

# **Gender Equality in the WASH Sector**

## **A Concise Research Report**

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Berlin, 15 May, 2024.

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## **Glossary**

GESI – Gender Equality and Social Inclusion

HSH – Humanitarian Sanitation Hub

WASH – Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

GTO – German Toilet Organization

### **1. Introduction and Background**

Whilst gender equality is a human right and a goal of Sustainable Development Goal 5, it remains an unattained objective (United Nations, n.d, Geschlechtergleichstellung, n.d). Within the Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) sector, it is a persisting challenge, posing barriers to equitable access and participation. Women encounter more challenges due to inadequate WASH facilities which is rooted in heightened hygiene requirements and an increased need for privacy, as they are at a higher risk of experiencing sexual violence when utilizing sanitation facilities (Macura et al., 2021, Nunbogu et al., 2023, Carrard et al., 2022). Additionally, the burden of household tasks and caregiving results in an elevated demand for functional WASH facilities which places additional stress on women's health and educational pursuits (Carrard et al., 2022).

But the challenge of gender equality is not confined solely to end-users. It persists due to the inherent structural inequalities that exist, encompassing issues such as the gender pay gap, limited representation of women in senior positions, underrepresentation of women,

constrained involvement in policymaking, as well as stereotypical gender assignments (Bennedsen et al., 2023, Chang & Milkman, 2020, Huang et al., 2019).

These challenges may also extend to the Humanitarian Sanitation Hub (HSH) project by the German Toilet Organization e.V. (GTO), which benefits from this research. Currently, the HSH project lacks measures for gender equality. In addressing this issue, it is crucial to reassess the theoretical and conceptual frameworks aimed at promoting gender equality within the WASH domain. This paper aims to delve into the causes of gender inequality within the WASH sector and evaluate best practices of gender equality-enhancing strategies and methods within this context by using empirical data collection and analysis.

This report is written out of a white, female, cis-gender, queer, feminist, European and ableist perspective. It tries to consider intersectionality and take an anti-imperialist perspective. Nonetheless, it might fail to completely capture all perspectives. Also, this report only uses binary gender due to nearly no occurrence of non-cis genders in the collected data and to reduce complexity.

## **2. Literature Review**

Gender inequality is a problem on multiple levels. This literature review is going to examine various frameworks and concepts aimed at promoting gender equality within the WASH (Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene) sector. The review will discuss approaches on gender equality and equity, while also addressing potential challenges and shortcomings. The aim was to gain some overall knowledge on existing gender equality frameworks which could help this research.

## **2.1 Gender Equality, Women's Empowerment and Gender Mainstreaming**

The debate in the humanitarian response and WASH sector evolves around different definitions, including gender equity and equality, gender empowerment, gender transformation and more.

Gender equality and women's empowerment are often used interchangeably, even though they are not the same. Which leads to some debates about the terms (Carrard et al., 2022). Gender equality has a much wider focus and sees responsibility and focus of inequality not only on women according to Carrard et al. (2022). It is defined by Roller et al. (2013) as a situation where men and women possess equal opportunities, status, power, rights and rewards. Important aspects contributing to this equal situation are the same access and use of resources, participation in community, relationship, household, and politics as well as safety and absence of violence (Roller et al., 2013). Women's empowerment, however, as defined by Kabeer (1999) is about an improvement of abilities and the existence of choices in situations in which they (women) were previously excluded. According to Sinharoy et al. (2023), this is one of the most used definitions of empowerment. Contrary to that, Rowlands (1995) defines women's empowerment as the internal and external change in women's power (Carrard et al., 2022, Rowlands, 1995). Carrard et al. (2022) see women's empowerment as the foundation for gender equality. Indarti et al. (2018) see empowerment as a complex process and challenge which needs more nuanced strategies for being successful to contribute to more gender equality. Those inconsistencies regarding definitions and gaps also exist for empowerment concepts which makes it hard to effectively measure empowerment and thereby have a chance to tackle structural inequalities (Dery et al., 2020, Indarti et al., 2018, Gerard, 2019).

When looking at frameworks of empowerment, Kabeer's framework of empowerment has three dimensions, consisting of resources, agency, and achievements (Kabeer, 1999). A current framework by Van Eerdewijk et al. (2017) uses the dimensions of resources, agency and institutional structures with an understanding of empowerment as a process and outcome. Carrard et al. (2022) also expand their conceptual understanding and add critical consciousness, well-being, and structures to agency and resources. They all discuss resources and agency which therefore highly overlap with the conceptual framework of gender equality by Caruso et al. (2021). Sinharoy et al. (2023) see a need for further improvements in conceptualizations and better measures for empowerment with the integration of empowerment as a process and outcome.

The Royal Tropical Institute (KIT) sees empowerment as the development of more choice and voicing of opinions through transformed relations of power, which ultimately gives more control towards women and girls. They also use agency, resources, and institutional structures as key elements. This also has a focus on girls whereas the other frameworks are more focused on women (Caruso, Conrad et al., 2021).

There are also tools to enhance empowerment. According to Gerad (2019), one effective tool for enhancing empowerment is to support economic empowerment. Especially access to financial markets, skill training, social protection and business development services are used to empower women's economic opportunities in the WASH sector (Gerad, 2019).

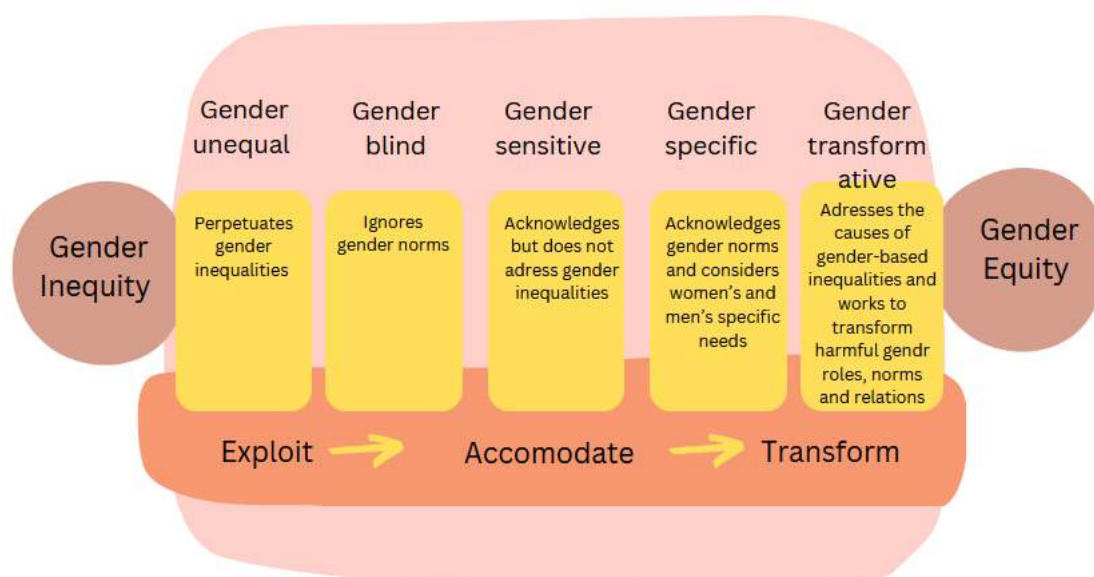
## 2.2 WASH and Gender Equality Frameworks

When one looks more at different frameworks, Pederson et al. (2014) created a Continuum of Approaches on Gender and Health (see Figure 1), which can be used to create a better overview of gender-related (health) interventions. This continuum classifies the different approaches on their impact and hence their contribution to gender equity. The approaches are being classified ascending from gender unequal, gender blind and gender-sensitive to gender-specific and gender transformative, holding the stages of exploitation, accommodation, and transformation (Pederson et al., 2014). Although originally applied within the health sector, the Continuum of Approaches framework is seen as applicable to the WASH sector as well by this study. Furthermore, the gender-transformative approach advocates for the interconnectedness of the SDG's WASH targets, as highlighted by MacArthur et al. (2020).

### Figure 1

*A Continuum of Approaches to Action on Gender and Health (Pederson et al., 2014 p.143)*





When looking at approaches, Fisher et al. (2017) found that concepts and handling of the issues of women in the WASH sector changed dramatically over the past 50 years. Three of the earliest approaches addressing gender equality were the Women in Development (WID), the Gender and Development Approach (GAD), as well as the Basic Needs Approach (BNA) (Reeves & Baden, 2000).

The WID approach emerged in the early 70s and called for better integration of women in development processes with active roles and focused mostly on women's practical needs (Reeves & Baden, 2000). It advises to conduct gender analysis to understand the specific needs of women (Fisher et al., 2017).

The GAD approach was a reaction to frustrations with the WID approach due to a lack of progress (Reeves & Baden, 2000). It is more of a political approach towards social justice and equity and was changing the type of WASH interventions due to a different view on gender relations, power- and social structures. The focus was more on collective decision-making,

political empowerment of women and contribution to improved economic resources (Fisher et al., 2017).

The idea of the BNA was to measure social and economic development based on the basic needs of people. It therefore investigated the fulfilment of needs like food, health, education, clean water, housing, employment, and participation in decision-making (Emmerij, n.d.). All those basic needs are reflected in the SDGs nowadays. The BNA is an approach to poverty reduction and improvement of quality of life in low-income countries (Emmerij, n.d.). According to Streeten (1984), it clarified some development problems like issues related to anti-poverty strategies, but it also caused other questions, for example, who is determining basic needs. Fisher et al. (2017) argue, that using the BNA demands that the basic needs of people are met, also regarding the WASH contexts.

The WID, GAD and the Basic Needs Approach (BNA) were formative for the discussions around gender concepts but still, there are multiple critiques on all three approaches (Reeves & Baden, 2000, Fisher et al., 2017). Nevertheless, they are used up to today, for example during Ebola campaigns where specifically women have been targeted in their stereotypical roles (Carter et al., 2017). The WID and the BNA both focus on gender roles and see women as the better caregivers for families due to their more caring characteristics and reproductive roles. The idea was to enhance technological development to reduce women's household burden. The approaches were critiqued by Fisher et al. (2017) as well as Reeves and Baden (2000) for supporting women in their stereotypical gender roles, supporting the unequal divisions and inequalities of gender and class as well as promoting a view of women as untapped resources. The WID as well as the BNA approach, see women in their traditional gender roles as caregivers and more responsible for household chores etc. The

approaches seem to support rather than transform and deconstruct gender roles which is seen as a cause of attribution and socialization rather than a set form of characteristics (Fisher et al., 2017, Carter et al., 2017, Reeves & Baden, 2000).

