GUIDANCE ON SPECIAL SUBJECT: WATER. SANITATION AND HYGIENE (WASH)

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The purpose of this guidance is to provide information and insights on how best to fulfil the requirements of the Safe Water, Sanitation and Hygiene for All (WASH) Outcome of the AWS Standard V2.0. It reflects the requirements of the AWS Standard V2.0, and supplements the General Guidance to offer advice on how to achieve criteria and indicators in a way that is consistent with good practice on WASH. It is intended to be used in conjunction with the AWS Standard V2.0 and General Guidance.

SECTION 1: GATHERING AND UNDERSTANDING WASH DATA

Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) as an aspect of stakeholder interests and challenges

The process of stakeholder identification and engagement required to fulfil *Indicator 1.2.1* allows companies using the AWS Standard to gain a robust understanding of the range and depth of WASH-related concerns and contexts that exist in the catchment. This understanding is essential in working together to devise appropriate, relevant strategies and solutions that are more likely to be successful because they are widely owned.

Successful engagement does not only depend on identification of relevant stakeholders (for example, water utilities, local authorities, public health departments and regulators), but also on how they are invited to voice their concerns. For example, women and girls should be consulted and equally included with men and boys, and special consideration should be given to people living with disabilities. Proposed actions and solutions should be considered carefully to ensure they do not disadvantage any particular group of stakeholders.

Stakeholder engagement on WASH can be conducted in several ways including surveys at the workplace or household, questionnaires, feedback forms, focus group discussions and key informant interviews. Once shared water challenges and opportunities for action have been agreed, it is important that affected stakeholders remain engaged through an ongoing process that tracks and reports demonstrable progress toward positive WASH outcomes (CEO Water Mandate, 2015).

Gathering site level WASH data

To fulfil *Indicator 1.3.8*, implementers must gather quantitative and qualitative data relating to levels of access and adequacy of WASH provision at the site level. This data should include:

- *Levels of access and adequacy of water for drinking, food preparation and washing:*

  In all countries and all sectors, employers are responsible for ensuring the availability of sufficient, free, physically accessible potable water to provide adequate hydration and hygiene for all workers, sensitive to worksite conditions, within a reasonable distance from the working task or the worksite. The data gathered for *Indicator 1.3.8* should include the quantity and quality of water available for drinking, food preparation and washing. Many countries specify parameters for potable water and testing should be carried out to ensure potable water quality is compliant with national regulatory standards. The quantity of safe water required for drinking and food preparation, as well as water required for sanitation, handwashing and personal hygiene will be context specific, dependent on, for example, the design of facilities, the type of work, the climate and the size of the workforce.

- *Levels of access and adequacy of sanitation:*

  In all countries and all sectors, employers are responsible for providing sanitary facilities at the site that allow workers to go to the toilet safely and discretely without harming their health, or the health of others, and that allow women to manage their menstrual hygiene needs (ILO, 2020). Data gathered for *Indicator 1.3.8* should include the location, design, condition and safety of sanitation facilities, as well as the number of people the facility caters to and the frequency of cleaning and maintenance.

- *Levels of access and adequacy of hygiene:*

  Evidence shows that hygienic behaviour, such as handwashing, is a key preventative measure in reducing the spread of illness and disease. Data gathered for *Indicator 1.3.8*, relating to hygiene at the site level, should include a description of facilities, their condition, ease of access and efforts made to positively influence behaviours. The provision of facilities is an essential starting point. Data should be gathered on hand-washing facilities with running potable water, soap and means of hand drying available per toilet and at every eating, food preparation and cooking facility. It is important also to ascertain how many people are expected to use the hygiene facilities and if the timing of use is clustered at specific points in the day. Those having to wait at a crowded time may neglect to wash their hands.

Understanding WASH-related legal and regulatory requirements

Indicator 1.5.2 requires implementers to identify national laws and regulations that relate to the provision of WASH for workers. This understanding is critical, as the site will be required to demonstrate legal and regulatory compliance in order to fulfil the requirements of *Indicator 3.2.1*. The national laws and regulations for WASH provision for workers effectively determine the minimum threshold for WASH performance at the site to achieve compliance with the AWS Standard.

Gathering WASH data at the catchment level

There is a wide array of resources available to assist in gathering WASH data at the catchment level for *Indicator 1.5.7*. For example, WWF's Water Risk Filter provides indicative data on WASH provision within catchments. Additionally, national governments report to the Joint Monitoring Program (JMP) of the WHO/UNICEF on the status of WASH services. Providing regular global reports on drinking-water and sanitation coverage, the JMP is the only global drinking water and sanitation monitoring mechanism that provides information allowing comparison between countries and over time. The JMP focuses on monitoring progress towards achieving Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) targets 6.1, "By 2030, achieve universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water for all" and 6.2, "By 2030, achieve access to adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene for all and end open defecation, paying special attention to the needs of women and girls and those in vulnerable situations". (SDG) targets 6.1 "By 2030, achieve universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water for all" and 6.2 "By 2030, achieve access to adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene for all and end open defecation, paying special attention to the needs of women and girls and those in vulnerable situations".

