

Afghanistan Overview: Water, sanitation and hygiene

Summary

Afghanistan aims to achieve universal access to **basic** drinking water supplies by 2026 by fulfilling the ambitions of the Citizen's Charter National Priority Program. It aims to achieve an Open Defecation Free Afghanistan by 2025. It has been recently estimated that this requires a public investment of US\$107 million annually over the period 2016 – 2030. This is higher than current investment levels which are estimated to be around \$80 million per year. The ambitions of the SDGs 6.1 and 6.2 are much harder to achieve for Afghanistan and the yearly estimated public investments of \$473 million, are more than four times that of reaching universal basic access.

Major opportunities and actions for Afghanistan to accelerate progress towards SDG 6.1 and 6.2:

1. Ensure adequate funding for the Minimum Service Standards under the Citizen's Charter National Priority Program.
2. Scale-up the current successful CLTS program to eliminate open defecation in rural areas and improve access to basic sanitation levels.
3. Build donor confidence for investing in WASH through increased performance and quality with transparent oversight and accountability systems.
4. Identify and better target resources to improve coverage for vulnerable groups and remote communities.
5. Facilitate private sector investments and private service providers to provide drinking water services especially, but not only in urban areas.
6. Improve revenue collection through metered household connections, especially in urban areas to ensure financing for operating and maintenance costs.
7. Revive and enhance the traditional practice of re-using of human waste in agriculture, especially in rural areas.

Overview of the Afghanistan's vision and targets for the SDGs

The water, sanitation and hygiene sector in Afghanistan is guided by the Rural WASH Policy (2010- 2019) which was updated in 2016, to reflect the ambitions of the SDGs. The strategy prioritizes the elimination of open defecation by 2025 and achieving universal access to basic water services and sanitation by 2026 – which coincides with the end of the ten-year Citizen's Charter National Priority Program. In 2007, Afghanistan established the Afghanistan Urban Water and Sewerage Corporation (AUWSC) with the objective to ensure sustainable provision of safe drinking water supply and sewerage services to all urban areas of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. AUWSC currently operates six provincial water supply networks in major towns and has business units in another 11 provincial capitals. Private operators are also active in Afghanistan, especially in the capital Kabul where over half of the +/- 5 million population is actually served through 72 small scale providers. The Ministry of Urban Development works closely with AUWSC and has identified the need for a regulatory framework and national regulator to ensure quality of services among the private operators, including AUWSC.

In 2015, Afghanistan achieved coverage of 63% for drinking water and 39% for sanitation. This was insufficient to achieve the respective MDG targets. The more ambitious SDG WASH targets significantly raise the bar of the original MDGs. As an arid country with limited natural water resources and often very deep aquifers, investments to provide water on-premises as stipulated under SDG 6.1 will require huge investments in capturing, transporting and treating river water to make it suitable for drinking. Given the still unstable situation in Afghanistan investors for such large infrastructural projects and contractors willing and able to carry out the works are hard to find. The government has formulated a policy aimed at strengthening the self-reliance of communities and Community Development Councils. The Citizen's Charter which aims at providing a package of minimum service standards, including drinking water and sanitation to all 32,000 communities over a period of ten years, relies on the CDCs for contracting, oversight and operation and maintenance of basic services. In addition to funding, Government only provides technical input for design and supervision of construction works. Given that investment levels in basic services still remain high, the Government is hopeful that universal access to basic drinking water and sanitation can be realized by 2026, as the performance of especially the rural WASH sector is strong.

In 2016, for the first time, the Ministry of Finance included a budget line for rural sanitation in the national budget. An alliance for sanitation established in 2015 between the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, the Ministry of Health, NGO partners and UNICEF, is rapidly building momentum in scaling-up the Afghan Context Community-Led-Total-Sanitation approach which has been successfully introduced in 2009 in Afghanistan. The first Open Defecation Free districts is expected in 2017.

The critical bottlenecks to overcome, other than dealing with civil strife, and large displacement of populations due to conflict or natural disaster is a still nascent governance and accountability structure, limited technical capacity and heavy reliance on donor funding. Although there is extra absorption capacity at national and provincial level to accelerate progress towards universal access to basic services, meeting the ambitions of the SDGs poses a huge challenge for Afghanistan.