### **2.3 WASH and Transformative Approaches**

More recently several studies (Carter et al., 2017; Fisher et al., 2017; Carrard et al., 2022) see transformative approaches as better concepts to support women and gender equality. The transformational approaches address more power to structures and social norms and the willingness to transform them. They see the responsibility for more equality not only by women but also by other genders, especially men. Carrard et al. (2022) also used a transformative approach in their research on gender equality measures in the context of WASH, called WASH-GEM.

When looking at more recent frameworks for gender equality in the WASH sector, Caruso et al. (2021a) created a framework to assess gender and ensure the monitoring of SDG targets 6.1, 6.2, 6. a, and 6. b which can be found in Figure 2. The framework uses interrelated domains, namely the ability to meet WASH needs, access to resources, a multi-level enabling environment and the ability to exercise agency which dynamically relate to each other. The idea is that access to resources, the ability to exercise agency and the ability to meet WASH needs all influence empowerment as well as they are influenced by empowerment (Caruso et al., 2021a). Resources and agency are very common entities in women's empowerment and were already used in the 1990s (Kabeer, 1999).

#### **Figure 2**

*Conceptual framework of gender equality related to WASH (Caruso et al., 2021a p.16)*



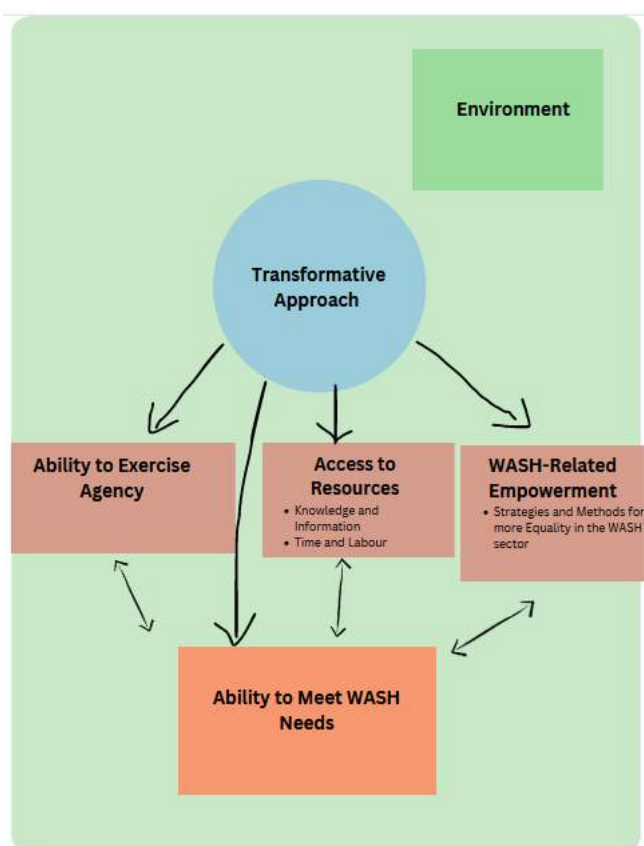
For this research, the transformative approach is chosen because it offers several benefits that can enhance the quality and impact of the study. It aims to holistically understand the root causes of inequalities in the WASH sector, it focuses on empowering women as a marginalized group, takes intersectionality into account and works as a sustainable long-term approach which sets out to change norms and structures to reduce gender inequalities (Marcus et al., n.d.). It is looking for a general change and not only empowering but also reducing inequalities by focusing on policies and educating about them not only on the female side.

### 3. Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this research is inspired by the theories of Caruso et al. (2021a) and Pederson et al. (2014). It connects the transformative approach with components of gender equality in WASH, as shown in Figure 3. The conceptual framework is adapted to the research needs and questions. Both theoretical models are explained in the literature review.

**Figure 3**

*Combined Conceptual Framework of Caruso et al. 2021 and Pederson et al. 2014*



The transformative approach is going to be the overarching concept to investigate gender (in)equality in the context of WASH. The transformative approach is one part of Pederson's continuum of approaches. It advocates for transformation, that is changing and questioning gender norms and power imbalances while empowering men and women rather than just addressing them (Pederson et al. 2014).

In connection to transformation, Caruso et.al (2021) proposes that transformation means the ability to meet WASH needs. Meaning the ability of all genders, sexualities, and

minorities to have access to water, sanitation and hygiene according to their individual needs (Caruso et al., 2021). This includes the ability to exercise agency, access to resources, and empowerment. All those three factors, the ability to exercise agency, access to resources as well as WASH related empowerment can be influenced by the transformative approach. This is also true for the ability to meet WASH needs.

The ability to exercise agency can influence the ability to meet WASH needs and therefore gender equality in WASH. It relates to an arrow in two ways, as both are assumed to influence each other. It means the ability to participate and engage in decision-making at all levels in the WASH field and have freedom of movement to access WASH facilities (Caruso et al., 2021).

Access to resources is another aspect which can influence the ability to meet WASH needs. Like the ability to exercise agency it is also connected to the ability to meet WASH needs with a two-way arrow, which represents the influence of both on each other. Access to resources means access and control over basic WASH resources, which enables individuals to meet their WASH-related needs. Those resources can be tangible or intangible (Caruso et al., 2021). For example, two important examples, which are intangible and relevant for the HSH are knowledge and information and time and labor.

WASH-related empowerment is another relevant factor which can influence and is influenced by the ability to meet WASH needs and therefore gender equality. Many strategies and methods for more equality act on this level. WASH-related empowerment includes strengthening individuals and communities in the political, economic and personal WASH contexts, enabling women and girls to have more power and control regarding their WASH needs. (Caruso et al., 2021).

The environment is the last factor which influences all the factors, including the transformative approach. It can further enable or mostly prevent access to resources, empowerment, and agency. It represents systemic and structural forces and can act for example on a social, political, economic, or physical level.

Because this research aims to find strategies and methods to increase gender equality in WASH contexts, the transformative approach is found useful in this study. This includes the ability to exercise agency, access to resources, WASH-related empowerment, and the environment. Many strategies act on an empowerment level but the other levels can also be influenced for more gender equality as they all influence the ability to meet WASH needs.

#### **4. Research Objective and Research Question**

The purpose of this study is to understand the gender (in)equality within the WASH sector and explore possibilities of integrating gender equality in WASH projects for NGO's such as GTO, specifically within the Humanitarian Sanitation Hub.

##### **4.1 Central Research Question**

In what ways can gender equality be promoted within the WASH sector?

Sub-questions

1. What are the causes of gender inequality in the WASH sector?
2. What are existing methods for integrating gender equality in the WASH sector?
3. What are the (best) practices using gender transformative methods in the context of WASH?

## **5. Methodology and Research Design**

### **5.1 Research Methodology**

The research design for the study and methodology to answer the research questions is described in this part. It includes the procedures for data collection, including the research participants, data gathering techniques, data analysis, and ethical considerations. To answer the research question an empirical data method is chosen. The research was carried out with qualitative data from interviews and secondary data from desk research. To sufficiently answer the research question, two types of interviews were conducted.

First, the interviews with people specializing in gender equality and WASH were conducted. The purpose of those was to give a general overview of the topic. Those interviewees are: M. Heuvels, B.S. Heinz, S. Karki. They were carefully chosen and selected by purposive sampling. The objective of the interviews with them was to identify the existing gender inequality in the WASH sector and identify strategies to improve gender equality in the sector. The interview questionnaire for the people specialized on gender and WASH can be found in Appendix B.

Second, the interviews with organizations of the German WASH Network were conducted, namely S. Joncourt, S. Weiß, A. Coever and K. Koch. Those interviews together with the research paper analysis served to generate information on best practices to stimulate gender equality in the context of WASH. They also gave an overview of the progress of gender equality within the German WASH Network. The objective here was to generate recommendations of the organizations about their experience with gender equality methods and gain insights on what is working well and what is more ineffective.



Moreover, desk research was conducted. This aims to generate broader knowledge needed to give recommendations on gender inequality methods, consisting mostly of reports, government papers and websites. It was decided to look at methods and frameworks of gender equality in the humanitarian development sector as well as three specifically focused on WASH. Through that, it is hoped to specifically cover the WASH themes but also confirm that there weren't any missing details. The different approaches, methods and measures to increase gender inequality were compared.

## **5.2 Research Participants and Sampling**

Overall, this research is participated by 8 participants with experience and positions in gender equality and WASH network. Among those three people with experience and positions in gender equality and WASH as well as German WASH Network members.

The group of (4) research participants experienced with gender equality consist of GTO contacts and network members with knowledge in gender equality or GESI-promoting positions. They were approached via LinkedIn and email. Due to the global implementation of WASH projects in the German WASH network, there was no specification regarding countries and the participants came from Zambia, Nepal, and Germany. A total of 4 people specializing on gender and WASH were interviewed.

For the interviews with participants within the German WASH network the sampling method that was used is non-probability, purposeful sampling. This means the interviewed organizations are contacted on purpose and based on the research conditions. The initial idea was to narrow the sample to organizations that have already integrated gender equality concepts, frameworks and methods into their projects and can identify best practices and share their experiences. During the interviewee recruitment process, it became clear that existing

gender equality concepts would limit the sample too much due to many organizations declaring they didn't have those concepts in place. Therefore, the conditions were being a member organization of the German WASH network, having existing WASH projects in place and being willing to talk about gender equality within their projects. To find suitable organizations the German WASH Network was used, and all 29 organizations were contacted via email or their contact formulas on their websites. Unfortunately, many did not reply or weren't able to allocate time for an interview. A total of 4 members of the German WASH network were interviewed. An overview of all interviewed participants can be found in the table below.

**Tabel 1**  
*Selected Interviewees per category*

Category	Name	Organization/Business
Gender focused Interviews	Maren Heuvels, Bettina-Sophie Heinz	GIZ
	Shula Kasongamolilo	Nexus Energy Water Zambia Programme (NEWZA)
	Srijana Karki	ENPHO
Interviews with organizations	Simon Joncourt	Seecon
	Arno Coever	Malteser International
	Kerstin Koch	Worldvision
	Sarah Weiß	Action Medeor

All interviews were semi-structured with only a few guiding questions which can be found in Appendix B. This allows a thorough understanding of the problems with different gender equality supporting methods and measures and gives the interviewees room to add to the problems which might otherwise be lost. Due to geographical limitations, the interviews were conducted online, by use of Zoom or Microsoft Teams. Consent was obtained for the interviews to be recorded.

### 5.3 Answering the sub-questions

1. *What are the causes of gender inequality in the WASH sector?*

This question aims to create a deeper understanding of gender equality. It was answered by asking the participants about causes as well as a deeper understanding of the topic generated through all conducted interviews. Semi-structured interviews as well as desk research were conducted to answer it. The question looks at the ability to meet WASH needs. Based on the prior literature review and the model by Caruso et al. 2021, it is assumed that the ability to meet WASH needs is influenced by environment, agency, WASH-related empowerment, and access to resources.