As for details of WASH provision in catchments, government agencies, multi-laterals and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) operating in the catchment should be able to provide the appropriate data. This data can be further enhanced by bespoke information collected through a partnership with an experienced local NGO or civil society organisation (CSO). The site's partner(s) may assess the percentage of the population with access to safe WASH in the communities as well as the impacts, challenges or barriers to access and opportunities in the communities. This could be achieved using available data and reports. Where data is lacking, the partner may carry out interviews with key stakeholders including government agents and organisations with knowledge of conditions, as well as collecting information directly from households and communities through, for example, focus group discussions and surveys. Where undertaken, it is important that drinking water source data is not only

gathered at household level, but also where people congregate in the community, for example in schools, religious centres, markets and other public places.

WASH associated with indirect water use of primary inputs

Advanced Indicator 1.5.9 requires sites to understand the adequacy of WASH provision within the catchments of origin of primary inputs. The processes to develop that understanding for the site's own catchment, outlined above, should be followed by either the implementer or the supplier.

Identifying shared WASH-related challenges

Indicators 1.6.1 and *1.6.2* require implementers to identify shared water challenges and any existing initiatives aimed at addressing those challenges. In WASH-challenged locations, any gaps in WASH that are identified could justifiably - reflective of WASH's status as a human right and an enabler of economic growth - be considered by the implementing site as an important shared water challenge, rather than something which solely impacts the external communities.

Understanding WASH-related risks

Indicator 1.7.1 requires implementers to identify and prioritise water risks faced by the site. Access to safe drinking water and sanitation is a basic human right (UN, 2010), with important consequences for health, wellbeing, dignity, social justice, livelihoods, educational opportunities and economic development. Where access and adequacy of WASH provision is identified as a risk inside or beyond the fence-line, it should be considered an issue of high importance.

By acting in a timely way to remove, reduce or mitigate WASH risks, a site can ensure business continuity and protect itself and its workers from unexpected costs and impacts. There are three main types of risk to an organisation: physical, regulatory and reputational:

- *Physical WASH-related risks* may be caused, for example, by no or poor handwashing facilities or contaminated drinking water leading to health impacts in the workforce, with significant business impacts. These include absenteeism, increased staff turnover and increased costs, for example, health clinic costs and decreased productivity (WaterAid, 2018).
- *Regulatory WASH-related risks* may be due to non-compliance with existing national or state level laws and regulations.
- *Reputational WASH-related risks* can be damaging through, for example, consumers of the company's products (whether close or far from the site) becoming aware of site workers and/or local communities lacking access to safe drinking water, sanitation or hygiene.

Understanding WASH-related opportunities

Indicator 1.7.2 requires implementers to identify water-related opportunities for the site. WASH-related opportunities may be considered in terms of benefits experienced by organisations which provide access to WASH through healthier workers and improved productivity. Reduced staff absenteeism and turnover, lower operational costs and lower business and reputational risks all positively impact the bottom-line regarding production outputs, product sales, market perception and attractiveness to investors. Explaining these benefits internally may be necessary in order to secure approval for investment of time and money in WASH. Some benefits are easier to quantify than others. Guidance in quantifying direct business benefits is available to support organisations to achieve this and can be found in the 2018 WaterAid report: 'Strengthening the business case for water, sanitation and hygiene - how to measure value for your business.'

Identifying best practice for WASH

Indicator 1.8.5 requires implementers of the AWS Standard to identify what 'best practice' looks like for site provision of equitable and adequate WASH services, both for their respective sector and for the catchment where they are practicing water stewardship. Best practice may involve alignment with

standard and established practices or the implementation of new and innovative approaches. In terms of site provision of WASH services for workers and catchment stakeholders, there are a number of well-established and widely accepted international guidelines and initiatives which implementers may find useful for identifying best practice in their own context. These guidelines and initiatives are outlined in Section 2 of this Supplemental Guidance.

SECTION 2 – PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTING WASH ACTIONS

Planning WASH actions

The water stewardship strategy and plan developed for *Indicators 2.3.1* and *2.3.2* should incorporate a commitment and plan for action on WASH that will be implemented by the site, describing who will do what and when. Plans should be informed by the data collected and address the specific challenges identified. At the site level, this will include actions that respond to any gaps in the access and adequacy of WASH provision identified. Beyond the site, in the catchment, the Water Stewardship Plan should reflect the knowledge acquired through stakeholder engagement, data collection, analysis of shared challenges and identification of best practice. Sites should be mindful to avoid blanket implementation of corporate-wide WASH targets that do not respond to the specific challenges identified through implementation of the AWS Standard.

