



Christine Esther Kayenparwoth, washes hands on arrival at Nyaravur Health Centre III in Nyaravur Subcounty, Nebbi District, Uganda. *Photo by Jimmy Adriko/UNICEF.*

The human rights to water and sanitation

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About the SWA Briefing Papers

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Other Briefing Papers:

[Leaving No One Behind](#)

[Integrity, Accountability, and Transparency](#)

[Climate Change](#)

[Strengthening gender equality in access to water, sanitation and hygiene](#)

Rationale

Abiding by the human rights to water and sanitation are embedded in SWA's Guiding Principles. Further, three human rights principles (non-discrimination and equality, participation and accountability) are directly named as SWA Guiding Principles. SWA partners must therefore have the knowledge and tools to understand how these human rights can be integrated into, and strengthen, the work that we do. At last but not least, SWA country partners have endorsed the recognition of the human rights to water and sanitation at the United Nations.

Human rights are at the core of the SDGs, with the human rights to water and sanitation specifically mentioned in the 2030 Development Agenda.¹

As the partnership is increasingly focussing efforts at country level, the SWA Secretariat is receiving specific requests from partners for more guidance on how they can implement the human rights to water and sanitation, along with related human rights, such as the rights to health and education. In this regard, it is important to recall that all human rights are indivisible and inter-dependent. Human rights are also universal, which means they belong to every person, in every country.

This Briefing Note offers SWA partners some concrete suggestions on the steps and approaches they could embrace to operationalize the human rights to water and sanitation, through the lens of the SWA framework.

¹ Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, para. 7 <https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda>

What are the key aspects of the human rights to water and sanitation that can be implemented by SWA partners?

The integration of human rights into policy, strategy, programming, budgeting and implementation places the individual's autonomy and dignity, as well as government obligations at the centre of SWA's activities. This strengthens the work that the partnership is already doing on equality and non-discrimination, participation, access to information, accountability and sustainability as key principles for achieving the SDGs, and sanitation, water and hygiene for all, always and everywhere .

This first section explains human rights principles and the standards of the human rights to water and sanitation.

Equality and non-discrimination

Equality and non-discrimination are key principles of human rights, requiring that all stakeholders pay attention to the reasons for discrimination in access to services, whether intentional or not, and remove such barriers to access.

Almost all countries have legislation that prohibits governments from enacting legislation, policies or practices that lead to discrimination on any [ground](#), and this applies equally to water and sanitation services.

It is often people who live in poverty, women, indigenous peoples and people from minority groups, persons with disabilities, migrants, internally displaced, refugees, older persons, people in places of detention, children who are excluded from services, and people living in disaster and drought prone areas. The reasons for this are not always financial, or due to where they live, but a result of policies, planning, programming and implementation loopholes that fail to consider the specific needs of marginalised and vulnerable people, or which specifically exclude them, such as requirements for people in informal settlements to have tenure documentation before being able to access services.

As has been discussed in previous briefing papers on [gender equality](#) and the [elimination of inequalities](#), we cannot claim to have realised our mission until everyone has access to services, and all discriminatory practices have been eliminated.

All of SWA's partners therefore have an important role to play in identifying and eliminating inequalities.

Participation

Human rights to water and sanitation require meaningful [participation and engagement](#) in decision-making in the development and improvement of water and sanitation services, particularly those who have been denied adequate access. SWA partners must therefore identify marginalised and vulnerable people and those who are discriminated against, and subsequently promote, protect, and engage with them. This may include working to remove barriers to participation.

This is equally true at the global level. SWA partners can help facilitate discussions between international financing institutions and governments, a dialogue in which

national government's voice is not always heard or listened to by international donors and other actors.

The work that SWA does in building trust between all stakeholders is critical for suitability, effectiveness and sustainability of national plans and processes, and this includes making space for all stakeholders to effectively engage in planning and decision-making processes.

