Checklist for Integrating Gender Equality in Humanitarian Sanitation and Faecal Sludge Management (FSM)

**Introduction**

**Why does gender equality in humanitarian sanitation and FSM matter?**  Almost a decade ago, the international community pledged to ensure everyone has access to adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene, emphasizing the needs of women and girls, especially during emergencies. Yet, for too many women and girls, sanitation is still not meeting their needs. One report revealed that, on average, [40% of women](https://www.oxfamwash.org/en/sanitweaks) avoid using latrines in humanitarian settings. The impact of unmet needs is significant, increasing their risk of suffering from disease, poor mental health, and sexualised violence. Discriminatory gender norms restrict women from having a say in sanitation-related decisions within their households and communities. Even though this is the case, society still expects women to do unpaid work to fix sanitation problems, either by volunteering in their communities or by teaching good hygiene to their families. Gender norms contribute to a shortage of female technical staff in the humanitarian sector. Despite global and organizational commitments and expertise on how to deliver, good practices are still not consistently implemented

**Why this checklist?** To deliver better sanitation services and faster advances on gender equality in humanitarian settings, we need a step change. Safe, private toilets are essential for this goal, but they alone won’t be enough. For meaningful change to occur, gender equality must be a fundamental element in professional development and integrated into all organizational processes, from planning to monitoring. By using this checklist, staff can meaningfully integrate gender equality into every stage of the sanitation value chain.

**About this checklist**: This checklist is a tool for implementing equitable sanitation services that support gender equality and women’s empowerment. It is a companion to SaniHub’s Topic Brief on gender in humanitarian sanitation and FSM action. The expected users are humanitarian WASH practitioners working in humanitarian and transitional contexts.

Gender equality should be a priority for WASH practitioners in humanitarian work, not just during the emergency. This checklist includes actions for pre-emergency preparation, immediate response, and the long-term recovery phases. We expect gender-sensitive approaches will be more appropriate in the first response, gender-responsive activities in the mid-term, and more gender-transformative programming over the longer term. However, to ensure a successful and effective response, we should adapt the type and order of activities based on individual circumstances. Given that effective action requires context-specific approaches, we advocate for the participation of women, girls, and individuals with diverse gender identities in all phases of programme implementation, starting with the identification of needs and design. To achieve better sanitation and FSM outcomes that promote gender equality and women’s empowerment, organisations need a top-to-bottom shift in mindset among WASH professionals.

The term “women” in this checklist is broad, encompassing women with disabilities, women of all ages, diverse economic and educational levels, women of different sexual orientations, transgender women, and women from various racial, ethnic, and religious backgrounds.

**CHECKLIST**

**(A) Ongoing**

1. **Keep your own gender training up to date:** As part of professional development, undertake regular gender-focused learning. This is particularly important in contexts where the gender norms vary from the content of organisational policies. It can also support those who are unsure how to include people with diverse gender identities in WASH programming.

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|  | **Suggested actions** |
| **Short term** | **Mid to longer term** |
| Checkbox Ticked with solid fill | Make sure you’re up-to-date on organizational policies and commitments regarding gender equality, and apply them in your work. | Make regular time for reflection on gender with your peers |
| Checkbox Ticked with solid fill | Invest in professional development training and mentoring to increase knowledge of gender equality issues | Include gender equality objectives in personal performance frameworks for staff. |

1. **Advocate for a gender equal WASH team:** Sanitation and FSM is already a gender-segregated sector. This situation is amplified in the humanitarian sector. While women begin a career in the humanitarian sector at similar rates as men, a higher number of women leave before reaching the midpoint of their careers. Limited opportunities for advancement, sexual harassment, work-life balance struggles, or family obligations often contribute to this. To promote gender balance in WASH teams, active steps are necessary, such as implementing policies like parental leave, sexual harassment, and safeguarding guidelines to make the workplace more welcoming and supportive for women and working parents. To keep women in the sector, it’s crucial to understand and tackle the hurdles they face at specific career stages.