2. Review of the sector – State of the Sector Building Blocks and Collaborative Behaviours

Afghanistan’s drinking water coverage has sustained progress over the past 16 years, including what seems to be a recent acceleration in rural areas. Progress on reducing open defecation is good as well. The newly revised Rural WASH Policy reflects the ambitions of the SDGs. Yet there are several areas and gaps still to be addressed in a number of building blocks.

Policy and strategy: Although scaling-up CLTS and accelerating access to basic drinking water services through the Citizen’s Charter is a strategy that is being implemented, there currently isn’t one medium-term national strategy that addresses the four sub-sectors, nor is there a strategy that specifically addresses inequalities in access or that targets vulnerable or marginalized groups. Afghanistan may be ready to conduct a joint WASH Sector Review with partners like UNICEF and the World Bank to formulate a comprehensive medium to long-term WASH Strategy to realize the SDG ambitions

Institutional arrangements: The relative lean government structure and limited level of decentralization means that roles and responsibilities especially in the rural WASH sector are quite clear. The urban WASH sector is far more complex and a clarification in roles of the Ministry of Urban Development and Housing, municipalities, private sector operators etc. is required. Given the increased scarcity of water, the recently established High Council on Water, chaired by the President is one attempt to bring different stakeholders around the table to address the competing interests for managing the increasingly scarce water resources.

Sector financing: Afghanistan relies on donor funding for more than 85% of its development budget. For operation and maintenance costs in rural areas, communities are accustomed to take care of their own services. Under the Citizen’s Charter, Community Development Councils will receive block grants for operation and maintenance of public works, including water supplies. Public funding to the WASH sector is steadily increasing and since the introduction of performance based-budgeting in 2016, the rural WASH Sector tripled its budget from an initial allocation of \$5 million by the MoF to \$17 at the end of 2016, to \$20 million for the year 2017. Increased transparency and improved accountability coupled with a solid performance has increased donor’s confidence to invest in the rural WASH sector. Yet investments fall short even for meeting universal basic access to drinking water by 2030. The President’s office recently decreed that all drinking water services provided on-premises must be metered.

Planning, Monitoring and Review: The MIS system for rural water supply exists, but is still not fully operational. A water point census is planned to populate the database so it can be used for planning purposes. Until then, data from national household surveys are used to prioritize provinces and where possible districts for interventions.

Capacity development: The strategy of major sector partners (UNICEF and World Bank) over the past couple of years has been to use their support for service delivery to develop the capacity and strengthening the accountability systems of the rural water supply and sanitation program. In-line with the National Technical Assistance (NTA) policy, donors support a large number of NTA staff at the Ministry with salaries competitive to the NGOs and private sector, in order to keep qualified staff within the government departments. This strategy is paying off, but can’t be sustained on the long run.

Building blocks

	Urban Water	Rural Water	Urban Sanitation	Rural Sanitation
 Policy/strategy	●	●	●	●
 Institutional arrangements	●	●	●	●
 Financing	●	●	●	●
 Planning, monitoring, review	●	●	●	●
 Capacity development	●	●	●	●

