



Water, Sanitation and Hygiene at CWS:

Supporting health, education and economic development through the sustainable management of WASH for all.



About CWS

Church World Service (CWS) is a faith-based organization transforming communities around the globe through just and sustainable responses to hunger, poverty, displacement, and disaster. Our vision is a world where all have food, voice, and a safe place to call home.

CWS and WASH

CWS provides community-led support to marginalized and hard to reach communities in over 25 countries. To fulfill its mission CWS works in six program areas of focus: Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH), Food Security & Livelihoods, Migrant Protection & Assistance, Refugee Resettlement, Disaster Risk Reduction & Climate Change Adaptation, and Emergency Preparedness, Response & Recovery. Child protection, climate change action, gender and racial justice, and community development are integrated throughout these practice areas. CWS prioritizes WASH programming all through its activities, as it considers WASH to be foundational to healthy and flourishing communities.

CWS focuses on bringing WASH services to communities and households through the following key approaches:

Rights-based approaches

CWS promotes the rights to life, liberty, and the security of the person; protection from persecution; including outside a person's country of origin, dignity; a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of the person and their family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services; and education.

Total WASH – water, sanitation and hygiene in communities and institutions

CWS supports the availability of at least basic levels of WASH¹ throughout communities. CWS aims to integrate all three WASH components (water, sanitation and hygiene) into its work, as they are interdependent on each other, and to support improved WASH facilities in institutions such as schools and health facilities. Most CWS projects that include WASH have an element of all three components, although in some of the areas where we work, water really is the most critical issue and sanitation is already relatively well provided. CWS focuses on components that are not being adequately addressed by other agencies and are expressed needs by communities.

Project alignment and coordination with government and other stakeholders

CWS makes considerable effort to coordinate with government agencies and to align with their policies, strategies and plans for the WASH sector, although getting the attention of government can be a challenge as there is often limited interest and few resources available for hard to reach and marginalized communities. In its disaster response, CWS follows SPHERE standards and operates through cluster/table/working group arrangements which operationalize the sharing of information and knowledge between stakeholders, along with joint planning and integrated activities.

Reaching marginalized and hard to reach populations

“Leave no one behind” is one of the three universal values that guide implementation of the SDGs², and is key to fulfilling SDG6, which stresses universal and equitable coverage of water, sanitation and hygiene and reaching those in vulnerable situations. CWS supports some of the world’s most undeserved people in its work, not only in disaster response and refugee camps, but also in its longer-term development work, where it focuses predominantly on extremely marginalized groups, such as ethnic minorities and those living in remote and underserved areas.

Community consultation and participation

Communities are at the core of CWS’s work; we engage with communities in all aspects and stages of our projects. These take an integrated approach, working with communities on a wide range of issues that affect their lives including agriculture, livelihoods, health, and education. WASH is foundational to all these issues and is included in many of these projects. We use a consultative approach with communities in project design and enable further participation to gain additional agency through capacity development, formation of user groups and management committees and through strengthening in right-based approaches and advocacy.

Our work to bring WASH services to marginalized and hard to reach populations

In Vietnam, for example, CWS works in the North and Northwest regions which are the poorest and most underserved regions and include many ethnic minority communities. These communities were selected in consultation with government officials as they are the most disadvantaged regions in the country.

The WASH situation in these regions was very poor and there was a very limited understanding of sanitation and disease transmission. CWS works in both communities and schools and has a strong focus on latrine promotion and eliminating open defecation using community-led total sanitation (CLTS) methodologies³.

¹As per WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme (JMP) definitions

²UNICEF (undated) A Guidance Note for Leaving No One Behind

³ <https://sanitationlearninghub.org/practical-support/the-community-led-total-sanitation-approach>

There is also public health awareness raising on hygiene, use of soap and water treatment, handling and storage, community sanitation (garbage collection and recycling), etc.