2. *What are existing gender transformative methods for integrating gender equality in the WASH sector?*

The second sub-question asks for transformative strategies and methods for integrating gender equality in the WASH sector. Here qualitative interviews with people specializing on gender and WASH as well as organizations were conducted to find existing methods and concrete measures on how to increase gender equality. Additionally, relevant papers and literature which was found, and which was recommended by the literature were used.

3. *What are the best practices of gender transformative methods in the context of WASH?*

Sub-question 3 was answered through the conducted interviews and desk research. The conclusions of best practices and concrete measures can later be used to make the advisory report. Here, empowerment and resources are connected due to the HSH focus on access to resources and the opportunity for more empowerment in strengthening this connection.

#### **5.4 Data Analysis**

The researcher used different methods to analyze the data, depending on the method of data gathering.

For the interview data, a coded text analysis was established. First, the created interview transcripts were read multiple times to ensure familiarization with the data (Babbie, 2015). Then the text parts were marked according to the sub-questions they are answering. As a third step, the content of the data was noted for the different text passages. Those were grouped into codes in another step. For the codes, inductive coding was used which means that the codes are emerging from the data and no pre-existing codes are used (Babbie, 2015). First, open coding is used to generate codes suitable for the data. Secondly, those existing codes are used for axial coding which creates broader categories for the codes. As a last step, those are selectively coded. With these patterns and topic of the data can be shown. To reduce complexity the interviews which were conducted in German were transcribed and open-coded in German. The axial and selective coding is conducted in English to assure easy comparability.

Regarding the data gathering through desk research, the data collection focuses on government papers as well as papers and documents from well-known NGOs. A specific focus was laid on the German government policies due to the GTO's location in Germany. Therefore, the Feminist Development Policy and the Third Development Policy Action Plan for Gender Equality (2023-27) both published by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development were examined (BMZ) (BMZ, 2023a, 2023b). Also, popular global frameworks were used as well as frameworks/data which was recommended by interviewees

during the interviews. For this, all the data was thematically coded, categorized and compared based on codes and components.

## **5.5 Quality Assurance**

### **Usability**

The collected data of this research is going to serve as a foundation for the advisory report of the GTO. With the data of this report recommendations on gender equality enhancing methods will be made to help the GTO's project HSH to become more gender equal. To ensure good usability the GTO, especially Thorsten Reckerzügl and Robert Gensch will be informed about processes and current states. This way they can re-direct the scope or give valuable inputs to ensure a wide range of usage possibilities of the research.

### **Validity**

The term validity in the context of research means that the described research methods precisely reflect the concepts they are set out to measure (Babbie, 2015). It's crucial to establish validity to make sure that the research uses the right techniques to effectively address the research question. The validity is going to be generated through the logical framework and combination of the uses of the gender equality continuum by Pederson et al. (2014) and the use of the gender equality framework by Caruso et al. (2017), methodology. Furthermore, validity is being ensured by discussing the research with the responsible project heads of the GTO as well as different stakeholders from other organizations and by implementing their feedback on improving the research. As common for qualitative research validity can only partly be shown due to small sample sizes and limited transferability.

### **Reliability**

Reliability refers to the same results which are measured over time with the same tools (Babbie, 2015). Due to the use of qualitative research, the results will be very limited in their reliability and are not necessarily transferable to other cases. This is the case due to the unique cases of the interviewees, different organizations, different perspectives, etc. To nevertheless make the research as reliable as possible the interview prompts will be standardized for the organizations and interviewees specialized on gender and WASH, and it will be conducted during a set timeframe. Also, the interview questions were formulated under the following conditions to increase reliability regarding to E. Babbie (2015).

- Interviewees are likely to know the answers to the presented questions
- Interview questions are formulated clearly
- Interview questions are relevant for the interviewee(s)

### **5.6 Ethical Considerations**

Ethical principles are upheld throughout all research stages and all participants were treated with respect. The participants were provided with clear information about the research's purpose and how the results would be utilized beforehand through a consent form as well as verbal information. The participants signed the consent form and the forms of data usage. The signed forms can be found under Appendix D. Participants' identities were kept confidential and anonymous upon request when presenting research findings. To maintain objectivity, leading questions were avoided, and an unbiased reporting approach was pursued.

## **6. Research Findings**

The research conducted investigated causes for gender equality, as well as methods and best practices to enhance gender equality within the WASH sector. The findings for all three research questions are explained, discussed, and analyzed. For better understanding,

they are visually presented in a causal loop diagram as well as two tables. The findings encompass a broad spectrum of perspectives, revealing both challenges and opportunities for addressing gender inequality effectively.

### **6.1 Causes of Gender Inequality in the WASH Sector**

The empirical data found four main causes for gender inequality in the WASH Sector. First, societal structures and cultural aspects; second, WASH sector-specific conditions; third, the barriers for women; and fourth, the change process. Whilst one could argue that the change process is not a real cause of gender inequalities, it is included due to the difficulty of creating change which was named multiple times as a reason for persisting gender inequalities. To grasp and further understand them a concept map was created. Here all influencing factors which were found during the interviews can be found. It was chosen to present the findings in a causal loop diagram and not organize them by categories of the framework due to the high overlap on topics when looking at the ability to exercise agency, access to resources, WASH-related empowerment as well as the environment. See Appendix C for the causal loop diagram.

#### **Societal Structures and Cultural Aspects**

The first identified and a major factor frequently coming up in the interviews as a reason for gender inequality in the WASH sector was societal structures. Overarching all of them was patriarchy (participant 5 and 6, 2023; participant 4, 2023), causing phenomena like male dominance, everyday sexism, and stereotypes of gender roles like the WASH sector being male connoted due to its technical and technological as well as infrastructure-based components.

Traditional gender roles and stereotypes can create barriers to women's promotion into higher positions. Women, who are doing household chores and caring for the children are often

not being promoted (participant 4, 2023). Prejudice of women's abilities working in WASH or accessing WASH infrastructure was also mentioned. When women want to advance their careers, this can lead to a need for higher performance and self-optimizing compared to men to make the next career step (participant 5, 2023).

Cultural aspects were also mentioned multiple times. They can influence the socialization and therefore behavior of people (participant 8, 2023). Socialization can also influence the possibilities and options one attributes to oneself as women are typically not socialized to become leaders. The interviewees were discordant with this topic. Culture was recognized as one of the aspects of gender equality by most participants (participant 5, 2023; participant 3, 2023; participant 8, 2023; participant 2, 2023; participant 1, 2023; participant 4, 2023). Nevertheless, it is seen as a sensitive topic especially when doing humanitarian or development cooperation work as European organizations in low-income countries with high WASH needs (participant 2, 2023). Participant 8 even negated the influence of culture on gender equality at some part even though the participant named it at a different point "These are really difficult things where you talk about cultural practices, socialization and so on [...]". There were some insecurities about the amount of intervention one should make within other cultures than one's own. This will be further discussed within the discussion part. When looking deeper into culture, it is said that it can have an influence in more traditional societies which are male-dominated. Cultural norms are very influential. It can be difficult for people to divert from them (participant 2, 2023; participant 4, 2023). They can create hierarchies like in the Bemba culture located amongst others in Zambia. In Bemba hierarchies exist which expect women to not respond when an elderly person is speaking. They should only speak if it's necessary and men should know the needs of their women. Married women also can't make



decisions without their husbands, which affects their engagement, decisions on rights as well as decisions on new facilities (participant 4, 2023). This can also be seen in Nepal where the family can decide on the women's possibilities and females in higher positions sometimes are not taken positively (participant 5, 2023). However, it can be difficult within implementing organizations as well where young female staff have difficulties addressing community leaders and have a hard time getting into an equal discussion (participant 2, 2023). Cultural and societal norms also have an influence when it is about taboos. Discussing gender aspects like MHM is different within different countries and might need sensitive approaches (participant 1, 2023).

Also, the geographic location can make a difference. Within certain regions and with different countries some topics are more of a taboo than others (participant 1, 2023; participant 2, 2023). There is also a difference between rural and urban areas which can be seen where rural areas are way more traditional (participant 2, 2023). An existing culture can also influence the recognition of minority and marginalized groups with women being marginalized and maybe also belonging to other marginalized groups. Gatekeepers of culture and tradition exist which create barriers towards a change for more GE. Also, it can give a high workload to the women with the pressure of the family, doing household chores, etc. Lastly, socioeconomic status can create a barrier through the level of education and literacy which is often seen lower in rural areas and higher in more urban ones. This can influence the assertiveness of women and their involvement in WASH projects (participant 4, 2023). On the positive side, it can also be said that within the projects by Worldvision in Muslim cultures, only limited difference was made between men and women even though women of some of those countries experience suppression and exploitation (participant 7, 2023). Additionally, environmental structures play

a role in gender inequalities for example the women in Nepal have a high workload and responsibility due to the work migration of their men (participant 5, 2023).

### **WASH Sector Specific conditions**

Gender equality has become more and more present and relevant in recent years. When looking at the organizations and their projects within the WASH sector two participants stated gender equality as being already always included as an aspect and cross-cutting issues in all their projects (participant 1, 2023; participant 7, 2023). The topic is so present that it is named as a trending topic, and it is used for marketing and positive outside communication (participant 7, 2023). It was even described as a glamorous word in the WASH sector (participant 3, 2023). Whilst GE has become more attention and is a topic, one participant 7 states it as not being a focus topic and not being much discussed (2023).

It can differ tremendously how many gender standards are implemented, and it depends on the country's organizations as well as the specific offices that work together (participant 7, 2023). On the positive side, many things are already done. Within participants 1's organization there are GESI experts who can advise the employees. Also, GE is supported by many governments through policies like in Germany through the feminist development policy, their donors and the BMZ and in Zambia through some national standards (participant 5, 2023; participant 4, 2023). On the other hand, the requirements of the donors in Germany like the BMZ and EU are assessed as not being high enough and strict compared to the theoretical feminist development policy and their high influence (participant 7, 2023). Also, on the governmental level in Nepal, there is no specific vocal person in the ministry and no clearly defined policies for gender mainstreaming and how to do it (participant 3, 2023). Within the organization of participant 7, there are no well-known standard concepts or indicators they are

using (2023). There are some people within the organizations more focused on GESI topics, but the interviewee did not have concrete information or knowledge on that (participant 7, 2023). In addition, an improvement can be seen in the MHM area where more young people and families are included (participant 7, 2023).

