

# WASH-Nutrition linkages

A joint narrative between Sanitation and Water for All and the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement



**SANITATION  
AND WATER  
FOR ALL**



**We know that reaching most of the Sustainable Development Goals requires a multisectoral approach. A growing base of evidence indicates that the WASH environment can be critical in shaping children's nutritional outcomes.**

## WHAT IS NUTRITION?

Good nutrition is not just about how much food is available to consume, but rather about enduring the right nutrition – whether from breastfeeding, a varied diet or supplements – go into the body, and stay in. Good nutrition helps develop strong brains and bodies, allowing a child the opportunity to not just survive, but also to reach his or her full potential throughout life. **The first 1,000 days from pregnancy through to a child's second birthday is the critical moment where a child's nourishment determines the child's destiny.**

## WHAT IS WASH?

WASH is the collective term for Water, Sanitation and Hygiene. Due to their interdependent nature, these three core issues are grouped together to represent a growing sector. Each field of work is dependent on the presence of the other, for example, without toilets, water sources become contaminated; without clean water, basic hygiene practices are not possible. **Without the basic needs of WASH, the lives of millions of children are at risk times, particularly during times of crisis.**

## WHY DOES NUTRITION MATTER TO WASH AND WHY DOES WASH MATTER TO NUTRITION?

The three main **underlying causes** of undernutrition are unsuitable or insufficient food intake, poor care practices and disease - these are directly or indirectly related to inadequate access to water, sanitation and hygiene.

**Stunting**, a main indicator for malnutrition - when a child is too short for their height - is also an indicator for repeated exposure to infection or other illnesses throughout the early years of life. **WASH programmes** are often implemented in a large scale and therefore, can serve as a key delivery platform for enhancing the coverage and effectiveness of nutrition interventions. **We must collaborate to ensure WASH programmes are designed to include the necessary nutrition-sensitive characteristics to effectively contribute to achieving better nutrition outcomes**

## PROOF POINTS

- Frequent illness impairs nutritional status and poor nutrition increases the risk of infection. This forms a vicious circle of recurring sickness and further deterioration of nutritional status.
- A child with severe acute malnutrition is nine times more likely to die from common infections (e.g. malaria, pneumonia, diarrhoea).<sup>1</sup>
- 50% of undernourishment is associated with recurrent onsets of diarrhea. When children are undernourished they are more likely to suffer from diarrheal diseases and other infections.
- Approximately half of all diarrhoea episodes and a third of respiratory infections would be avoided by breastfeeding.<sup>2</sup>
- Inadequate WASH conditions facilitate ingestion of fecal pathogens which lead to diarrhea, intestinal worms and inhibits a child's ability to absorb nutrients.

<sup>1</sup> UNICEF, (2015). Management of severe acute malnutrition in children: working towards results at scale. [online] Available at: [http://www.unicef.org/eapro/UNICEF\\_program\\_guidance\\_on\\_management\\_of\\_SAM\\_2015.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/eapro/UNICEF_program_guidance_on_management_of_SAM_2015.pdf) [Accessed 29 Apr. 2016]

<sup>2</sup> Victora, C., Bahl, R., Barros, A., França, G., Horton, S., Krasevec, J., Murch, S., Sankar, M., Walker, N. and Rollins, N. (2016). Breastfeeding in the 21st century: epidemiology, mechanisms, and lifelong effect. *The Lancet*, 387(10017), pp.475-490.

## HOW DO WE TAKE ACTION?

### Integrated policies and plans for wash and nutrition will provide the political boost needed

---

The integrated approach to WASH and nutrition in national policies and development partners' strategies in many countries have begun to acknowledge the importance of adequate WASH conditions for achieving good nutritional status, and call for WASH interventions to be scaled up along with nutrition actions. Along with the policy set up, developing measurable and interlinked indicators for WASH and nutrition can help improve strategies, technical guidelines, and management practices of integrated services.<sup>3</sup>

#### Key messages

- Only national policies and plans that cut across sectors can contribute to the impact needed to reach the sustainable development goals. WASH and nutrition are inextricably interlinked and when policy makers from both WASH and nutrition recognise this and reflect it in **both sectoral plans**, the impact on the nutritional status of a population will be amplified and progress can be accelerated.
- Political will is critical in ensuring that a national strategy is developed in consultation with multiple stakeholders across multiple sectors. By ensuring that a strategy for WASH or nutrition includes important crosscutting issues and **specific objectives of the other sector**, this can trigger proactive approaches that will be adopted by partners to ensure integrated action from the outset.
- When we analyse plans across different countries, we can develop a clearer picture of successes and challenges faced. WaterAid's first Missing Ingredients report analyses how integrated WASH and nutrition plans are across 13 countries. **Using these reports and supporting further analysis** in the future will identify where gaps exist and help to ensure that the right capacity is built to address those challenges.

### Transparency in financing WASH and nutrition will feed advocacy efforts to mobilise resources

---

More commitment to nutrition is dependent on financial investments made in key sectors. In 2015, twenty-five SUN Countries identified nutrition-sensitive allocations from more than four key sectoral domains comprising health, agriculture, education, WASH and social protection. Countries that undertake the tracking exercise highlight its value in sensitization by introducing a nutrition lens to some sectors and acting as a catalyst for further engagement.<sup>4</sup>

#### Key messages

- Visibility about where public investments are being made is a crucial first step in engaging across sectors. By ensuring more open dialogue about **WASH and nutrition spending**, countries will find more efficiencies between WASH and nutrition programmes, getting more value for money, to deliver the more effective services to populations in need.
- Data on financing empowers civil society to advocate for more resources and more effective allocation of resources. **Civil society must engage** in how public and donor funds are distributed to ensure they deliver the impact needed for WASH and nutrition at the community level.