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|  | **Suggested actions** |
| **Short term** | **Mid to longer term** |
| Checkbox Ticked with solid fill | Implement gender self-assessments to pinpoint internal opportunities for gender integration, covering policy development, implementation, and fostering supportive organizational structures for gender equality. | To create a more diverse and inclusive workplace, make gender representation a key component of hiring practices. This includes ensuring at least 30% women on all senior management teams, which will promote diverse perspectives and improve decision-making. |
| Checkbox Ticked with solid fill | Require senior directors/managers to guarantee gender equality in programmes and the workplace, creating safe and decent working environments for women and diverse employees. | Attract and keep greater numbers of women and minority staff and create a pipeline for advancement into leadership roles. |
| Checkbox Ticked with solid fill | Implement comprehensive PSEA training across all teams, enforce a code of conduct, and ensure robust safeguards are in place to enable prompt and systematic responses to complaints raised by women and diverse staff. | Disaggregate staffing data by gender and other diversity factors. |

1. **Refresh any preparedness and contingency plans:** Make sure preparedness or contingency plans and stockpiles reflect the latest recommendations on gender-specific sanitation needs, including those from After-Action Reviews, evaluations, and other sources.

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|  | **Suggested actions** |
| **Short term** | **Mid to longer term** |
| Checkbox Ticked with solid fill | Ensure that all programmes integrate a gender, age, and disability marker or similar tool to incorporate these factors into all elements of any humanitarian response. | Engage in ongoing feedback with people of all genders, evaluate the gathered information, and implement their recommendations in the planning process and program design. |
| Checkbox Ticked with solid fill | Consult with local gender equality groups on what hygiene kits should include. Identify steps to ensure people can access hygiene products safely (with stigma or abuse) and as often needed. |  |

1. **Advance inclusive hiring within partners, sub-contractors as well as Refugee Led Organisations**

While men are more likely to be employed in constructing toilets and septic tanks, emptying services, or transporting waste, women tend to be involved in promoting sanitation or marketing sanitation products, often without pay. Women in the sanitation industry face stigma alongside existing gender norms, leading to fewer women joining the workforce. Sanitation companies often hire men over women due to a belief that women lack the physical capacity or necessary skills, like a driving license, to perform the work.

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|  | **Suggested actions** |
| **Short term** | **Mid to longer term** |
| Checkbox Ticked with solid fill | Conduct a gender supply-chain audit to find active and interested women’s groups who are already engaged in the sanitation value chain.  | Empower women, by providing training, to work in all parts of the sanitation chain, from making and selling biofuel to driving sanitation trucks, and using emptying technologies. |
| Checkbox Ticked with solid fill | Review sub-contracting policies and supportive hiring environments for socially inclusive and gender-sensitive procurement. Prioritise working with sub-contractors who hire, and/ or are owned by, women. | Work with influential men, community members, and leaders, while simultaneously addressing harmful social norms concerning women’s involvement in the sanitation workforce by educating their family members. |
| Checkbox Ticked with solid fill | Encourage partners to assess their organizational culture and human resources through gender audits, developing plans to boost female staffing. This may involve initiatives like setting targets for women in traditionally male-dominated positions, such as offering incentives to truck owners who employ female drivers.  | By offering training, enable unpaid WASH workers, especially women, to transition into formal sanitation roles, breaking down societal stigmas and creating opportunities within the Sanitation Value Chain. |
| Checkbox Ticked with solid fill | Partner organizations must provide adequate pay, safe working conditions, occupational safety and health measures, and personal protective equipment tailored for women, along with health insurance if possible, for all sanitation workers.  | Advocate for at least 30% representation of all women on all senior management teams or boards in partner organisations.  |

1. **Earmark funds for gender activities in WASH programme funding and design:** besides the costs associated with good standards of construction (such as solid latrine doors with locks and lighting), budget must also be made available for a gender analysis, diverse staffing, gender-specific capacities building, ensuring everyone feels safe using sanitation services, accessible complaint and response mechanisms and engagement of local gender partners and so forth.