The state of gender equality in the WASH sector is different depending on the field one is looking at. Here a division can be made between humanitarian and developmental WASH and therefore between WASH in emergencies and WASH in development. According to participant 2 in humanitarian WASH there is much more male dominance than in developmental WASH (2023). This is due to the often-remote locations and the temporary and quick fixes. The management needs to act quickly and often favours men over women due to easier security situations and the ability to put all the staff in one sleeping location (participant 2, 2023). Overall, it was said multiple times that the WASH sector is very male-dominated, especially the technical, building and infrastructure part (participant 2, 2023; participant 7, 2023; participant 1, 2023). This is especially the case in higher, decision-making positions, whilst it is also stated by participant 8 that this is also the case everywhere else. But there are also big differences seen between the women's ratio in engineering and infrastructure building and the humanitarian response at the project management level (participant 1, 2023). Therefore, at Worldvision for example the country offices are staffed only exclusively with females in management positions, nevertheless, the highest positions as national directors are mostly men (participant 7, 2023). Also, participant 1 stated that the board of directions is mostly male-dominated, within the own organizations as well as with others (2023). This is also the case in Nepal where nearly no higher positions are staffed with females (participant 4, 2023). There are some women seen at the divisional management level but still not much (participant

1, 2023). Also, when you look at geographics a difference in the staff ratio can be seen. For example, in Africa vs. Asia. African WASH projects are far more male-dominated than Asian ones. This is due to more hardware-related infrastructure projects in Africa which tend to be more male-dominated as discussed above. In Asia there are more software-related projects like hygiene promotion and therefore also more females (participant 2, 2023). But the inequalities can also be seen in more subtle and underlying situations like appearance and speaking time when comparing men to women (participant 8, 2023). So, there is still room for improvement when looking at the whole sector but also in the German sector and within German organizations. This also goes not only for the WASH sector but for the whole humanitarian and development cooperation sector (participant 7, 2023; participant 1, 2023). Whilst the estimate also differs here as one can see from participant 1's statement "We are doing okay but not perfect in terms of gender equality" (participant 1; 2023).

The WASH Sector in general is perceived by some interviewees as unattractive for women with little existing female perspectives and difficulties in pursuing a career as a woman. It is seen as unattractive for young people (Gen Z) who have different demands for their position than the older generation. It was described as unfriendly for women, having little fun and causing a feeling of invisibility for women (participant 5 and 6, 2023). This is exemplified by a quote from participant 5 (2023) "And then you ask yourself, okay, but as a woman, I work in the water sector, and I'm not actually seen there either. So, I think these are also problems that people simply don't think about".

The issues within the sector are still about improving access and bringing services closer to the community as well as enhancing women and youth participation in WASH governance (participant 4, 2023). To also mention the (female) intersectional perspective

people with disability are rarely recognized and seen which can cause limited access. Within youth, equality is also restricted regarding decision-making. Economic and socio-cultural conditions also play a role like a lack of education and literacy which limits engagement, participation, and assertiveness (participant 4, 2023).

### **Barriers for Women**

Next to the WASH sector conditions, there are also multiple barriers for women. When looking at the barriers to women working in WASH positions, already begin during the recruitment process when job positions get advertised looking for more male attributed skills which makes it less attractive for women.

From some positions females get excluded because their engagement isn't desired, this is not always a full exclusion, sometimes more in the way that they are kept in low positions or gender quotes are achieved by filling the female positions with female students rather than more experienced women who can contribute more to discussions. Women get excluded in certain cultural contexts and not even spoken to due to their lower status within the country like for example in India (participant 5, 2023).

In countries like India, where women are generally held in much lower regard than men, I've had the classic problems where people in the government simply prefer to talk to a driver about the subject than to me, because I'm a woman and my driver is a man (participant 5, 2023).

On the positive side, it could also be seen that some women working in WASH positions weren't seen as competition, which gave participant 5 more freedom to act. Also, children and pregnancies are often not considered in the profession. This could be seen in the case of Germany, which makes childcare more difficult without more flexible working hours

(participant 5 and 6, 2023). The pay for the same position and workload also often differs between men and women, where women get paid less for the same position which is called the gender pay gap. Participant 5 also reported their own experience with the gender pay gap (2023). Regarding Nepal, the security for women in certain WASH positions was also mentioned. Herby the Nepalese organizations had insecurities about filling a position who regularly visits rural areas of the country alone on a motorbike to get in contact with the community. They doubted the security aspect and told females wouldn't even apply due to these conditions. Security aspects were also mentioned regarding shift work when women weren't safe when using public transport at certain times which prevented them from working certain jobs (participant 3, 2023; participant 1, 2023).

When looking at the user perspective there are multiple factors which can create a barrier regarding the use of WASH facilities. Those can be the distance to facilities or a safe drinking point, maintenance of facilities, access to soap, affordability as well as environmental factors (participant 4, 2023). In some places even no access to basic water and sanitation facilities for example in the Nepali slums. Security can also be a factor when facilities are placed in regions which aren't safe for women or dangerous during the nighttime. The gender aspect is often not considered and different needs for security and menstrual health management aren't considered (participant 5, 2023).

### **Change Process**

Gender equality looks often very different in theory than in practice. Even though certain measures are planned you can be surprised by the reality (participant 1, 2023; participant 8, 2023; participant 4, 2023). The process for change towards more gender equality is described as difficult multiple times by the interviewees. Change takes time, is a process and is often

slow, especially in rural areas (participant 5, 2023; participant 8, 2023; participant 2, 2023; participant 1, 2023; participant 7, 2023). Some of the interviewees advocate for a sector change in general which needs a change of the whole system and strengthening of systems that already work well for more gender equality (participant 5, 2023; participant 4, 2023).

To make it more complicated projects are mostly short and only 1-2 years which creates pressure and makes sustainable change more difficult. But there are also catalysts for change which can help with faster progress like girls' education and change in the community composition due to work migration (participant 2, 2023). Due to the slow (mostly) slow nature of change it needs accountability to create sustainable change (participant 4, 2023), It takes energy (participant 5, 2023) and can create more costs for example when a gender analysis is executed or methods need to be changed for more gender equality like the need for external consultants or changes in recruitment processes (participant 5, 2023; participant 3, 2023). Also, in the case of a gender transformative approach, the project can become very costly (participant 4, 2023). Willingness and understanding also play a big role (participant 5, 2023). Often organizations only implement a few measures (1 or 2) so they can say they did something for GE but aren't willing to bear higher costs (participant 3, 2023). In communities, it sometimes happens that people learn to speak the language of the project teams to tell them what they want without making any changes. During the interviews, it also became clear that the importance of improved gender equality differed between interviewees as well as the willingness to implement methods in their own organization. The willingness to create a deeper understanding of the issue or explore more of the reasons why certain infrastructure is placed at a location is often not given. This can lead to a lack of addressing social-cultural factors (participant 4, 2023). Regarding understanding, it was reported that a growing understanding

can be seen but is often not very deep. It often focuses only on quotes and numbers of girls and women accessing facilities or female-to-male ratios with missing knowledge of theories and terms (participant 4, 2023). It is often taken quite lightly as more of a box-ticking whilst it is described by the interviewees specialized on gender and WASH as very deep (participant 4, 2023; participant 3, 2023). The more obvious inequalities like gender quotes are therefore easier to change than the ones which are more underlying and not that obvious (participant 8, 2023). Additionally, when looking at WASH, a priority on water can be seen. Sanitation and hygiene are not seen as that important (participant 3, 2023). Also, it is reported that the openness of partners, organizations, communities, and individuals for gender equality can influence the outcomes of measures (participant 1, 2023; participant 3, 2023; participant 8, 2023). This can create conflicts and suppress or slow down change (participant 5, 2023). Willingness, understanding and prioritization can therefore influence if an organization is making changes towards more GE. This leads to frustration in some people like participant 5 was saying (2023) [...] I am fully behind gender but it's always just so okay- gender is just written in somewhere. That doesn't achieve anything [...].

In an experience of participant 4 (2023) when women of the WASH communities were asked to explain their WASH needs, they didn't know. Without this knowledge, it is difficult to design suitable infrastructure (participant 4, 2023). Limited resources are also a factor which can slow down change, like resources for more advocacy within the sector or resources which make a sustainable change possible (participant 3, 2023; participant 4, 2023).

## **6.2 Methods which Contribute to more Gender Equality**

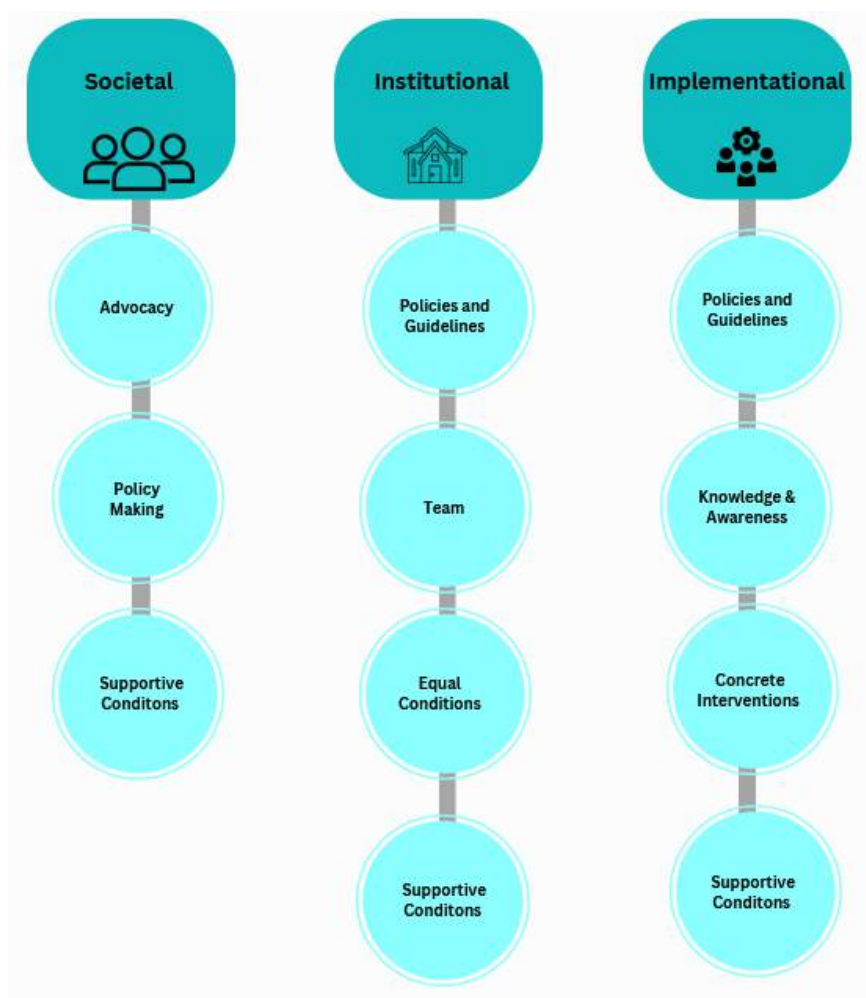
All methods found during this research are divided into first; societal interventions, second; institutional interventions and third; implementational interventions. Every of these



sections is again divided in subsections which can be seen in Figure 4 and will be presented in the following paragraphs.