### Implementing integrated WASH and nutrition programmes

---

There are 5 main pillars of the WASH'Nutrition strategy initially designed by West and Central Africa WASH Regional Group in 2012 with the support of many partners: Co-location: target areas affected by undernutrition, focus on the mother-malnourished child unit, increase emphasis on behaviour change, improve coordination and reinforce the principle of WASH minimum package.

#### Key messages

- **Co-location** of WASH and nutrition services will ensure there is more impact in areas of high malnutrition prevalence. To achieve this, we need information systems, aligned sector action plans and strong stakeholder coordination. Co-location is an effective way to achieve impact, at scale.
- The **first 1,000 days** from pregnancy through to a child's second birthday is the critical moment where a child's nourishment determines the child's destiny. An increased focus on the thousand days, with mother/child as a

---

<sup>3</sup> Action Against Hunger, (2017). WASH'Nutrition A Practical Guidebook. [Online] Available at:

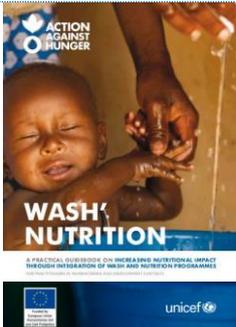
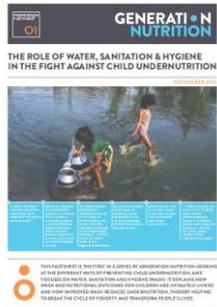
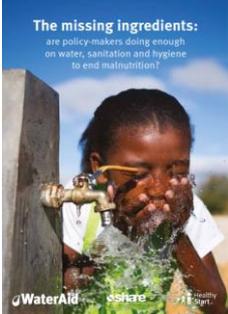
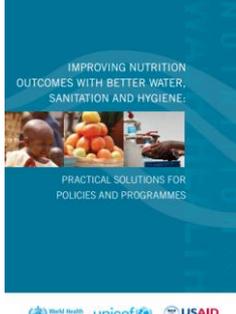
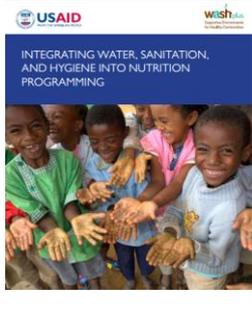
[http://www.actionagainsthunger.org/sites/default/files/publications/2017\\_ACF\\_WASH\\_Nutrition\\_Guidebook\\_BD.pdf](http://www.actionagainsthunger.org/sites/default/files/publications/2017_ACF_WASH_Nutrition_Guidebook_BD.pdf) [accessed 13 June 2017]

<sup>4</sup> SUN Movement, (2015) SUN Budget Analysis Synthesis Report. [Online] Available at: <http://docs.scalingupnutrition.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/SUN-Budget-Analysis-Short-Synthesis-Report-SUNGG-version-EN.pdf> [Accessed 13 June 2017]

target group for WASH programmes will ensure more children enjoy the cognitive and physical development they need to reach their full potential.

- When children are undernourished they are more likely to suffer from diarrheal diseases and other infections. **Behaviour change programmes** to improve WASH and nutrition educate communities on how to combat the underlying factors. Scaling up these programmes will play a huge role in breaking the cycle of recurring illness.
- Reaching most of the Sustainable Development Goals requires a multisectoral approach and this can only be done with **effective coordination**. When resources are bundled, particularly between interlinked sectors like WASH and nutrition, expertise can be maximised and sustainable impact can be achieved.
- The **WASH minimum package** for households is a combination of WASH service delivery and awareness-raising around the importance of safe hygiene practices - a minimum needed to prevent WASH related diseases. When we ensure and reinforce the principle of the WASH minimum package both in health and nutrition centres and at the household level in communities affected by undernutrition, we can play a critical role in keeping mothers, children and their families healthy.

## KEY RESOURCES

			
<p>A practical guidebook on increasing nutritional impact through integration of WASH and Nutrition programmes <a href="http://bit.ly/2sw5vKQ">http://bit.ly/2sw5vKQ</a> For practitioners in humanitarian and development contexts.</p>	<p>Prevention Factsheet: The role of water, sanitation &amp; hygiene in the fight against child undernutrition <a href="http://bit.ly/2sNRs67">http://bit.ly/2sNRs67</a> A Generation Nutrition call to all actors to take on the recommendations of the factsheet.</p>	<p>Briefing paper: Greater investment in water, sanitation and hygiene is key to the fight against undernutrition <a href="http://bit.ly/2sRsIJW">http://bit.ly/2sRsIJW</a> The paper reviews WASH interventions and undernutrition links and the funding situation.</p>	<p>Policy brief: The Case for Investment by Public Health, water, sanitation, and hygiene <a href="http://uni.cf/2sKUSWp">http://uni.cf/2sKUSWp</a> This is one brief in a five-part series by UNICEF on the importance of multi-sectoral approaches to nutrition.</p>
			
<p>The missing ingredients: Are policy-makers doing enough on water, sanitation and hygiene to end malnutrition? <a href="http://bit.ly/2sRj9KZ">http://bit.ly/2sRj9KZ</a> An analysis of national nutrition plans in 13 countries to view WASH linkages.</p>	<p>Improving nutrition outcomes with better water, sanitation and hygiene. <a href="http://uni.cf/2mlBwRz">http://uni.cf/2mlBwRz</a> Practical solutions for policies and programmes. Primarily for nutrition programme managers and implementers.</p>	<p>Integrating water, sanitation, and hygiene into nutrition programming <a href="http://bit.ly/2sRzBL6">http://bit.ly/2sRzBL6</a> The WASHplus project supports communities by creating and delivering WASH interventions.</p>	