



What do you need to pay attention to when you want to set up sustainable projects in the area of water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH)? The financial, institutional, environmental, technological and social (FIETS) aspects of sustainability. The Dutch WASH Alliance believes that all of these aspects require attention; not separately, but as a whole. This fact sheet explains the relationship between environmental sustainability and each of the other FIETS elements.

1 Environmental and financial sustainability

WASH projects are financially sustainable if they can stimulate the local market and obtain local financing. They also require long-term investments in maintenance and administration. The local population must be able to keep the WASH interventions running in cooperation with the government and the business community. Attention to environmental sustainability stimulates and guarantees this financial sustainability. For example, sanitary waste can bring a profit when re-used as fertiliser or as a source of biogas. When WASH interventions are implemented in an environmentally sustainable way, then the water resources and other ecosystem services will remain available. This in turn helps investments in WASH projects to generate long-term benefits.

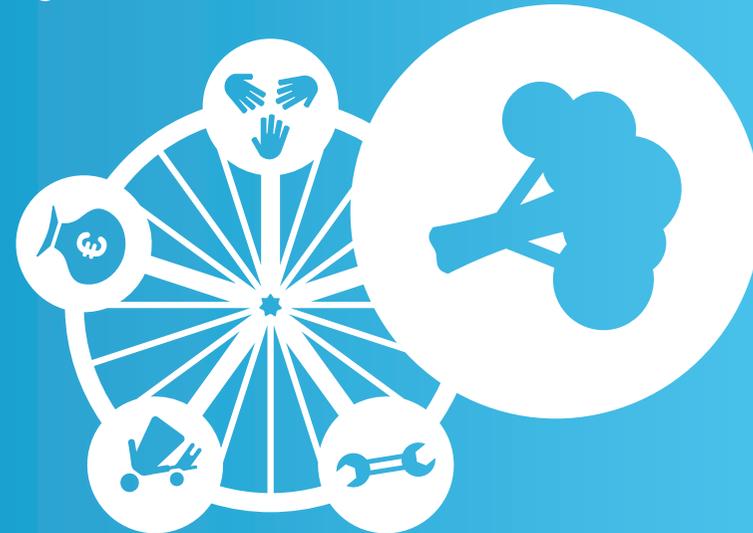
2 Environmental and institutional sustainability

WASH projects are institutionally sustainable when local organisations invest in them and take responsibility for them. These organisations – from governments and companies to knowledge institutions and NGOs – are generally very influential, know the area well and know what the local population needs most. The Dutch WASH Alliance therefore prefers to work together with these organisations. In order to guarantee environmental sustainability, it is vital that the ecosystem is also 'represented' at the planning table. This representation could come from a nature conservation agency, for instance.

The Dutch WASH Alliance

...is active in the fields of Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH), especially in developing countries and always in partnership with local parties: from local community and governments to businesses and civil society organisations. The solutions vary from context-specific awareness creation programmes and training courses to the construction of water systems or sanitary facilities. The work is always focused on achieving sustainable results. In order to realise these goals, the organisation follows the 'FIETS' strategy. 'FIETS' is not only the Dutch word for 'bicycle' (itself a very sustainable way to move!), it also stands for Financial, Institutional, Environmental, Technical and Social sustainability of WASH interventions.

E as integral element of FIETS



3 Environmental and technological sustainability

WASH projects are technologically sustainable when the technical tools used are low-tech, high-quality, durable and affordable. The local community should be able to assess and solve technical problems, as they are the ones who will eventually have to operate, maintain, repair, reproduce and (hopefully) expand the technical installations. WASH technologies should cause as little damage as possible to the ecosystem, and ideally they should actually have beneficial effects. For example, you can pump water up out of the ground, but this will be unsustainable if there is no refill of the water table. In these cases it is therefore better to choose alternatives such as harvesting rain water. There are also technologies for preventing sewage from coming into contact with clean ground water. Technology must of course be located in the right place; installing toilets near open water is not a good idea, for example.

4 Environmental and social sustainability

WASH projects are socially sustainable when they do not hinder a person from having access to water, sanitation and hygiene – at least not without democratic decision-making at its base. And certainly not based on gender, age, economic status, social position, religion or culture. For this reason, the local community must be involved in every phase of the project. What are the specific WASH-related needs? What natural resources and ecosystem services are available to meet those needs? And how can the local community contribute to these needs? When people work together to analyse a problem, taking others' perspectives into consideration and choosing a collective solution, they can prevent conflicts and build collaborative efforts. Such an approach highlights the linkage between the environmental and the socio-cultural aspects of WASH projects. (See frame below).



The Dutch WASH Alliance

...is a cooperative effort by six Dutch NGOs, each with a wealth of experience in developing countries: Simavi, Akvo, AMREF Flying Doctors, ICCO, RAIN and WASTE. Together with six thematic partners and an expansive network of local organisations, they work to create sufficient water, good sanitary facilities and hygienic living conditions in eight developing countries. Read more at: www.washalliance.nl

Social sustainability in practice

In some societies, it is common that women are only allowed to use water after the livestock have been watered, as livestock are the primary source of income and provide milk for the children. Unfortunately, in times of drought, the limited supplies of water can become polluted or disappear completely, so women are confronted with extra hardships. In these cases, the Dutch WASH Alliance looks for solutions that take the interests of all social groups into consideration. For example, smart interventions can often create more sources of clean water in grazing areas, and special places can be set aside where only people may use the water. After all, every problem has a potential solution. Consider the situation where young people must cut down trees to make charcoal to sell when there is no agricultural land or work available. If they fell too many trees, then sources of water can run dry. In these cases, the Dutch WASH Alliance works with the local community to look for alternative sources of income.