#### Figure 4

*Overview on Methods for more Gender Equality*



### 6.2.1 Societal Interventions

#### **Policy Making**

To improve standards on gender equality politicians can define policies which can lead to higher implementation of measures. For example, the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development created such policies (BMZ, 2023a, 2023b). Through them, other institutions like the GIZ, where participant 5 is working will follow the guidelines.

„Okay, there is now this priority, there is the paper on it, so the policy, how do we implement it? “(participant 5, 2023).

#### **Advocacy**

Promoting and tackling structural change is important to create a fundamental change towards more gender equality. Also, advocating for gender equality in general helps to create more awareness within society.

#### **Supportive Conditions**

Institutions need to be equipped with adequate resources so they can carry out their work. They need a budget to implement strategies, integrate accountability systems maybe even hire someone for a second opinion. It is a problem that there are often not enough resources in the sector. Like participant 3 stated (2023), “Very few human resources are there to advocate and to work on this sector as well”. This is something which can be provided or supported through government and society. Also, creating accountability and holding institutions accountable for gender transformation over a period of time is important because change takes time. Demanding more progress can help to increase gender equality due to governments high influence on some project fundings.

#### **Cultural and Societal Awareness**

Society needs to work on a cultural change towards more gender equality. Traditional gender roles and norms as well as persisting taboo topics like menstrual hygiene complicate those changes. They persist amongst others due to specific gatekeepers of culture and tradition. Like participant 4 explained “In reality that is gatekeepers of culture and tradition that will- that will come back and try to reinforce that cultures and traditions that you are trying to address”. Through more awareness of them society can specifically address those.

### 6.2.2 Institutional Interventions

#### **Policies and Guidelines**

Follow national standards within your country as well as the implementing country is highly advised. Then, on an internal level create policies, guidelines, and standards around gender equality. This way gender equality can become a company value. When standards are set, it is important to spread them within the organization and make sure everyone is familiar with them. Some of the organizations already use some standards like participant 7 (2023) states: “These standards exist, and we are trying to implement them more and more”. It is recommended to regularly check and update the policies and guidelines if needed to always be up to date.

#### **Knowledge and Awareness**

The organization's team should be trained on gender equality. In terms of knowledge but also in terms of concrete measures everyone can take. This is important because their knowledge is often limited as participant 3 (2023) states:” What is the problem is that professional, also WASH professional are there but they don't have a specific idea and knowledge how to mainstream gender in their project cycle”. It is best to provide trainings once

or twice a year. Also have an assigned vocal person for gender equality to prioritize gender equality. This can help with monitoring, responsibility, and ownership.

### **Gender Equal conditions**

Ensure gender-equal pay for all and have job advertisements which address male and female candidates. This helps to create more equality everywhere, as participant 5 (2023) is stating: "I know the gender pay gap personally in any case". Also ensure gender separated toilets for security and menstrual hygiene needs.

Flexible working hours can make a position more equal and family friendly for needs like childcare, pregnancy and breastfeeding. Also, women have different needs of security which was stressed by participant 5 (2023), "Safety is also important, i.e. sexual harassment, abuse, i.e. safety in the sense of. Um. Gender based violence". Within the company this can mean introducing harassment management and complaint mechanisms, extra security measures for work routes and fitting working clothes and gear. Equality can also be encouraged by observing and discussing gender roles within teams. This way negative or unequal relationship dynamics within the team can be tackled.

### **Supporting Conditions**

Check if your actions contribute to more gender equality and if your partners create their activities and outputs accessible for all. For example, when checking new project proposals like some of the interviewees already do: "For instance if we look at new proposals to check if the gender aspects are sufficiently covert in the proposals" (participant 2, 2023). In case you find gaps negotiate about possible changes and try to find a suitable solution for all. Set aside enough financial resources, staff who can implement measures and enough project time. Regarding changes of other cultures than one's own be sensitive and respect cultural

backgrounds and traditions. If possible, you can use a catalyst for faster change like environmental changes or group pressure. The way towards more gender equality is a time-consuming and a slow process and an ongoing job. To help with that you can make use of tools and resources on gender equality to extend your knowledge with the resources that are already freely online and generate ideas for best implementation.

### 6.2.3 Implementational Interventions

#### **Policies and Guidelines**

Also, within projects it is advised to have standards, policies and guidelines for project implementation. Worldvision for example only builds toilets together with trainings how to properly take care of them and consider everyone's WASH needs. Having specifically gender-focused programs like Seecon has on MHM and Worldvision has with its ultra-pure projects can create a bigger focus on gender equality. Ideally, gender equality should be implemented within the whole project cycle.

#### **Create Knowledge & Awareness**

Working on stereotypes within the community can create a cultural shift. Here it also helps to clarify meanings of terms like gender equality, gender equity etc. and what it looks like in the WASH sector. Awareness can help to get people to lay a stronger focus on the topic. Without the awareness in some instances people don't even know what they needs are, like participant 4 (2023) identified, "I was asking, it was a group of both, men and women. I was asking them, so women tell me what are your WASH needs and they didn't know". Advocacy can also help to share the word about gender equality and can help to reduce taboos. Identify the right people in a community to spread the word and make a change. Ensure that everyone

benefits from your knowledge and awareness measures and that it is not solely focused on women.

### **Concrete Interventions**

Use concrete interventions for gender equality adapted to your context. Those can be for example conducting gender analysis, implementing the use of gender equality checklists, supporting of marginalized groups and using external project evaluators. Using gender analysis before you design project is even advised by the Zambian government as participant 4 is stating :” according to the ministry of water it is very important before any design of the project that you do a gender analysis so that you understand in that context what are the gender issues that are- that are alternating, and you design your intervention to address those issues “. But be careful with only women focused measures. Whilst they can be effective the research also showed that they can increase the burden on women and make them responsible for the problem.

### **Supportive measures**

Supportive measures which help to advance gender equality can be working together in partnerships, ensuring enough resources, and planning long term projects with the possibilities of evaluating and monitoring gender equality.

### **6.3 Best Practices**

Whilst conducting the first interviews it became clear that best practices were not obvious. Best practices are defined in demarcation to the general method part as methods which were emphasized, named multiple times during the interviews, or were clearly stated as best practices. Even though they are named best practices, they are mostly context-dependent and not transferable to all situations and organizations. The 10 best practices chosen are

based on the number of participants who mentioned them as well as the way in which they were emphasized.

1. Set gender standards, policies and strategies
2. Make standards and policies as concrete as possible
3. Get the team on board and create willingness for change
4. Check project applications for gender equality
5. Plan resources for gender equality measures beforehand
6. Start with yourself
7. Ensure gender-equal positions and career opportunities
8. Include everyone, especially more boys and men
9. Promote knowledge on gender equality
10. Don't force change without the consent of the community

1. Set gender standards policies and strategies

Follow already existing national standards within your country as well as the implementing country. Then, on an internal level create policies, guidelines, and standards around gender equality. This way gender equality can become a company value. Create strategies which can be adapted to circumstances and situations. For example, in the traditional communities in Nepal, young female staff had difficulties making their voices heard and being taken seriously in meetings. A solution was here to adapt the guidelines of the organizations to not send junior staff there immediately but introduce them step by step (participant 2, 2023).

When standards are set, it is important to communicate them within the organization and team and make sure everyone is familiar with them. It is recommended to regularly check and update the policies and guidelines to always be up to date.

## 2. Make standards and policies as concrete as possible

There are different standards and approaches you can follow. For example, gender equality enhancing approaches like gender transformation or the Make Right Real approach (MRR) which was recommended by participant 2 (2023). The MRR approach addresses the system change and inequalities within WASH (participant 2, 2023; Make right real, n.d.). It is helpful to also set up some guidance documents on how to implement your standards and approaches (participant 3, 2023). Make them as concrete as possible by use of examples to make sure everyone is on the same page to follow along and there are no excuses. Adapt it to the local context and situation (participant 4, 2023). Say what it means so people can do something and implement it (participant 2, 2023).

## 3. Get the team on board and create willingness for change

Make gender equality a value and involve the whole team. Vocal persons for gender equality can help with this. Those are for example used in the organization of participant 7 and spent at least 5-10% of their working time on the topic (participant 7, 2023). Introduce new gender positions like Malteser International did. Malteser International also has a specific position for gender equality promotion (participant 2, 2023).

## 4. Check project applications for gender equality

Check the contracts and project applications for gender equality and gender transformative measures. In case they are not satisfactory it is good to go into a discussion about it and demand more. Look at gender issues and check new proposals if gender aspects



are sufficiently covert. This is already done by many organizations like Seecon and Malteser international (participant 2, 2023, participant 8, 2023).

#### 5. Plan resources for gender equality measures beforehand

Have a buffer budget for all gender equality measures you want to take. Also, for research into root causes of gender inequalities (participant 3, 2023). This is seen as a transformative approach due to the possibility of finding root causes and therefore promoting a structural change (participant 4, 2023)

#### 6. Start with yourself

Question whether you create inclusive content for all. Be honest with yourself and identify problems. It is not important to be perfect or have everything implemented already but more to look at the problems. It is advised to use a gender inclusion checklist for your project or conduct a gender analysis. This helps to find out what measures you really need (participant 4, 2023). This lays a foundation to address transformation and was mentioned multiple times. You can also develop your own tools like Action Medeor, which recently developed a gender and inclusion checklist by their inclusion officers to assure more gender equality in their projects (participant 1, 2023).

#### 7. Ensure gender-equal positions and career opportunities

Try to opt for gender balance within teams. Having a gender-balanced team can help to introduce and discuss other gender topics by not being in the minority position (participant 2, 2023). This changes the team's gender balance and therefore creates structural change.

#### 8. Include everyone, especially more boys and men

Try to include everyone in your actions. Use community-based approaches and co-creation (participant 4, 2023). Also, inclusive language is not widely used yet and not actively

tackled like in Germany the gender topic. This is the case within most interviewed organizations, and within Seecon (participant 8, 2023). Using more of it can help to increase equality. But ensure that not only women participate in gender equality measures. One example that was named during the interviews were projects where boys and girls sew period pads and additionally can generate income through that (participant 7, 2023).

#### 9. Promote knowledge on gender equality

Focus on knowledge building and awareness raising (participant 5, 2023; participant 4, 2023). Here for example sensitization campaigns can be used to promote equal participation for all, online and offline.