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|  | **Suggested actions** |
| **Short term** | **Mid to longer term** |
| Checkbox Ticked with solid fill | Enhance gender-responsive budgeting in sanitation to monitor allocations and expenditures for gender equality results. | Advocate for longer-term investment in staff, time, and partnerships on gender transformative change.  |
| Checkbox Ticked with solid fill | Include reference to the gender marker in funding proposals as well as gender tags to indicate gender activities.  |   |

**(B) During the response**

1. **Include sanitation and FSM in a gender analysis:** Always ensurethat specialized partners (the gender cluster and/or other gender experts) consider sanitation and FSM related aspects in gender analysis and needs assessments. The analysis should describe the different impacts the humanitarian situation has on different genders and their priorities in terms of sanitation and adapt activities accordingly.

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|  | **Suggested actions** |
| **Short term** | **Mid to longer term** |
| Checkbox Ticked with solid fill | Conduct a gender analysis to pinpoint opportunities for gender integration, focusing on individuals at highest risk and their specific needs. Additionally, assess knowledge, attitudes, and practices (KAP) related to sanitation, menstrual hygiene management (MHH), products, and disposal options. Investigate whether sanitation and faecal sludge management (FSM) tasks are distributed evenly among household members. | Conduct gender analysis during and after the crises, and ensure women are involved in data collection, analysis, and response decision-making. This will help guarantee that the humanitarian response is tailored to meet the diverse needs of women. |
| Checkbox Ticked with solid fill | Develop an action plan on the analysis findings with budgeted activities on decision making roles and livelihood opportunities for women.  | Develop gender accountability mechanism to enable capture data and results to monitor progress. |

1. **Follow guidelines on gender in sanitation designs, siting, construction, and maintenance** Involve the affected community in discussions about latrine standards, specifically whether shared or family-style options are more suitable and implement their decision. By raising awareness and providing access to best practices and guidelines, we can promote appropriate latrine design and maintenance, leading to better sanitation.

Guidelines on gender

Be **safe and private**: be in a safe location; have good lighting; cubicles have solid walls, roof and doors and can be locked inside. Increased screening in front of shared toilet entrances could offer greater privacy for users.  A clearly marked latrine section for women, with its own entrance, is necessary in shared toilets. To minimize men gathering near toilets at night, ensure adequate lighting in other areas.

**Cater for menstrual and other hygiene requirements** by providing water and soap; hooks, shelves and mirrors; access to menstrual products; means for washing and/or disposal of menstrual products.

Be **accessible to all users**: Locate latrines based on the feedback of a diverse group of women and girls. Latrines should be accessible via a suitable path. Teach masons how to build latrines that are easy for everyone to use, like adding handrails to make squat latrines safer for pregnant women or older people.

* **Keep up with maintenance and management**: ensure proper management arrangements and cleaning are in place.

Be **affordable and available when needed**: Provide enough cubicles to avoid long queues that can lead to fighting, abuse of power by the caretaker, or a search for alternatives, which may be far away or unsafe. The Sphere Handbook (2018) defines a ratio of minimum 1 toilet for 20 people.

Source: Adapted from WaterAid, WSUP, UNICEF 2018 Female-Friendly Public and Community Toilets. A Guide for Planners and Decision-Makers

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|  | **Suggested actions** |
| **Short term** | **Mid to longer term** |
| Checkbox Ticked with solid fill | Collaborate with community members, representing all groups, to tailor guidelines to local needs.  | Involve men from different backgrounds (elders, community leaders, etc.) to promote women and girls’ participation in decision-making.  |
| Checkbox Ticked with solid fill | Distribute guidelines to partners and the community, and train masons (including women) to build latrines according to the minimum standards. |   |

1. **Influencing sanitation-related behaviour and decision making:** Seek gender balance and diversity in those recruited as sanitation behaviour change promoters. Hygiene promoters, a role primarily assigned to women, often receive little or no compensation. By exploiting women’s traditional roles as carers, this practice reinforces inequality and widens the gender gap in the sanitation profession. Ensure all materials and approaches promoting latrine use and safe FSM are gender-transformative, avoiding assigning tasks based on traditional gender roles (such as assigning latrine construction as a job for men). Including women’s voices and perspectives in WASH committees for IDPs and refugees results in better sanitation planning and decision-making. This ensures the efficient execution of activities such as upgrading, repairing, and maintaining latrines and septic tanks, including regular desludging.