WASH provision at the site level

Indicator 3.6.1 requires implementers to provide a description of actions taken to improve the level of access and adequacy of WASH provision at the site. This includes improvements to the provision of drinking water, toilets, washing facilities, hygienic areas for food and drink consumption and potentially showers, as well as awareness raising and training, and any additional efforts to positively influence behaviours. Measures taken to improve WASH provision at the site should take account of gender, work schedules and incentive structures – as explained below – as well as any other special needs.

- *Gender considerations:* Women make up a large percentage of the labour force in certain sectors including, for example, the apparel and agriculture sectors. There is a great deal of evidence that demonstrates that women (and girls in communities) tend to be significantly more affected by both the siting and design of WASH facilities (UNICEF, 2017). Issues such as personal safety and the prevalence of sexual assault highlights the need for facilities with, for example, gender segregated toilets with internal locks, adequate lighting and privacy. Solutions proposed to remedy issues that arise from disadvantages to women related to WASH should be considered carefully. For example, if sanitation facilities for culturally acceptable menstrual hygiene management are not available in the workplace, including menstrual hygiene-related materials and disposal options, this can result in increased absenteeism of women when menstruating. A key principle is that WASH facilities and programs designed collaboratively with women are far more likely to meet the needs of women.
- *Work schedules and incentive structures:* At the site, care must be taken to ensure access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene is not restricted, intentionally or otherwise, by work schedules (for example, one break in eight-hour shift, or inability to leave the assembly line) or incentive structures (for example, workers paid according by piece rate for each unit produced or action performed, so they skip breaks to increase output).

Respecting the human right to WASH and traditional access for local communities

Indicator 3.6.2 requires implementers to provide evidence that the site is not impinging on the human right to safe water and sanitation of communities through their operations, and that traditional access rights for Indigenous and local communities are being respected. Sites operating in WASH challenged countries or catchments should take particular notice of this Indicator, as it is possible that such infringements may not be immediately visible. Implementers should consult and engage with the

appropriate public sector bodies and/or local NGOs/CSOs to best understand if and where the site could be inadvertently impinging on the human right to WASH or traditional access rights. Examples include, but are not limited to:

- Inadequate on-site pollution control leading to damage of the quality of local water supplies;
- Non-payment of water-related fees that support the maintenance of local public sector offices and infrastructure, thereby undermining their viability to provide effective services;
- Contracting of significant numbers of migrant, seasonal or new workers such that the operation of local public WASH infrastructure becomes unviable due to unprecedented demand.

Considerations for WASH provision at the catchment level

Advanced Indicator 3.6.3 requires implementers to report on actions taken to support access to adequate WASH for stakeholders in the catchment. Where local communities in the catchment are home to the site's workers, business benefits include healthier workers and improved productivity. But wider gains can be made through strengthened community relations, enhanced government and regulatory relationships, increased school attendance, improved health systems, sustainable management of essential water resources and an enhanced social license to operate.

Interventions may be direct, for example partnering with local organisations or government authorities to improve WASH provision, or distributing educational and behavioural change materials and implementing related activities. Rewards and incentives for workers and/or communities to improve access to safe WASH at home may be introduced, such as nominated WASH Champions (WASH NGOs will be able to advise on effective strategies for building local action by affected stakeholders). Whatever the proposed solutions developed may be, the affected communities should be at the centre of decision-making, and plans should be stakeholder endorsed prior to initiating.

Collective action to enhance WASH provision

Sites implementing the AWS Standard may also drive improvements in WASH provision at the catchment level indirectly by sharing information and advocating for change in collaboration with public sector agencies. Fulfilment of *Advanced Indicator 3.6.4* requires implementers to provide evidence of credible efforts taken with relevant public-sector agencies to share information and to advocate for change to address access to safe drinking water and sanitation in catchments where WASH has been identified as a shared water challenge. As with any collective action, implementers should be aware of any existing initiatives being undertaken by other stakeholders, as joining and enhancing these may avoid duplication of effort.

It is important to note that while business benefits are prominent drivers for collective action, the extent to which initiatives enhance sustainable water management reflects the degree to which the collective actions undertaken by the implementer with stakeholders have a genuine 'stewardship orientation' or whether it is focused primarily on advancing a business interest. From an integrity management perspective, it is important to ensure that the objective(s) or intent of initiatives focus on advancing sustainable water management rather than pursuing vested interests at the cost of public interest and resources – see the 2015 CEO Water Mandate report 'Guide for Managing Integrity in Water Stewardship Initiatives: A Framework for Improving Effectiveness and Transparency,' for further guidance on ensuring integrity in collective actions.