#### 10. Don't force change without the consent of the community

Keep cultural differences in mind when making changes towards more equality. The best practice to change the minds of people- is bilateral, one-on-one talks with more traditional leaders. This takes the communal pressure off them, and they don't have to defend a certain point of view in front of their community. But it takes time, and resources and goes very slowly (participant 2, 2023).

## 7. Discussion and Analysis

In this part the findings will be discussed. First, a discussion is made of the causes of gender inequality and second on methods and best practices for enhancing gender equality.

### 7.1 Discussion of Causes of Gender Inequality

Within this discussion part, interesting findings regarding the reasons for gender inequality will be discussed. The topics societal structures, change, culture, understanding gender (in)equality and transformation of gender equality will be further discussed. Those

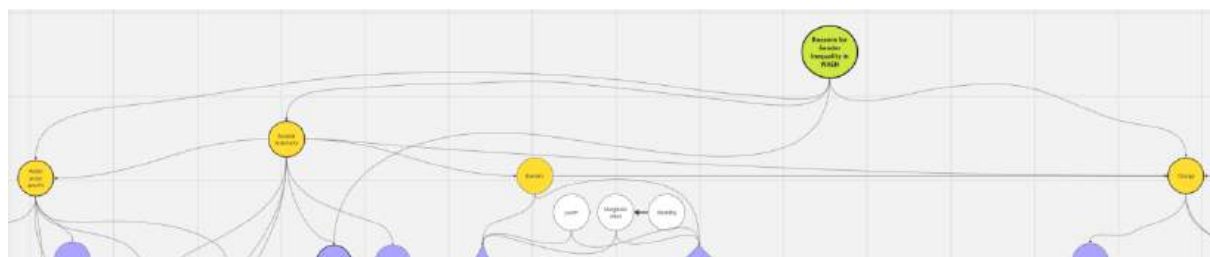
topics are chosen because they stood out as being controversial, surprising, or complex during the interviews.

### **Societal structures**

Societal structures are very influential but difficult to change. When looking at the connections of the causal-loop diagram, see Figure 5, societal structures can influence all three other factors of gender equality, namely the barriers for women, the WASH sector specific conditions as well as the process of change whilst the other way around, those don't influence societal structures. The topic of societal structures in general was only discussed by a few interviewees and not much connected to specific methods of change. It is assumed that the interviewees focused on smaller, individual, or institutional change due to the easier feasibility of change. Another possibility is the limited understanding and therefore not immediate connection of gender equality and the societal situation. More research could help to explore options of societal change into more gender equality. Using systems approaches, like the MRR approach which was recommended by participant 5 (2023) to respond to gender inequality could also help to better intervene.

### **Figure 5**

*Causes of gender inequality – causal loop diagram – upper half*



**Change**

Change is needed to resolve gender inequalities. Its process was way more pronounced in the literature. Whilst it is no direct root cause of gender equality it influences the ability to meet WASH needs indirectly. When the environment, the ability to exercise agency, the access to resources or the WASH related empowerment compromise the ability to meet WASH needs nothing can improve without change. There is a need of considering the change process more when planning gender measures in the WASH sector to being able to reach a more holistic change.

### **Culture**

Cultural aspects were identified as one of the main causes of gender inequalities next to societal structures and barriers for women. They were very prominent during the interviews. One critically discussed argument was if and how the gender equality measures should be implemented in a low-income country with strong patriarchal structures and lower status of women. Here culture reinforces norms and traditions which support gender inequality. The data shows that understanding cultural norms and societal expectations is crucial for effectively addressing gender equality in the WASH sector. Ignoring this can increase inequalities and limit the change process. This corresponds with the literature of Bayeh (2016). If a Western, European organization can demand gender measures for their projects even though the community might not want that and how much one can critique other cultures which are not one's own.

In the opinion of the researcher, this is a good and important question to ask. It is difficult and not sustainable to push for gender equality from the outside. It needs to be created in participation and with the support of the community. At the same time the argument that patriarchal cultures don't want gender equality is not all wrong. They make it easy for

themselves and avoid conflict. Supporting gender equality is not only a white, European perspective. Two of the interviewees specializing on gender and WASH that were interviewed lived in low-income countries and they very much supported gender transformation and societal change. Also, the goal shouldn't be for people to implement projects without consensus with the community. It is a small line of respecting and criticizing but gender equality should not be left out completely within different cultures. There might be a need to start at a different point and have different expectations on implementation of gender equality measures than within Europe. More research into adequate cultural change is needed.

### **Understanding of Gender Equality**

Contrary to the researcher's prior assumption, the importance of understanding gender equality was an often-mentioned topic by the interviewees specializing on gender and WASH. It was assumed that the focus would be more on general education than on understanding. A deeper understanding and knowledge of the structural inequalities in WASH was only seen with the interviewees specializing on gender and people with previous experiences in the gender (GESI) field like participant 2. In general, some people seemed insecure when talking about the topic and repeatedly emphasized that they were talking out of their own personal perspective and didn't know everything (participant 1, 2023, participant 8, 2023, participant 7, 2023). Gender equality seemed to be at times a quite sensitive topic, especially when talking about one's own organization as participant 8 (2023) stated "[...] where I now have to talk to the management, I can't speak for the management like this. [...] but I can only speak for others to a limited extent". Other examples were also "[...] so I'm not omniscient either", that participant 1 expressed (2023). The insecurities and restraint might be due to the political discussions around the topic. Despite the interviews with people specializing on gender, the

researcher often had the feeling everything was very vaguely and broadly formulated without getting more concrete. But also, content-wise the understanding was not always there. Participant 1 (2023) compared the possible gender equality for women with the underrepresentation of men within the company “Up until two years ago, we only had women and one man in my program department. So, you'd have to ask my colleague what it was like for him, yes, the years before that”. Whilst it might be true that the man under many women felt different in a way it has nothing to do with the structural inequality that women are experiencing and is likely not restraining his participation, career, or other opportunities. This example does not work for men and women in the same way due to gender roles and expectations as well as patriarchal structures. However, this was not the only participant questioning gender equality. Participant 7 (2023) also questioned if there is not sometimes too much of a women's focus nowadays and if it is fair to have women as a target group within their projects on marginalized groups “So right down to the fact that I sometimes ask myself okay, isn't it too much, i.e. aren't we somehow neglecting the men again”? This also shows a limited understanding as it is not about creating an advantage for women but more about creating equal opportunities. Also, when looking at gender transformation it is not the goal to focus only on women but integrating everyone in reducing inequalities and including boys and men. Nowhere in the scientific literature preparing for this thesis an argumentation for the unequal or discriminating treatment of men when focusing on gender equality was seen. It is only the case that too much of a women's focus is critiqued because it lays the pressure of change on women instead of all people (Willettts et al., 2023). Therefore, transformative approaches are needed. A limited understanding can also be seen with the focus on women's ratios and limited ideas of possible gender measures by some participants. Therefore, the lack

of understanding which was thematized by the interviewees specializing on gender also concerns some of the employees within the German WASH Network.

### **Gender Equality transformation**

In theory, the transformative aspect of addressing gender equality was widely acknowledged by the interviewees specializing on gender who had a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter and recognized it as the most effective approach. However, in practice, many organizations were found to be lacking awareness and knowledge regarding this approach and no one expressed intentions to transform existing inequalities. Most organizations did not have dedicated gender positions, with some exceptions in cases where topics such as female health and Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) were prioritized. This gap in knowledge and understanding shows the disconnect between the theoretical ideals of the people with gender specialization and government structures and practical implementation within organizational settings.

Concluding, it can be said that the reasons for gender equality are very complex. Next to the four main categories of societal structures, WASH sector specific reasons, barriers for women and change this discussion revealed other obstacles. Societal structures are likely to have the biggest influence on gender equality but are also the hardest to change and the least discussed. Also, the change process needs to be considered more when planning projects and interventions to make actions more sustainable. Regarding gender inequality in different cultures, adequate ways need to be found to address the topic and make a positive transformation without disrespecting the culture. Working closely together with the communities and finding common ground can help. Lastly, creating deeper understanding of gender inequalities for all through education and transformative approaches is recommended.

## **7.2 Discussion of Methods and Best Practices**

Some highlights of the discussion which will be further examined below are policy making, advocacy, knowledge and awareness raising, gender equality transformation and best practices.

### **Policy Making**

Policy making plays a critical role in shaping the gender equality landscape within the WASH sector. Effective policies can create an enabling environment for promoting gender-responsive practices and ensuring equitable access to WASH services. It can influence access to resources and the ability to exercise agency. Well-designed policies can provide guidance, resources, and incentives for integrating gender considerations into WASH projects and programs. Policymakers should prioritize the development and implementation of gender-responsive policies that address the specific needs and priorities of women, men, and marginalized groups in WASH planning, budgeting, and implementation processes. This may involve conducting gender analyses to identify gaps and disparities, as well as consulting with diverse stakeholders to inform policy development.

### **Advocacy**

Advocacy efforts play a role in raising awareness about gender inequalities in the WASH sector and mobilizing support for transformative change. They have the potential to influence public discourse, shape policy agendas, and catalyze collective action for gender justice. Advocates should engage in advocacy initiatives aimed at promoting gender equality in the WASH sector. This may involve conducting awareness-raising campaigns, lobbying policymakers, and mobilizing grassroots movements to demand accountability and



transparency in WASH governance. Collaborating with civil society organizations and community-based groups can increase advocacy messages and reach wider audiences.

### **Knowledge and Awareness Raising**

Knowledge and awareness-raising initiatives are fundamental for fostering understanding and commitment to gender equality principles in the WASH sector. By increasing awareness about the gendered impacts of water, sanitation, and hygiene issues, stakeholders can be empowered to take action and advocate for change.

Connection to the literature: Research by Wilson and Kneese (2018) underscores the importance of knowledge-sharing platforms and awareness campaigns in promoting gender-sensitive approaches to WASH programming. Increasing public awareness about the intersectionality of gender, water, and sanitation can contribute to more inclusive and responsive policies and practices. Implications: Efforts to raise awareness about gender inequalities in the WASH sector should be integrated into educational curricula, community outreach programs, and media campaigns. This may involve developing informational materials, conducting training workshops, and leveraging digital platforms to disseminate knowledge and best practices. Engaging with diverse stakeholders, including government agencies, NGOs, schools, and community-based organizations, can facilitate knowledge exchange and collaborative learning.

### **Gender Equality transformation**

In theory, the transformative ideas of addressing gender equality were acknowledged by the interviewees specializing on gender. As participant 5 (2023) said, “And then we tend to ask ourselves okay, how can transformation in the water sector be achieved with the resources and partners we have?” Some, like participant 2 recognized it as the most effective approach.