Access to information

Human rights law also includes a [right to information](#), and this is critically important for the realization of human rights, from ensuring that people are informed about their rights, to information on how the rights are implemented in practice, and what to do if they are not.

Where information is not accurate or well-understood by or not available to the intended recipients, it has no value. SWA partners can play an important part in sharing information about strategies, plans, budgets and services with individuals and communities in an accessible manner, and in gathering and analysing information that comes from communities, whether about the quality of services, or who is able to access them, and if not, why not.

[To reach the most marginalised people, we need to be creative, and communicate in through a range of channels, finding alternatives for places and people that methods used for richer communities might miss](#), to ensure the smooth flow of accurate and helpful information and to avoid indirect or unintended harm

Accountability

Human rights become empty rhetoric without appropriate processes or systems in place to hold governments and other actors, including external support agencies and other development partners to account when they violate, are at risk of violating human rights, or contribute to violations.

[Accountability is central to safeguarding people from corruption, and achieving equality, sustainability and quality of services](#). Accountability measures are also necessary to monitor the resources available for and expenditure on water and sanitation. [A previous SWA briefing note addresses accountability and integrity in greater detail](#).

Unfortunately, accountability mechanisms for water, sanitation and hygiene are often inaccessible, unaffordable, weak and lacking in the right institutions and procedures. There is a role for all stakeholders to engage in and advocate for transparency and accountability in the sector. [SWA's Mutual Accountability Mechanism promotes accountability between all actors as part of its contribution to supporting countries and other partners to achieve the SDGs](#).

Progressive realization and maximum available resources

Governments must work to ‘progressively realise’ economic, social and cultural rights, including the rights to water and sanitation, using the maximum available resources.² Acknowledging that it is not possible for all human rights, particularly economic, social and cultural rights, to be met immediately, in practical terms, this means that under human rights law, it is recognized that universal access will take time, but concrete measures to achieve it must start immediately. States must devote as many resources they can towards fulfilling economic, social and cultural rights, including the rights to water and sanitation. This obligation places a priority on activities concerning resource allocation, such as determining the national budget. Hence, governments must demonstrate that they have a realisable, financed plan to ensure that everyone has access in the shortest possible timeframe, that this plan foresees, as necessary, measures to expand such resources and that it prioritises the needs of the most disadvantaged and vulnerable populations. [Further States must ensure that there are no barriers, intentional or otherwise, to ensuring services for all, whether in informal settlements or remote rural areas, places of detention, refugee camps and other places that are often left out of policies.](#) Progressive realisation is a useful concept for the achievement of the SDGs, as governments have a fixed timeframe to work towards.

States cannot use ‘lack of funds’ as an excuse for not acting – where they do not have sufficient funds, they must be able to demonstrate why, providing evidence, and explaining that every effort has been made to use all resources that are at its disposition in an effort to satisfy, as a matter of priority, those minimum obligations, as well as the steps they are taking to [secure the necessary funds, including through taxation](#), to reach the most vulnerable and marginalised individuals and groups. Parliaments also have a crucial role to play on this front, particularly in identifying the right [fiscal and taxation policies](#). States should seek international cooperation and assistance internationally in promoting and protecting the human rights to water and sanitation when such funds are not available. SWA has always worked with partners on increasing access to financing, and continues to do so, particularly through the Finance Ministers Meetings.

Standards of the human rights to water and sanitation

Under the human rights to water and sanitation, there are five standards that must be met – the normative content of the rights. These should be adapted for each country’s individual needs and contexts.

1. Availability

Availability refers to sufficiency of water, as well as adequate infrastructure and financial resources to fulfil the requirements of the human rights to water and sanitation.