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|  | **Suggested actions** |
| **Short term** | **Mid to longer term** |
| Checkbox Ticked with solid fill | Use communication strategies to engage community groups in promoting safer sanitation practices, like using latrines and safe FSM solutions. This will help reduce unsafe practices like piercing or opening latrine pits, and encourage people to continue using latrines rather than returning to open defecation. | Empower women and girls by boosting their confidence, knowledge, and skills, and ensure their meaningful inclusion in decision-making processes and leadership roles.  |
| Checkbox Ticked with solid fill | Promote targeted SBCC messages to encourage women and girls to dispose of menstrual products properly, reducing the rapid filling of latrines with disposable pads and diapers. | Ensure that sanitation promotion does not perpetuate reliance on women’s unpaid work in the community or household. |
| Checkbox Ticked with solid fill | To promote women’s involvement in decision-making, WASH committees are often required to have a gender balance, with women constituting at least half of the members. | Tailor WASH events to consider women’s needs, e.g. obtaining childcare provision during the meetings/trainings |

1. **Assess the impact of the WASH programme on Do No Harm and safety from a gender perspective.** Routinely perform accessibility and safety audits and take specific action on the findings.To minimize unintended negative consequences, especially for women in groups at a higher risk of violence, it’s crucial to closely monitor resistance and backlash (including violence, rumours, harassment, or abuse) against changes in sanitation-related roles that challenge traditional gender norms.

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|  | **Suggested actions** |
| **Short term** | **Mid to longer term** |
| Checkbox Ticked with solid fill | Equip staff, partners, and WASH committees with the skills to assess latrine design and construction location for safety and accessibility such as through an accessibility and safety audits. Collaborate with organizations of women and persons with disabilities on implementing the audits. | Offer a secure and easily accessible way for users to provide feedback, and review it regularly. Routinely document and counteract unintended consequences. |
| Checkbox Ticked with solid fill | Train staff on latrine construction guidelines incorporating audit findings to ensure user safety. | Evaluate how norms change in societies where certain forms of gender-based violence or discrimination are tolerated. |

1. **Partner and coordinate with local women's, gender equality rights, and protection organisations** for gender capacity strengthening, including through inter-agency coordination mechanisms. Effectively coordinate across sectors and clusters, including with gender and other sectors like education, health, protection, and youth, especially in areas where transactional sex is known or suspected in relation to WASH.

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|  | **Suggested actions** |
| **Short term** | **Mid to longer term** |
| Checkbox Ticked with solid fill | Bring together local gender equality and humanitarian experts to help develop, carry out, and track the programme. | Support women-led organizations and those advocating for women’s rights with financial and political assistance. |

1. **Embed gender in Monitoring, Learning and After-Action Reviews:** Collect data and statistics disaggregated by sex, age, ethnicity, disability, and other identifying characteristic as indicated in the gender analysis. Methods could involve gathering gender-specific data and qualitative data to understand experiences and issues affecting individuals of all genders. Developing gender-related indicators or scales on decision-making and agency is crucial for inclusive data collection. Specialists in protection, gender, or GBV should design these indicators to establish monitoring questions and processes.

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|  | **Suggested actions** |
| **Short term** | **Mid to longer term** |
| Checkbox Ticked with solid fill | Design a way to track specific gender equality metrics, focusing on areas like women’s active participation in decision-making and their employment in sanitation and FSM.  | Evaluate the impact on gender equality by monitoring changes in discriminatory attitudes and norms, as well as shifts in gender roles related to sanitation and FSM practices. |
| Checkbox Ticked with solid fill | Within the first 3-4 months of a response, conduct an After-Action Review and lessons learned analysis on gender and use the insights to make adjustments.  | Share and document the transformative work of women in improving sanitation. |

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