Working towards WASH best practice

Indicator 3.9.5 requires sites to implement actions towards achieving best practice in terms of WASH, whereas *Advanced Indicator 3.9.10* requires sites to demonstrate that best practice has been implemented. As explained in the AWS General Guidance, "best practices can be situation-specific and defined by a variety of methods such as regulatory, scientific and stakeholder input". However, there are several widely endorsed guidelines and resources which implementers may wish to benchmark their performance against to demonstrate implementation progress and achievement of WASH best practices:

- [International Labour Organization (ILO), WASH@Work: a Self-Training Handbook](#) – This Handbook collates and builds upon tools previously developed by ILO to highlight the importance of access to WASH in various types of workplaces. It comprises four self-training modules, which adapt existing ILO training tools on Occupational Safety and Health to provide governments, workers and employers with the necessary skills to implement the general principles contained in relevant ILO instruments.
- [Joint Monitoring Programme (JMP)](#) – The JMP provides definitions and indicators for safely managed drinking water, sanitation and handwashing facilities, as well as 'service ladders' which are used to benchmark and compare WASH services.
- [World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD), WASH Pledge: Guiding Principles. A business commitment to WASH](#) – This publication includes a set of guiding principles to support companies in their efforts to implement WASH at the workplace. It also provides guidance and tools to help businesses assess WASH conditions within their own operations, as well as along the value chain, including suppliers and surrounding worker communities.
- [World Health Organization (WHO), Guidelines for drinking-water quality, 4th edition, incorporating the 1st addendum](#) – These guidelines build on over 50 years of guidance by WHO on drinking-water quality, which has formed an authoritative basis for the setting of national regulations and standards for water safety in support of public health.

SECTION 3 - EVALUATING AND DISCLOSING WASH ACTIONS

Quantitative and qualitative evaluation of WASH actions

Step 4 of the AWS Standard requires implementers to evaluate their performance against the sites Water Stewardship Plan (*Indicator 4.1.1*) and associated value creation and shared benefits (*Indicators 4.1.2* and *4.1.3*), evaluate the impact of any water-related emergency incidents (*Indicator 4.2.1*), consult stakeholders on water stewardship performance (*Indicator 4.3.1*) and update the site's Water Stewardship Plan to incorporate any new information and lessons learned (*Indicator 4.4.1*).

Specific to WASH, it is recommended that Step 4 be comprised of qualitative reporting on the actions the site has undertaken, and qualitative and quantitative evaluation of the changes these actions have contributed to. Quantitative reporting should use the WASH definitions and indicators for drinking water, sanitation and hygiene facilities from the JMP. Being aligned with the JMP means that implementers will be well positioned to report on how the site has contributed to achievement of SDG 6. This may bring important reputational, regulatory and community relationship benefits for the site and the broader company. Doing so will also leave the site in a strong position to report on achievements more broadly, including under Step 5 – Communicate and Disclose, as well as in Annual Reports, and other company disclosures.

Disclosure of WASH performance and actions

The requirement under *Indicator 5.3.1* to annually provide a summary of the site's water stewardship performance applies to the WASH component of the Water Stewardship Plan, as it does to other parts of the plan. This may yield information for the company's annual report (*Advanced Indicator 5.3.2*) including on the benefits which have accrued to the site and stakeholders from implementation of the AWS Standard (*Indicator 5.3.3*).

Indicators 5.4.1 and *5.4.2* require implementers to disclose the efforts of the site to address shared WASH challenges, including efforts to engage stakeholders and coordinate with public sector agencies. In short, these two Indicators are where the site should pull together all the work done to present why they chose to act, what they chose to do and how those actions have led to benefits.

Complementary reporting frameworks and initiatives

Strong interlinkages exist between the disclosure actions required of sites by the AWS Standard and external reporting frameworks on water-related performance such as CDP Water and Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) 303. This is as true for WASH as it is for all other aspects of the AWS Standard. For example, in CDP Water, the security questionnaire contains a section with criteria on WASH services in the workplace.

Developed in 2013, the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD) WASH Pledge allows companies to commit to and implement access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene at an appropriate standard for their employees at all company premises within their control, within three years of signing. They also commit to championing such access among their peer industry group. On 19 May 2020, WBCSD and the WASH4Work coalition released an updated Pledge for access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene (WBCSD, 2020). This expands the scope to include a company's supply chain/suppliers and local communities, in addition to workplaces and local communities where workers live. Subsequently, at the beginning of 2022, WBCSD transitioned the WASH Pledge resources and engagement to the WASH4WORK initiative. Businesses signing this pledge are proactively demonstrating and disclosing their commitment to the WASH-related aspects of the AWS Standard.

REFERENCES

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