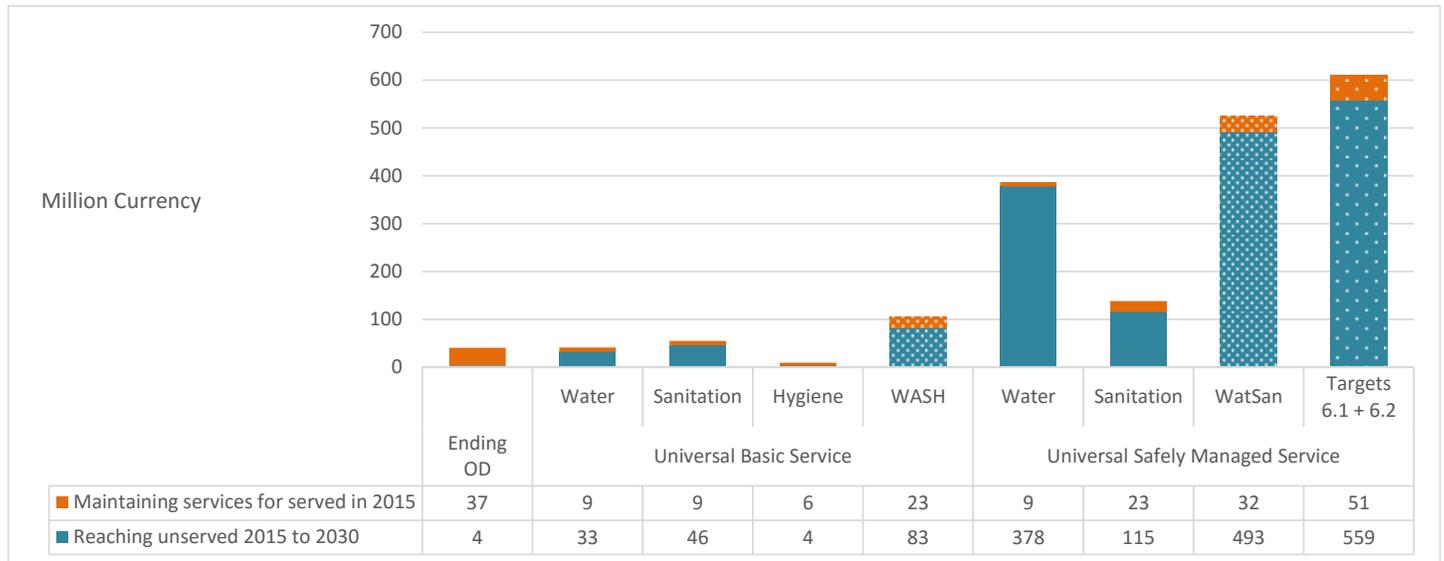
Collaborative Behaviour	Government	Development Partners
1. Enhance government leadership of sector planning processes	★★★★★	Insufficient data
2. Strengthen and use country systems	★★★★☆	Insufficient data
3. Use one information and mutual accountability platform built around a multi-stakeholder, government-led cycle of planning, monitoring, and learning	★★★★☆	Insufficient data
4. Build sustainable water and sanitation sector financing strategies that incorporate financial data from taxes, tariffs, and transfers as well as estimates for non-tariff household expenditure	Insufficient data	Insufficient data

3. Sector investment needs, the financing gaps and areas for improving efficiency

Investment needs and funding gap

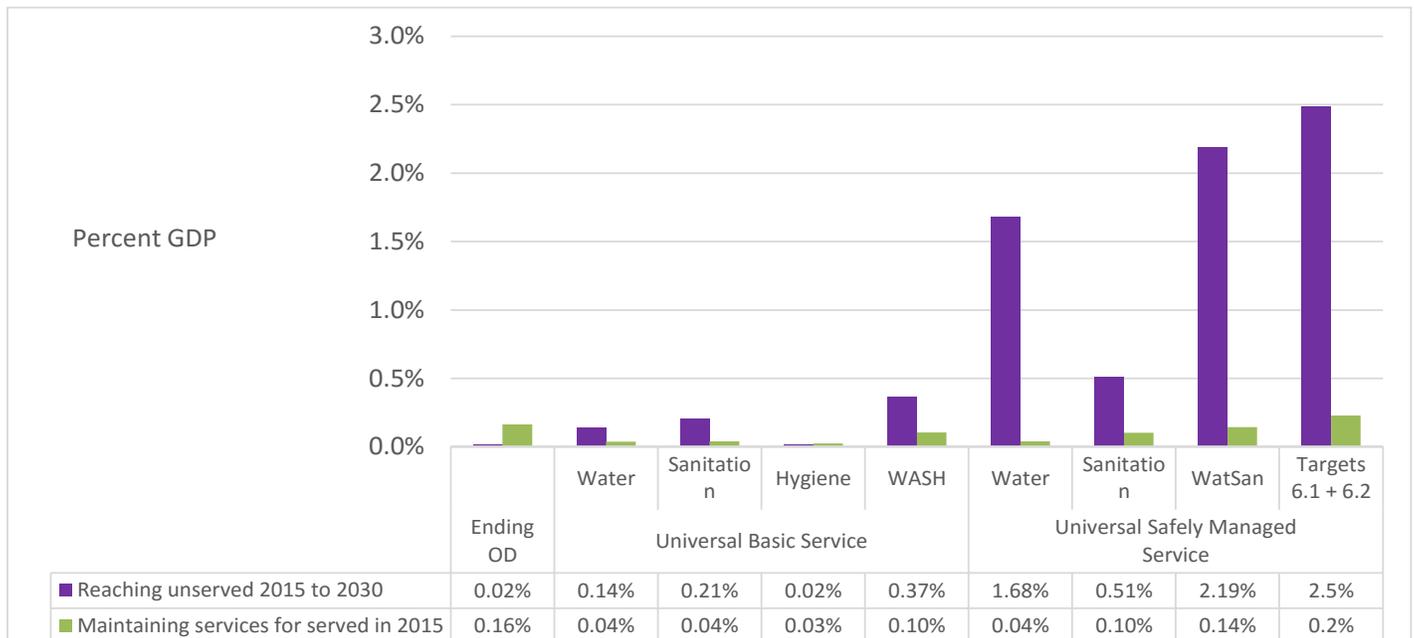
According to calculations made by UNICEF and the World Bank, Afghanistan will require 106 million dollars per year to achieve universal access to basic drinking water, sanitation and hygiene and 610 million dollars annually to meet the SDG 6.1 and 6.2 targets on safely managed sanitation by 2030. The largest share of the investments will be targeted at capital expenditures in the medium-term and mostly dominated by investment needs in urban water. In 2016, a combined total of \$80 million was invested in WASH. This would leave a gap of \$26 million annually to meet the target for universal basic access.