Even without the particular threats of water scarcity and climate change, States must monitor the availability and different demands for water resources, to ensure allocation according to human rights requirements. Where there is a risk of limited availability,

² International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights article 2 (1) and CESCR General Comment no. 15, para. 41 E/C.12/2002/11 (2002).
<https://www.internationalbudget.org/wp-content/uploads/Maximum-Available-Resources-booklet.pdf>

early warning signals will allow evidence-based decisions about water management. This will also require clear criteria on prioritization different water uses, taking into account the needs of present and futures generations, better management and regulation of water users that are depleting or polluting water resources as well as better management of intergovernmental decisions and responses in the event of a climate or other water scarcity issue. Household uses necessary for realising the rights to water and sanitation must be protected and prioritised, particularly for marginalised and vulnerable populations.

2. Accessibility

Accessibility refers to the physical accessibility of water and sanitation, ensuring that everyone regardless of who they are, their health status, physical ability or location is able to access services, preferably in the home. This includes the location and design of facilities, as well as time and distance and the physical security of using the service, and the proper management of waste.

Water, sanitation and hygiene facilities and services must not only be accessible at the household level, but in all places where people spend significant amounts of time. This includes health and educational institutions such as schools and clinics, detention centres such as prisons, and workplaces, markets and other public places.

3. Affordability

Human rights do not require that services are available for free, but that services are affordable, that every individual or group must be able to access water and sanitation, regardless of their ability to pay. This means that the price paid to meet all these needs must not limit people's capacity to buy other basic goods and services, including food, housing, health care and education, guaranteed by other human rights. While human rights law does not require services to be provided free of charge, States have an obligation to provide free services or put adequate subsidy mechanisms in place to ensure that services always remain affordable for the poor and those who are left behind. Of particular interest is the tension between ensuring affordability of services, and the requirement for services to be financially viable.

4. Acceptability

The acceptability of any water and sanitation services provided is crucial: water and sanitation facilities will not be used if they fail to meet the social or cultural standards of the people they are meant to serve. Acceptability has important implications for dignity and privacy, which are themselves human rights principles that permeate international human rights law and are especially relevant to the human right to sanitation and associated hygiene.

- **Water** must be of an acceptable odour, taste and colour to meet all personal and domestic uses. The water facility itself must be acceptable for the intended use, especially for personal hygiene.
- **Sanitation** facilities will only be acceptable to users if the design, positioning and conditions of use are sensitive to people's cultures and priorities.

Particularly with respect to sanitation and associated **hygiene**, a number of practices are unacceptable from a human rights perspective. These include the manual emptying of pit latrines and the stigma that can be attached to women and girls during [menstruation](#). States must ensure that these practices are eliminated, which will often

require a range of measures, including political leadership, awareness raising and legal and policy change.