However, in practice, many organizations were found to be lacking awareness and knowledge regarding this approach. Most organizations did not have dedicated gender positions, with some exceptions in cases where topics such as female health and Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) were prioritized. This gap in knowledge and understanding shows the disconnect between the theoretical ideals of experts and government structures and practical implementation within organizational settings. Here as well, more knowledge building and awareness raising is needed.

### **Broader gender equality**

Another gap that could be identified within the research was other gender identities than the binary cis-women and cis-men. Nearly all interviews and research articles focused on the binary male and female but other identities were nearly no-were discussed. Only participant 8 added the question of other gender identities after his interview as an addendum via email (2023). These findings also correspond with Macura et al. (2023). This shows that whilst in theory all genders are often already implemented in reality the understanding and focus lies on the binary model and does not include more gender identities. Here as well, more knowledge building and awareness raising is needed.

### **Methods and best practices**

For a long time, the research felt frustrating. Bigger, more popular organizations weren't accepting interview requests and the interviews conducted didn't seem to produce the fitting answers to the research questions. Answers were vaguely and general formulated or so broad that they weren't of any help. It took some time to understand that some interviewees wouldn't give honest answers. Some participants felt very loyal to their organizations and didn't want to admit the inequalities in their organization. One reason could be difficulties admitting that those

inequalities exist whilst in theory they should not exist. This could be due to shame, protection of the company and the reputation of the company as well as oneself. To counteract on this, more honest discussions are needed to underline that it is not about being perfect or blaming specific organizations for not being equal enough but about working together on inequalities, looking at the problems and trying to improve them. Therefore, more open discussion and knowledge building is needed. Overall, the topic has a high complexity and needs more research, maybe also in psychological reasons of resisting change towards more gender equality.

Best practices were not that obvious. And it was difficult to determine best practices. Some of the organizations didn't have defined methods let alone frameworks they were using. They used some measures and saw gender equality as an important topic but didn't clear concepts or ideas. A larger sample would have been of help to create a more powerful statement on best practices. It was assumed by the researcher that all participants had concrete ideas for methods and best practices which wasn't the case. Due to this knowledge gap, more knowledge on specific interventions is needed like a gender equality checklist, adapted to the local context (participant 2, 2023). This way people know exactly what to do and know how to actively work on gender equality in their own case.

Also, it became clear that best practices are very context-dependent and not transferable to all contexts and organizations. Implementation needs to fit to the situation and there is no one size fits all (participant 4, 2023; participant 2, 2023).

Overall, advancing gender equality in the WASH sector requires continuous efforts and research to bridge the gap between theory and practice, fostering a more inclusive and equitable environment for all.

## **8. Conclusion**

In conclusion, this research has led the researcher to recognize the challenges and complexity surrounding gender equality and its integration within organizations. Looking for the root causes for gender equality helped to generate a better understanding of the topic and its complexity. It showed the reasons for gender equality and how engrained societal structures are in gender equality but also the nature of the WASH sector, which barriers apply and how difficult a change towards more gender equality is.

Regarding the existing methods for enhancing gender equality, multiple methods which act on a societal, institutional and implementational level were identified. Amongst those, policy making, knowledge and awareness raising, and advocacy were quite prominent. Especially the creation of deeper understanding of the topic, creating the will for change and including everyone, best with the use of transformative approaches were identified as important. Additionally, this research identified 10 best practices with data of the conducted interviews.

Achieving gender equality requires not just surface-level changes, but a structural transformation within our institutions and societies. It demands a concerted effort to dismantle existing power dynamics and promote inclusivity at every level. As participant 2 (2023) said, quite a substantial part is also related to dignity. Protecting one's own dignity by meeting the WASH needs and access to equal working conditions for all. Only through systemic change can gender equality and a more just and equitable world be created.

## **9. Relevance of the Research**

The research results help to further understand the reasons for gender inequalities in the WASH sector and help to show different methods and strategies to improve gender equality. The different reasons for gender inequalities raise awareness on the complexity of

the topic, displaying obstacles like the barriers and difficulties of change. But through that also generating new starting points of interaction towards more equality. The methods and best practices sections give strategies and tactics to improve gender equality and inspiration how change can happen by naming specific examples. NGOs and Organizations within the WASH field can use this research to understand the complexity of gender inequality in the context of WASH and get hands on methods and practices on what to do enhance gender equality.

### **10. Contribution to the Professional Product**

The information retrieved and analyzed via the interviews form the main components of the advisory report. The report aims to create a research foundation of causes of gender equality as well as methods and best practices which will be used in the advisory report for the real case of the Humanitarian Sanitation Hub. The information as well as the identified gaps serve to give concrete recommendations how to improve gender equality on the Humanitarian Sanitation Hub platform.

The advisory report can be used by the GTO to gain inspiration and gain a better understanding of the problem. But it can also serve other organizations, especially within the German WASH Network to gain inspiration on possible improvements and check what they could do better.

### **11. Limitations**

The results of this research are limited due to two main factors. First, the number of interviewees who participated in the study was smaller than expected. Due to timely constraints on the side of the organization and organizational policies only four out of twenty-eight organizations (GTO not included) were willing to conduct interviews with the researcher. This led to missing data and a small sample size, which makes the results less reliable. This also

generated limited data regarding best practices, next time deeper desk research or quantitative data from surveys could be beneficial to create more trustworthy statements. The chosen sampling method of non-probability sampling also has a higher risk of a sampling bias which can't be excluded. Therefore, the inferences that can be made are weaker than with probability sampling.

Secondly the limited understanding and willingness to honestly go into details, which was already seen in the discussion section makes the data less reliable. A social desirability bias of individuals as well as the company's actions could be the reason here. These limitations can lead to limited answers to the research question.

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## **Appendix A**

### **Interview Consent Form**

Research project title: *Gender Inequalities in WASH: Preparation Towards More Equality Development Within the Humanitarian Sanitation Hub*

Research investigator: Mona Richter

#### Project Description

This research project is about understanding gender inequality within the water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) sector and exploring possibilities of integrating (more) gender equality in WASH projects. To gain those insights qualitative interviews will be conducted which examine established methods and best practices aimed at strengthening gender equality, both within organizational contexts and within the WASH sector at large.

By taking part on this research, I confirm that I understand the objective of the research and that there are no risks anticipated with my participation to the research.

### Interview process

- I have the right to withdraw from the research at any time.
- The interview will be recorded, and notes will be taken, potentially even with transcripts.
- Access to the data will be limited to the researcher and Dr. Cynthia Embido Bejeno as the internship counsellor as well as a second examiner from the Windesheim University of Applied Sciences and staff of the German Toilet Organization e.V.
- Unless otherwise agreed, any interview content is going to be anonymized so you cannot be identified through the data and a pseudonym will be used.
- The video or audio recordings will be destroyed after the end of the research project
- Any variations of the conditions above will only occur with your further explicit approval.

### Quotations

I understand that my words may be quoted directly. With regards to being quoted, please tick any of the statements that you agree with:

	I wish to review the notes, transcripts, or other data collected during the research which include my participation.
	I agree to be quoted directly.
	I agree to be quoted directly if my name is not published and a made-up name (pseudonym) is used.
	I agree that the researchers may publish documents that contain quotations by me.

By signing this form, I agree that:

1. I am voluntarily taking part in this project. I understand that all information is treated in strict confidence and that can stop the interview at any time.

2. The recordings and transcription of interview or extracts from it will be accessible only to the researcher and her supervisor and mainly used for the bachelor thesis by Mona Richter as well as an advisory report written for the German Toilet Organization e.V.

3. Unless otherwise agreed, anonymity will be ensured, and pseudonyms will be used.

3. I don't expect to receive any benefit or payment for my participation.

4. I can request a copy of the transcript of my interview and may make edits as I feel necessary to ensure the effectiveness of any agreement made about confidentiality.

5. I have been able to ask any questions I might have, and I understand that I am free to contact the researcher with any questions I may have in the future.

Participants Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Participants Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Researchers Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix B

### Interview Questions

1. Tell me a little bit about your work on gender
  - What is your current job title in the organization you work for?
  - Could you briefly describe your role and responsibilities in addressing gender inequalities within the WASH network/humanitarian sector?
  - How long have you been involved in this position?
  
2. From your perspective, what are the primary reasons for gender inequality in the humanitarian aid/WASH sector?
  
3. How does your work as a gender expert in the field look like?
  - Could you share the specific tools or strategies you use?
  - Do you apply a gender transformative approach, and are there other approaches you find effective?
  - Could you highlight best practices you've observed and any less effective methods?
  - Are there specific tools or resources you would recommend for addressing gender inequalities?

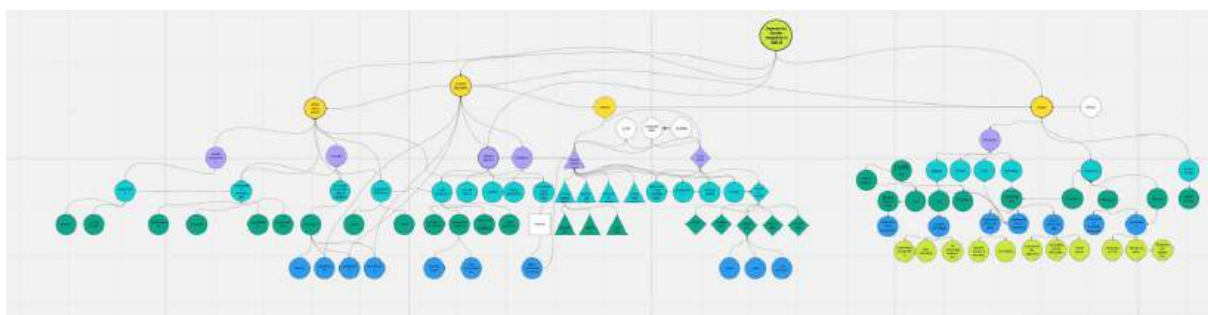
4. What measures are needed for more gender equality in the wash sector?
  - Do you perceive issues related to the ability to exercise agency in achieving gender equality?
    - If so, how do you think it can be improved?
  - Are there challenges related to access to resources, and what measures can be taken to enhance it?
  - Is WASH-related empowerment a concern, and if yes, what strategies can improve it?
  - How does the environment contribute to gender equality, and can positive changes be influenced?
  
5. What, in your view, are the most significant challenges for gender equal abilities to meet WASH needs?
  - How do you propose these challenges can be addressed and improved?
  
6. How would you suggest improving gender equality within an online platform focused on knowledge about planning and implementing sanitation and faecal sludge management in emergencies?
  
7. Is there anything else crucial about gender inequalities in the WASH sector that we haven't covered in our discussion?