Fig. 2 Annual capital costs to achieve universal access to basic and safely managed WASH services by 2030, in millions US\$



The cost for reaching the unserved range from 0.37% of GDP annually for universal access to basic services to 2.5% of GDP annually for safely managed services

Fig 3 Annual capital costs of reaching entire population to achieve universal access of different service levels by 2030, as a percentage of GDP



Priority actions to be taken to ensure the readiness of the sector for the SDGs

- Scale-up the CLTS efforts and promote an Open-Defecation-Free district approach
- Further increase the share of public resources allocated to rural water and sanitation using performance-based budgeting
- The government and development partners will gradually increase the amount of development financing on national budget, starting by putting sector financing on the sector plan
- Explore the possibility of conducting a joint WASH Sector Review to outline a comprehensive strategy for meeting SDG 6.1 & 2
- Further enhance national capacity for service delivery, planning and monitoring of WASH services
- Develop a strategy to prioritize addressing the needs of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged

4. Planned actions to catalyze progress towards the SDGs in Afghanistan

Given its status of a fragile- and low-income country, still plagued by internal conflict, Afghanistan will prioritize reaching the SDG ambitions of universal access to basic drinking water and sanitation services as outlined under the Citizen's Charter National Priority Program. It seems realistic to expect that the funding required to reach this level of ambition will actually be made available thanks to the continued generous support of the international community.

- Policy and strategy:** National policies and plans are in place to reach universal access to basic services and where possible aim to address elements of safely managed services (prioritizing metered piped connections on premises, establishing a regulatory framework, promoting safe re-use of human waste in agriculture).
- Capacity development:** Under the Citizen's Charter the provincial and district capacity will be greatly enhanced to provide the minimum service package which includes access to basic drinking water and sanitation services to all communities. Teams of engineers and social mobilizers will operate at district level and will support the Community Development Councils and social mobilizers of the Facilitating Partners in each community.

Relevant (SMART) actions to ensure the Collaborative Behaviours are applied

- Strengthening National Accountability Systems:** Building on the systems set-up under the National Solidarity Program, the Management Information System of the Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Program will be strengthened and a water point census will be conducted to map the water supply needs.
- Increase on-budget support:** Partners will be encouraged to increase their on-budget support for the WASH sector so that government systems can be effectively run and services effectively delivered in a well-planned and coordinated manner, prioritizing areas of greatest need.

Plans and strategies to reduce the financing gap

- Plans to use existing resources more effectively:**
 - i. Private sector involvement in provision of urban water supply will be further promoted and facilitated, and a regulatory framework needs to be established to ensure compliance with national service standards
 - ii. All new piped supplies will have to be metered and community development councils must establish payment schemes for all other forms of centralized community water supplies
- Plans to access more financing:**
 - i. Increased performance with full transparency and accountability will inspire confidence with the donor community to increase their investments in rural water supply and sanitation
 - ii. Further strengthening of AUWSC and improved regulation for private sector involvement in urban water supply and sanitation will enhance donor confidence to further invest in WASH in urban areas.
 - iii. As part of a Joint Sector Review, develop a comprehensive financing strategy for the urban and rural WASH sector



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