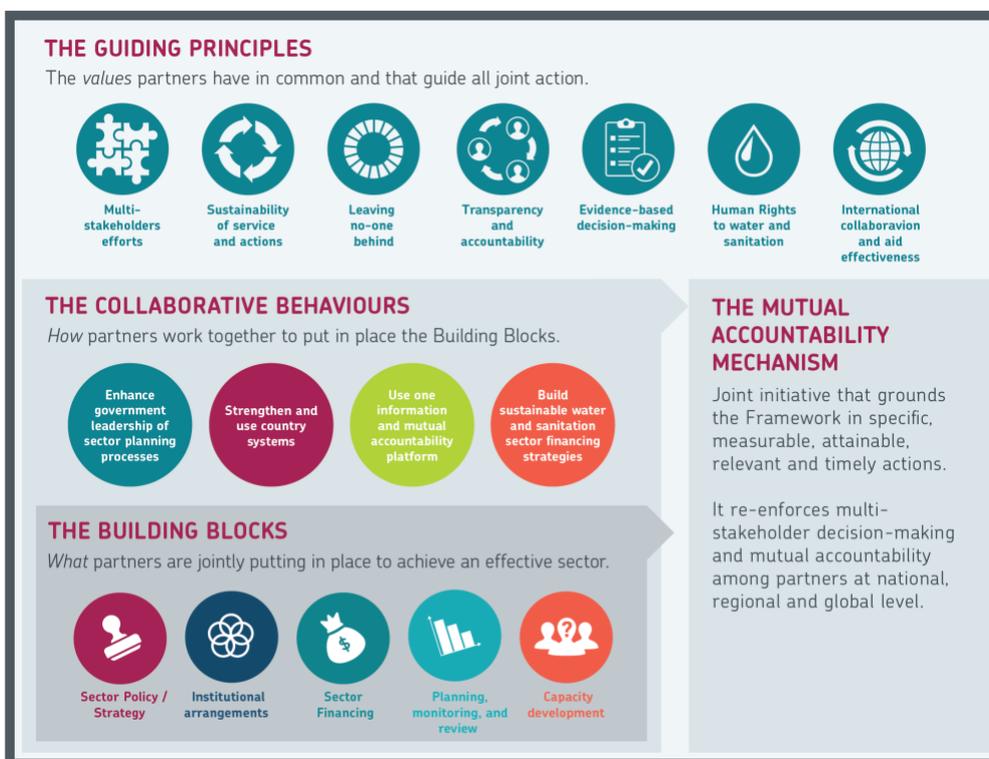
5. Quality

The quality and safety of water and sanitation services must be ensured to protect the health of users and the general public. From the perspective of the human rights to water and sanitation, the following considerations are important:

- Water must be of a quality that is safe to use for human consumption (drinking and the preparation of food) and for personal and domestic hygiene. It must be free from microorganisms, chemical substances and radiological hazards that constitute a threat to human health.
- Sanitation facilities must be safe to use and must effectively prevent human, animal and insect contact with human excreta, to ensure safety and to protect the health of users, the community and the wider environment. Toilets must be regularly cleaned, accessible to those for whom the toilet is intended, and provide hygiene facilities for washing hands with soap and water. Women and girls also require facilities to enable menstrual hygiene management, including the disposal of menstrual products. Ensuring safe sanitation further requires inclusive design and hygiene promotion and education, to ensure that people can use toilets in a hygienic manner

Integrating human rights into SWA's Framework - Guiding Principles, Building Blocks and Collaborative Behaviours

The Sanitation and Water for All partnership developed the SWA Framework to catalyse effective multi-stakeholder collaboration in support of strong, resilient water and sanitation systems that can deliver lasting change. It can provide the basis for partners to take action to help integrate human rights into legislation, policies, programmes, financing and other actions. The SWA Guiding Principles, Collaborative Behaviours and Building Blocks are useful for framing the conversation on human rights and access to water, sanitation and hygiene. This is explored in the following section.



The SWA Guiding Principles and human rights



SWA’s seven Guiding Principles are the values partners have in common and that guide all joint action.

1. Multi-stakeholder efforts

Human rights require participation and that the voices of the most excluded and marginalised be heard, and given meaningful opportunities to influence decision-making. At the core of SWA is the belief that public policies built from multi-stakeholder efforts – bringing together governments, civil society, private sector, development partners and academic institutions – lead to better, more sustainable outcomes. While governments have the obligation to realise human rights, all SWA partners have something to offer, and collaboration increases the likelihood of success. SWA’s multistakeholder work also encompasses efforts to reach beyond the sector to other related topics across the SDG agenda, as well as connecting with allies and movements working for social justice more broadly.

2. Sustainability of services and actions

Sustainability reflects the human rights principle non-retrogression, meaning we

must not lose the progress that has been made. For the water and sanitation sector, this principle highlights the importance of planning for the future, not just for the conditions of today, but also taking into account the rights of future generations, climate change, environmental protection, urban growth and, in the simplest of terms, the costs of operation and maintenance. This is necessary in order to ensure that systems are not just constructed, but that they are accompanied by the right institutions, human resources, financing and procedures to enable them to continue working into the future, as long as they are needed at present and in the future. Services that are not sustainable will inevitably first affect those who are poor, vulnerable, or disadvantaged, as they are least able to adapt their access to services when the necessity arises.

