stakeholder with relation to gender equality should be clarified in this document.</p> <p>Possible monitoring Progress can be reviewed annually.</p> <p>Action D2. Design activities should promote greater participation of females alongside males within decision-making groups, including community-led total sanitation committees, water management committees, school health clubs and project steering committees. This may include working with project stakeholders to review community group selection criteria to ensure more equitable participation in project activities.</p> <p>Possible monitoring Participation should be measured as part of the gender equality indicators.</p> <p>Action D3. Consider, where possible, role modelling women's participation in WASH programs.</p> <p>Possible monitoring Could be reviewed as part of the organisational reflection processes.</p>	<p>Action I1. Build and support gender champions (in project staff, partners and community members) for greater ownership and progress of gender equality.</p> <p>Possible monitoring Progress can be reviewed annually.</p> <p>Action I2. Promote women's qualitative participation as much as their quantitative participation. WASH projects should focus on women's participation as a means to promote gender equality (and not just to promote the health of households).</p> <p>Possible monitoring Use qualitative monitoring methods (e.g. Focus Group Discussions, Most Significant Change stories) preferably regularly (e.g. annually) and through project evaluations.</p> <p>Action I3. Undertake public awareness-raising in project areas about advancing gender equality at household and community levels. This can be done in partnership with local gender advocates and theatre groups.</p> <p>Possible monitoring Use qualitative monitoring methods (e.g. Focus Group Discussions, Most Significant Change stories) preferably regularly (e.g. annually) and through project evaluations.</p> <p>Action I4. For any community gatherings supported by the project (e.g. meeting, 'triggering' sessions and celebrations) ensure that celebrations occur at a time and place that maximises the attendance of women alongside men. Consider other 'layers' of possible vulnerabilities such as people with disabilities.</p> <p>Possible monitoring Analysis of regular project monitoring information (e.g. project meeting records). Such analysis would include who is participating and what groups are being represented.</p> <p>Action I5. For projects that utilise the community-led total sanitation (CLTS) process, ensure that during Open Defection Free (ODF) celebrations the efforts made by women is highlighted alongside men. This is also a good opportunity to highlight positive gender WASH stories (refer to M3 below).</p> <p>Possible monitoring Incorporate within the project's ODF certification process.</p> <p>Action I6. School WASH components should address menstrual hygiene needs in new infrastructure and hygiene education promotion.</p> <p>Possible monitoring Monitor menstrual hygiene within the regular design, construction and use-of-facilities monitoring process. Monitor changes in hygiene promotion and teaching hygiene curriculum in action.</p>	<p>Action M1. Regularly track and record changes throughout the project for females', males', girls' and boys' participation, roles and opportunities, access to benefits, and attitudes and behaviour within decision-making groups and at household and community levels.</p> <p>Possible monitoring Track against benchmark regularly (e.g. annually). A combination of both qualitative and quantitative methods should be used.</p> <p>Action M2. Collect information regarding the barriers of the most marginalised groups within the project areas recognising there are diversities within gender groups.</p> <p>Possible monitoring Track against benchmark regularly (e.g. annually). A combination of both qualitative and quantitative methods should be used.</p> <p>Action M3. Collect and share positive gender stories that have occurred within the project area e.g. men contributing to WASH-related tasks that traditionally are undertaken by women; women undertaking active water management committee positions.</p> <p>Possible monitoring Use qualitative monitoring methods, particularly exploring the circumstances that enabled these situations to transpire, as it could provide useful insight for programming.</p> <p>Action M4. For any monitoring visits supported by the project (both household and community) ensure that they occur at a time (and place) whereby women and men are available to attend. Consider other 'layers' of possible vulnerabilities such as people with disabilities. This helps ensure there is adequate cross-representation within the monitoring information collected.</p> <p>Possible monitoring Analysis of regular project monitoring information (e.g. who is participating and what groups are being represented?)</p>

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Finally, having an external gender specialist as a critical helper to guide reflections (rather than engaging in the traditional consultant role of undertaking this work for us) was extremely useful in terms of maximising the learnings for team members. Overall, while the RAP findings do not single-handedly offer an easy answer for addressing gender equality in WASH programs, the opportunity to take stock, critically reflect, discuss and formulate some practical steps which will strengthen practice in future program cycles, represents a very good use of time and effort for team members and PIA as a whole in adopting improved practice in gender equality.

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