## Appendix C

### Image 1

Causal loop diagram reasons for gender equality – whole



### Image 2

Causal loop diagram reasons for gender equality – key influences



### Image 3

Causal loop diagram reasons for gender inequality – wash sector specific

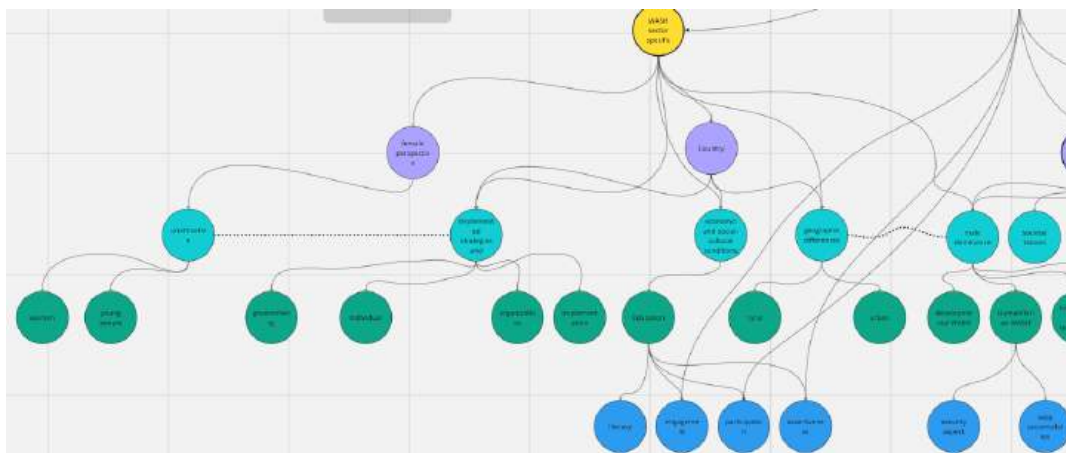


Image 4

Causal loop diagram – Reasons for gender inequalities – Societal structures

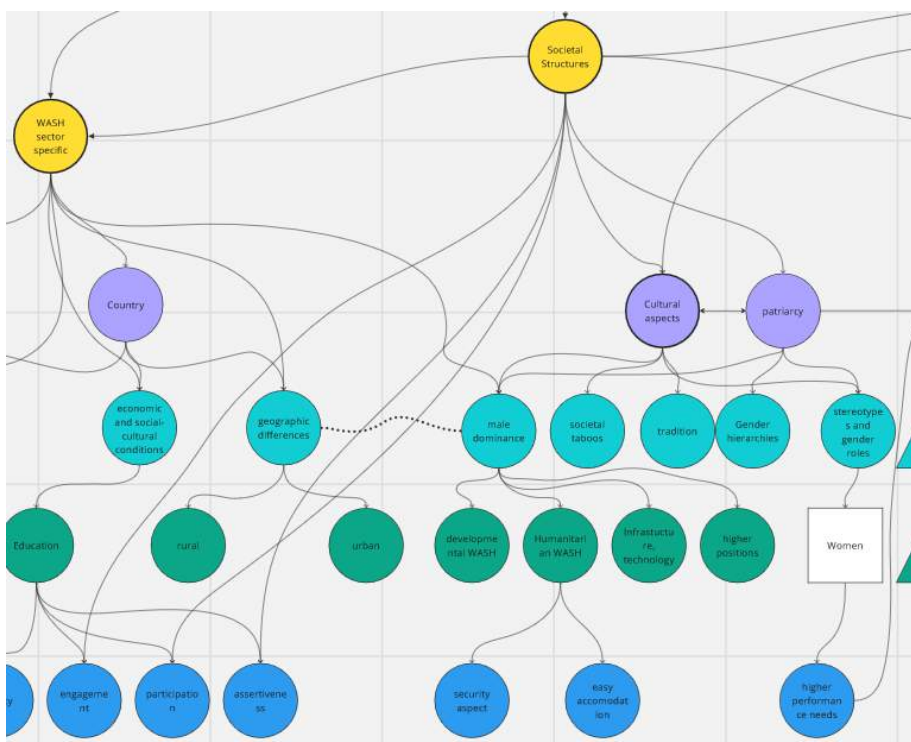


Image 5



More can be found under <https://miro.com/app/board/uXjVKZbCMT4=#tpicker-content>

## **Appendix D**

Signed Consent Forms

	I wish to review the notes, transcripts, or other data collected during the research which include my participation.
	I agree to be quoted directly.
	I agree to be quoted directly if my name is not published and a made-up name (pseudonym) is used.
	I agree that the researchers may publish documents that contain quotations by me.

By signing this form, I agree that:

1. I am voluntarily taking part in this project. I understand that all information is treated in strict confidence and that can stop the interview at any time.
2. The recordings and transcription of interview or extracts from it will be accessible only to the researcher and her supervisor and mainly used for the bachelor thesis by Mona Richter as well as an advisory report written for the German Toilet Organization e.V.
3. Unless otherwise agreed, anonymity will be ensured, and pseudonyms will be used.
3. I don't expect to receive any benefit or payment for my participation.
4. I can request a copy of the transcript of my interview and may make edits as I feel necessary to ensure the effectiveness of any agreement made about confidentiality.
5. I have been able to ask any questions I might have, and I understand that I am free to contact the researcher with any questions I may have in the future.

Participants Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Participants Signature: **Arno Coerver** Digitally signed by Arno Coerver  
Date: 2024.04.04  
11:36:16 +02'00' Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Researchers Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

	I wish to review the notes, transcripts, or other data collected during the research which include my participation.
	I agree to be quoted directly.
	I agree to be quoted directly if my name is not published and a made-up name (pseudonym) is used.
	I agree that the researchers may publish documents that contain quotations by me.

By signing this form, I agree that:

1. I am voluntarily taking part in this project. I understand that all information is treated in strict confidence and that can stop the interview at any time.
2. The recordings and transcription of interview or extracts from it will be accessible only to the researcher and her supervisor and mainly used for the bachelor thesis by Mona Richter as well as an advisory report written for the German Toilet Organization e.V.
3. Unless otherwise agreed, anonymity will be ensured, and pseudonyms will be used.
3. I don't expect to receive any benefit or payment for my participation.
4. I can request a copy of the transcript of my interview and may make edits as I feel necessary to ensure the effectiveness of any agreement made about confidentiality.
5. I have been able to ask any questions I might have, and I understand that I am free to contact the researcher with any questions I may have in the future.

Participants Name: Bettina-Sophie Heinz

Participants Signature: Bettina-Sophie Heinz Date: 27.03.24

Researchers Signature: M. Richter Date: 27.03.2024

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### Interview Consent Form

Research project title: *Gender Inequalities in WASH: Preparation Towards More Equality Development Within the Humanitarian Sanitation Hub*

Research investigator: Mona Richter

Research Participants name: Maren Heuvels

The interview is expected to take 30-40 minutes. There are no risks anticipated with the participation, but you have the right to withdraw from the research at any time.

#### Interview process

- The interview will be recorded, and notes will be taken, potentially even with transcripts
- In case a transcript is made, it will be sent to you to give you the opportunity to correct factual errors
- The data will be analyzed by Mona Richter as the research investigator
- Access to the data will be limited to Dr. Cynthia Embido Bejeno as the internship counsellor as well as a second examiner from the Windesheim University of Applied Sciences and staff of the German Toilet Organization e.V.
- If you wish, any interview content is going to be anonymized so you cannot be identified through the data and a pseudonym will be used
- The video or audio recordings will be destroyed after the end of the research project
- Any variations of the conditions above will only occur with your further explicit approval

#### Quotations

I understand that my words may be quoted directly. With regards to being quoted, please tick any of the statements that you agree with:

	I wish to review the notes, transcripts, or other data collected during the research which include my participation.
	I agree to be quoted directly.
x	I agree to be quoted directly if my name is not published and a made-up name (pseudonym) is used.
	I agree that the researchers may publish documents that contain quotations by me.

By signing this form, I agree that:

1. I am voluntarily taking part in this project. I understand that I don't have to take part, and I can stop the interview at any time.
2. The transcribed interview or extracts from it may be used for the bachelor thesis by Mona Richter as well as an advisory report written for the German Toilet Organization e.V.



3. I don't expect to receive any benefit or payment for my participation.

4. I can request a copy of the transcript of my interview and may make edits I feel necessary to ensure the effectiveness of any agreement made about confidentiality.

5. I have been able to ask any questions I might have, and I understand that I am free to contact the researcher with any questions I may have in the future.

Participants Signature:



Date: 13.02.2024

Researchers Signature:



Date: 13.02.24

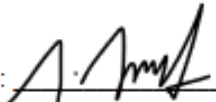


	I wish to review the notes, transcripts, or other data collected during the research which include my participation.
✓	I agree to be quoted directly.
✓	I agree to be quoted directly if my name is not published and a made-up name (pseudonym) is used.
✓	I agree that the researchers may publish documents that contain quotations by me.


By signing this form, I agree that:

1. I am voluntarily taking part in this project. I understand that all information is treated in strict confidence and that can stop the interview at any time.
2. The recordings and transcription of interview or extracts from it will be accessible only to the researcher and her supervisor and mainly used for the bachelor thesis by Mona Richter as well as an advisory report written for the German Toilet Organization e.V.
3. Unless otherwise agreed, anonymity will be ensured, and pseudonyms will be used.
3. I don't expect to receive any benefit or payment for my participation.
4. I can request a copy of the transcript of my interview and may make edits as I feel necessary to ensure the effectiveness of any agreement made about confidentiality.
5. I have been able to ask any questions I might have, and I understand that I am free to contact the researcher with any questions I may have in the future.

Participants Name: Simon Joncourt

Participants Signature: 

Date: 05.02.2024

Researchers Signature: 


Date: 05.02.2024

X	I wish to review the notes, transcripts, or other data collected during the research which include my participation.
X	I agree to be quoted directly. after my approval of quotations.
	I agree to be quoted directly if my name is not published and a made-up name (pseudonym) is used.
	I agree that the researchers may publish documents that contain quotations by me.


By signing this form, I agree that:

1. I am voluntarily taking part in this project. I understand that all information is treated in strict confidence and that can stop the interview at any time.
2. The recordings and transcription of interview or extracts from it will be accessible only to the researcher and her supervisor and mainly used for the bachelor thesis by Mona Richter as well as an advisory report written for the German Toilet Organization e.V.
3. Unless otherwise agreed, anonymity will be ensured, and pseudonyms will be used.
3. I don't expect to receive any benefit or payment for my participation.
4. I can request a copy of the transcript of my interview and may make edits as I feel necessary to ensure the effectiveness of any agreement made about confidentiality.
5. I have been able to ask any questions I might have, and I understand that I am free to contact the researcher with any questions I may have in the future.

Participants Name: Kerstin Koch

Participants Signature: 

Date: 09.04.25

Researchers Signature: 

Date: 09.04.2024