3. Leaving no-one behind and minimum standards of coverage, access, use and effectiveness of services

This guiding principle to leave no-one behind reflects the human rights principle of non-discrimination and equality, which has been outlined above. Also, as explained above, there are five specific standards associated with the human rights to water and sanitation, which governments must incorporate into their policies, programmes and planning. These are availability of the resource or service, accessibility of the services at all times for all, affordability of the services, and quality and acceptability of the service.

Human rights require that governments ensure a minimum basic level of access to services for everyone, before upgrading to a better service for some, and that particular support is provided to those individuals and communities that are currently being excluded.

4. Transparency and accountability

The guiding principles of transparency and accountability are also embodied by the human rights principles of access to information and accountability. Transparency in all aspects of government, particularly pertaining to planning and budgeting and accountability of all actors to adhere to plans and budgets is essential for reaching the SDGs. SWA's partners should integrate complaints mechanisms into their plans to improve access to services, including ensuring that institutions have the right administrative procedures to [monitor service delivery](#), and [address complaints](#).

Accountability is also a key tool to supporting people to claim their rights, enabling a process by which policy failings may be identified and addressed so that access to water and sanitation is continually improved. With strong accountability processes in place, relating not just to human rights obligations, but also national legislation and policies, and other administrative processes, governments will be more responsive and have a stronger capacity to create an enabling environment for [service delivery](#).

Integrating access to water and sanitation as human rights into the constitution or in legislation sets a requirement for compliance, along with an adequate accountability process to strengthen this compliance.

5. Evidence-based decision-making

Human rights are as much about the process as the end result. Following human rights principles promotes good governance and leads to sustainable and inclusive outcomes. Evidence of using human rights to improve access to service provision

using many different approaches can be found at the SWA website here.

6. Human rights to water and sanitation

Human rights are central to SWA's mission and to achieving the SDGs. This paper sets out the many opportunities for integrating human rights into the work that SWA and its partners do, and more information can be found on the SWA website.

7. International collaboration and aid effectiveness

All governments have obligations to achieve the human rights to water and sanitation within their own borders. Less acknowledged are the obligations of all States to support other countries in the realization of human rights, and protection of human rights.

As part of their obligation to respect, protect and fulfil human rights, international cooperation, collaboration and aid must not hinder recipient governments' human rights obligations, and should be aligned with recipient government policies and plans. The [obligations](#) of donor States include ensuring that development assistance is disbursed to enhance the realization of human rights in recipient countries, rather than fulfilling the [political interests of donor countries](#).

Building Blocks



SWA's Building Blocks capture the **key elements** that the sector must have in place to be able to deliver sustainable services and progressively eliminate inequalities in access to water and sanitation. In this section, there are non-exhaustive checklists that can help partners assess whether their actions are compliant with human rights. There are [further checklists available on the SWA website](#).

1. Sector policy / strategy

Legislation, policies and strategies should specifically integrate human rights obligations including how to prioritize the needs of the most marginalized and vulnerable individuals and groups.

[Checklist](#)

- a. Are there laws, regulations and policies in place recognising the human rights to water and sanitation?
- b. Do targets reflect human rights principles and standards?
- c. Do laws, regulations and policies adequately consider the specific needs of marginalised, vulnerable and disadvantaged people?
- d. Do by-laws governing water and sanitation reflect human rights?
- e. Are the policies being translated into programs and are there guidelines to implement the same?

2. Institutional arrangements

Institutional arrangements should include systems and institutions that integrate human rights obligations, particularly opportunities for participatory processes, monitoring of service provision and complaints procedures. Independent systems, which are accessible to all, and used for meaningful engagement, must be in place to hold governments to account for the delivery of services.

Institutions must be assigned specific responsibilities with respect to delivering and monitoring services.

Multi-stakeholder platforms facilitate the development of the institutional frameworks that will be responsive to human rights requirements (e.g. participation of community-based organizations in Joint Sector Reviews).

Checklist

- a. Do all relevant institutions explicitly reference the human rights to water and sanitation in their terms of reference?
- b. Do institutions function transparently and in a participatory, non-discriminatory manner?
- c. Do institutions adequately integrate the human rights to water and sanitation into their work?
- d. Are regulators able to monitor compliance with the human rights to water and sanitation and react accordingly?

3. Sector financing

Financing is often separated from other considerations, as if the rules that govern how money is resourced and spent follows rules that are independent of politics. Conversations about how to ensure that inequalities are eliminated are sublimated to the assumption that water and sanitation services be profitable. This leads to investments tending to favour low-risk service delivery, in other words formal services in urban areas, and water or sewage treatment plants that are designed to serve only the formal settlements in cities, even in places where significant proportions of the population live in informal settlements. .

However, it has been shown again and again that investments in service provision repay themselves many times over. Investments in services for marginalised and vulnerable populations positively influence economic and social development.

Financing that follows government obligations to realise the human rights to water and sanitation requires prioritisation of services for poor, disadvantaged and vulnerable individuals and communities. Therefore, financing must be provided for such programmes and projects, and these budgets must be monitored, to ensure that they are spent as budgeted.

Checklist

- a. Are there sufficient funds dedicated to realisation of the human rights to water and sanitation and particularly the elimination of inequalities, and non-retrogression?
- b. [Are States complying with their obligations to use maximum available resources, including through taxation?](#)
- c. Do tariff and subsidy structures make adequate provision for affordability of services?
- d. Are available budgets spent in a timely and transparent manner?
- e. Are funds for 'software' sufficient to ensure institution and capacity building?
- f. Are the funds specifically budgeted for poor and marginalised and are there monitoring mechanisms to track the same?
- g. Are duty-bearers and relevant officials analysing the lifecycle costs of services to ensure budgets are sufficient for sustainability?

4. Planning, monitoring, and review

Human rights must be integrated into planning, monitoring and review processes, which means that they must be participatory, transparent and multi-stakeholder.

Human rights monitoring includes identification and monitoring of human rights standards of availability, accessibility, affordability, quality and acceptability, as well as monitoring the actions that the sector (including service providers) take in order to ensure that everyone is able to access affordable and safe services.

Data on access to water and sanitation must be disaggregated according to identified inequalities, including gender, disability, age, specific ethnic or indigenous groups, language, geographic location, occupation, and poverty.

Checklist

- a. Are planning processes participatory, transparent and multi-stakeholder?
- b. Are there adequate indicators to monitor compliance with the human rights to water and sanitation?
- c. Is data regarding access to water and sanitation disaggregated according to gender, age, disability, race, geographic location and other relevant factors?
- d. Is relevant and disaggregated data made public?
- e. Is there an institution mandated to monitor compliance with human rights, including examining potential violations of the human rights to water and sanitation?

5. Capacity development

Increase awareness of human rights obligations and responsibilities among all stakeholders, including government ministries, departments and agencies, external support agencies, research and learning institutions, the private sector and community organisations, including the actions that they can take to achieve these.

Checklist

- a. Are duty-bearers and other decision-makers educated in human rights, and the relevance for human social, cultural and economic development?

- b. Do duty-bearers and officials have the necessary skills to ensure water and sanitation services are human rights -compliant, for example are female friendly and disability inclusive?
- c. Are there public awareness campaigns on what human rights entail, and how they can be claimed and protected?

Collaborative Behaviours



SWA Collaborative Behaviours are how partners work together to put in place the Building Blocks.

1. Enhance government leadership of sector planning processes

As human rights confer obligations on governments, their leadership in realising human rights is critical. However, other partners will often have greater knowledge and experience in identifying and managing how human rights can be implemented, making a multi-stakeholder process central to planning processes.

As human rights require participation, all stakeholders must be involved in decision-making, including the most marginalized individuals and groups. This may be through advisory sessions, civil society and/or academia working closely with national and local government in devising the most appropriate policies and strategies.

2. Strengthen and use country systems

National systems and institutions, such as regulatory frameworks and public financial management processes, are essential for governments to set their priorities, and for other partners to be aware of those priorities, as well as progress made towards achieving them.

Country systems must comply with human rights, and this particularly means that States must work to the benefit of the poorest and most disadvantaged members of society, using maximum available resources. This requirement also extends to how donor governments disburse their resources, and should work towards [development effectiveness](#).

3. Use one information and mutual accountability platform

The human rights to water and sanitation oblige governments to monitor access to these services, including full information on whose access falls short of human rights standards.

Systems that allow for mutual accountability between the different stakeholders will ensure that all partners are pulling in the same direction: this is the purpose for which

the Mutual Accountability Mechanism was created.

All information and mutual accountability platforms must be open to all residents to comment on and challenge where necessary, so that CSOs and other non-government actors have the opportunity of providing information, and clarifying where data may be inaccurate or incomplete.

4. Build sustainable water and sanitation sector financing strategies

Human rights principles must be integrated into all financing strategies. This requires that financing strategies secure programmes and projects that target individuals and groups with poor access to services. These budgets must be monitored, to ensure that they are spent as budgeted.

Government investments whether from loans from development banks or from international grants or through public-private agreements must contribute to increasing basic service coverage, and must include considerations of maintenance and operation. Affordability of services (including, but not limited to, tariffs) must be carefully monitored and cross-subsidies put in place for low-income households and individuals, where necessary and appropriate.

Human rights also demand transparency and sustainability in financing strategies.

Integrating human rights into SWA's global and regional activities

The SWA partnership works at international, regional and at national levels, and SWA partners can adopt different actions at every level to integrate the human rights to water and sanitation.

This will include integrating the language and principles of human rights into all SWA webinars, High-level Meetings, including ministerial dialogues and sessions at international and regional conferences.

a. SWA Mutual Accountability Mechanism

The Mutual Accountability Mechanism integrates the human rights principles of accountability, participation and access to information. This mechanism supports SWA's partners to build on and develop multi-stakeholder platforms, at national, regional and global levels to have meaningful discussions about how governments can work with each other as well as together with all stakeholders to reach the SDGs. This will also involve setting regional and global targets and commitments as well as national commitments, monitoring achievement of the commitments, and holding each other to account for achievement of those commitments. Commitments made under the SWA Mutual Accountability Mechanism are given space for discussion at appropriate regional and global platforms.

b. High-level Meetings and engagement

Sanitation and Water for All's High-level Meetings are an opportunity to discuss specific issues that are of interest to partners; one of these is realization of the human rights to water and sanitation. Accountability will always be a part of these discussions, particularly as part of the Mutual Accountability Mechanism, along with the elimination of inequalities to leave no-one behind, identifying and acting on the roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders.

SWA partners also engage with high-level actors beyond the High-level Meetings, including with heads of state, parliamentarians and other sector leaders to realize the human rights to water and sanitation.

c. Knowledge management, webinars, and the SWA tools portal

Sanitation and Water for All is promoting several different knowledge management tools, including webinars, and a tools portal. The human rights to water and sanitation are integrated into these platforms, and various tools on human rights are available in the tools portal.

Sanitation and Water for All also collaborates to strengthen peer-to-peer learning between countries and organizations and for knowledge exchange on how to integrate human rights into policies and practice, providing examples of good practice of policies and financing measures that reflect human rights concerns.

Sanitation and Water for All, based on its partners' expertise and together with its partners, is exploring how to provide capacity building and training to SWA partners on understanding of the human rights to water and sanitation. This includes the development of communications tools and social media campaigns on specific aspects of the human rights to water and sanitation. [The Handbook on the human rights to water and sanitation has also been relaunched and is available on the SWA website. Key resources, such as General Comment No. 15 are available in the resources section below.](#)

d. Steering Committee meetings

Sanitation and Water for All's global policy is directed by the Steering Committee. Issues relating to the integration of the human rights to water and sanitation into partners' activities can be achieved through increasing the Steering Committee members understanding of these rights and why they are important for the partnership.

e. UN processes, including the High-Level Political Forum

Sanitation and Water for All partners should take the opportunity of examining their activities, its engagements on key United Nations processes around the importance of human rights and sector strengthening. There are various opportunities to engage with other global multi-stakeholder partnerships, including Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) movement and the Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health. SWA can also work towards strengthening the understanding of human rights in their submissions to the High Level Political Forum, as well working with SWA partners on their submissions.

Integrating human rights into national level activities:

Below are some approaches that SWA partners could consider to strengthen their national work on the human rights to water and sanitation:

1. **Participation:** Strengthening participatory approaches through multi-stakeholder processes to achieve the SDGs. These approaches should include non-WASH actors, such as local government ministries and civil society organisations that work on social justice issues.

2. **Access to information:** Information on what governments are doing to ensure that everyone can enjoy their human rights to water and sanitation can be shared in many different ways, and should be context and audience specific. This can range from using social media platforms to messaging on the radio in local languages.
3. **Monitoring:** SWA works closely with GLAAS and JMP on creating the appropriate indicators necessary to monitor progress towards realization of the human rights to water and sanitation, including on gender disparities and affordability. This work also includes the disaggregation of data according to different categories, such as income, gender, ethnic/religious/social considerations, as well as geographical location.
4. **Policy, strategy, and planning:** SWA partners can integrate human rights considerations, including non-discrimination and equality, participation, access to information and accountability into their policies, standards and targets.
5. **Accountability:** SWA partners collaborate to include human rights considerations in commitments made under the Mutual Accountability Mechanism.
6. **Decentralization and local authorities:** SWA partners can work with the ministries or departments of local government to support capacity-building at local level on human rights and the elimination of inequalities, as it is at local level that decisions are made regarding specific population groups who are not able to enjoy their human rights.
7. **Financing:** Human rights makes particular demands on financing strategies, including that there are specific budget lines to ensure participation and access to information, as well as expanded and dedicated budget lines to ensure access for the most vulnerable and marginalized. Budget monitoring is important to ensure that resources are spent as intended.

Conclusion

The human rights to water and sanitation are not simply an end in themselves, but are a means to an end. The principles of non-discrimination and equality, participation, access to information, accountability and sustainability can be understood as ongoing actions to achieve universal access to water and sanitation. There is always a need and an opportunity to go deeper, to achieve more.

The human rights to water and sanitation make particular demands on governments and other stakeholders in the process of ensuring universal access to water and sanitation.

They require governments to prevent and address any discriminatory practices, demanding proactive efforts for vulnerable and marginalized populations to be included and prioritized in all decisions around service provision. They require that information regarding service provision and how to access services is available and accessible.

These human rights also require that States, including donor States, examine all financing arrangements for water and sanitation services, including how finances are sourced, and how budgets are spent. All partners, including those that provide financial resources, whether as grants, loans or business investments, must be diligent in how that financing is managed.

At SWA, it is understood that every partner, every actor has a role to play in achieving the SDGs and the human rights to water and sanitation. The Mutual Accountability Mechanism contributes to this through government-led commitments, matched by commitments from all other relevant stakeholders.

Through these actions, the human rights to water and sanitation will become a reality, for all, always and everywhere.

Resources

[Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, General Comment no. 15 on the right to water, E/C.12/2002/11, 2002.](#) Substantive issues arising in the implementation of the international covenant on economic, social and cultural rights

[UN OHCHR Special Rapporteur on the human rights to water and sanitation](#)

[UN Special Rapporteur's Handbook on the human rights to water and sanitation, 2014](#)

[International Water Association's Manual on the human rights to water and sanitation for practitioners, 2016](#)

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Developed by SWA, March 2021
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