Acceptance of CLTS approaches has been difficult at times. People were used to having financial support and it was hard to change this expectation. This was made worse as some NGOs continued to provide financial support for sanitation. Over time, and with growing trust and awareness of the benefits, CLTS and associated activities have been very successful, and many villages and communes have reached Open Defecation Free (ODF) status. There is a focus on developing community “change agents” and many commune officials have become leaders in promoting CLTS and other improvements, and many CLTS facilitators are local officials, or health centre staff. CWS supports the monitoring of ODF status alongside the Ministry of Health and reviewed every three years.

Our work applying rights-based approaches in WASH

Human rights-based approaches are another of the three universal values that guide its implementation of the SDGs⁴ and are integrated into CWS programming.

CWS’s long-running work with remote indigenous communities in the South American Chaco promotes community-led advocacy for a variety of services especially related to health and education, including improved WASH services and building awareness of the communities’ rights based on the constitutional and legal framework, and training on how to demand those rights and access services. This includes advocating to government and empowering women to increase their civic participation including involvement in the newly formed Departmental Technical Roundtable on Climate Change.

To develop a better understanding among local and international WASH actors of indigenous peoples and other socially excluded groups, CWS recently undertook a qualitative research study which brings for the first time the voices and perspectives of the Wichi people and other stakeholders on success and failures in domestic rainwater harvesting (DRWH) initiatives, in twenty rural dispersed settlements of two departments in Salta province, Argentina. The research makes evidence-based recommendations for key audiences (i.e., academia, policymakers, donors, authorities, practitioners and advocates). A better understanding by both local and international WASH actors of indigenous peoples -especially women- and other socially excluded groups as rural DRWHs users is crucial to increase the success rate of emerging large-scale efforts to ensure safe water access via DRWH-based approaches in rural dispersed, multi-cultural and ethnically diverse areas.

Our work integrating WASH into disaster response

WASH is a core part of CWS’s disaster response programming. The nature of WASH support is phased, with emergency provision provided for immediate needs, followed by longer term support for maintaining safe WASH provision as communities begin to recover. For example, in response to the 2018 earthquake in Sulawesi, Indonesia, CWS, working with government and cluster partners,



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⁴ UN Sustainable Development Group Website: <https://unsdg.un.org/2030-agenda/universal-values/human-rights-based-approach>

initially focused on providing an emergency water supply through water tankers along with basic sanitation and hygiene provisions including hygiene, clean up and menstrual hygiene kits (see box). This was followed by the development of longer-term initiatives including boreholes, pipes, tanks, gravity fed systems and training and hygiene promotion, conducted by health promoters and community members, including ODF elimination, safe handwashing, clean and safe water management (storage and handling), drainage and solid waste management. Throughout the assistance there was a strong focus on community engagement. A total of 21 water committees were established, and plans were developed for eventual handover to village government. Water committees were provided with technical and system management training. The number of beneficiaries is approximately 58,000 which has greatly exceeded the target of 20,000.



Hundreds of communities across the US (largely comprised of faith groups) hand pack or sponsor thousands of kits –including general hygiene kits (including soap, toothbrush and paste, nail clipper etc.), menstrual hygiene kits (including pads, tampons, soap, sanitizer and disposal bags) and disaster clean up buckets (including detergent and soap, sponge sand cloths, garbage bags. CWS distributes to communities in need including those recovering from disasters.

Our work integrating WASH with innovative and energy conserving technologies

In its efforts to respond to climate change and to meet the needs of remote communities with low levels of service, CWS utilises and promotes innovative technologies wherever appropriate. In Kenya, CWS has initiated solar powered boreholes and a solar water purification system to treat saline water in a community, school and health centre. CWS's Renewable Energies Technologies Program in Georgia and Moldova has been active for more than a decade during which it has supported small-scale enterprises installing urine diverting dry toilets, grey-water and drinking water filters, and solar water heaters for households and institutions. Target families are poor and rural, sometimes migrants, people on social assistance, and women headed households. Replication is promoted through households showcasing these technologies to the rest of the community.



For more information about our programs contact media@cwsglobal.org

Learn more about
Water, Sanitation
and Hygiene at CWS:

