



GWOPA Theory of Change - Narrative with assumptions

June 2024 - December 2025

Overall picture

GWOPA, as a global Alliance facilitated by UN-Habitat, focuses on SDG 6 – *ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all* – especially on SDG 6 targets on sustainable access to safely managed drinking water (target 6.1), safely managed sanitation (target 6.2) and improved water quality, wastewater treatment and safe reuse (target 6.3). GWOPA's other foci are SDG 13 on climate action, SDG 17 on partnerships, SDG 11 on safe, resilient and sustainable cities and human settlements and the UN commitment to the New Urban Agenda. GWOPA contributes to several of UN-Habitat's high-level outcomes.¹

GWOPA's mission has been to facilitate and grow effective water operators' partnerships (WOPs) as an innovative way of strengthening capacities for the effective, efficient, equitable and sustainable delivery of water and sanitation services (WSS) by water and sanitation (WS) operators that are accountable to, integrated and supported within overall urban processes.

GWOPA combines capacity development via individual WOPs with knowledge management, alliance building and advocacy with its members and more comprehensive partners so that the WOP approach – and learning distilled from WOPs – are disseminated to WS operators. As a result, the demand for WOPs is expected to grow; more WOPs will emerge and obtain appropriate funding. WOPs would generate and disseminate more practice-oriented knowledge for WS operators from various contexts. GWOPA's combined activities would also contribute to duty bearers (local and national governments and multilateral bodies) creating enabling conditions for equitable, environmentally sound, climate-resilient WSS provided by operationally efficient WS operators linked to broader urban processes.

The overall theory of change (see visual in Annex 1) covers three results areas:

Results Area 1: WS operator capacity strengthening via WOPs

The full range of GWOPA activities supports developing and learning from WOPs. These activities include direct support to WOPs via fundraising, matchmaking between WS operators, the development of WOP tools, monitoring and knowledge management, global WOP events, servicing and growing the membership, research, collaboration with strategic partners, public communications, networking and engaging with duty bearers at all levels.

Key outputs of these activities: the “proof of concept” that WOPs are an affordable, adaptive capacity development approach; WOPs demonstrate how sustainable and safely managed WSS services can be provided to achieve SDG 6; over the years, cohorts of WOP participants at the institutional and individual levels have become highly capable; WS operator staff can

¹ Increased and equal access to basic services, sustainable mobility and public space, expanded deployment of frontier technologies and innovations, reduced greenhouse gas emissions and improved air quality and effective adaptation of communities and infrastructure to climate change.

contribute their knowledge and skills to a flourishing WOP community of practice; WOP members engage in national and regional WOP platforms and beyond – for example, as part of urban development processes. WOPs will also be systematically taken up as a capacity development instrument in the ongoing development process at the country level, including in UN country programmes as part of the UNSDCFs and other development partner portfolios (reaching into results area 3).

Growing WOP membership and GWOPA thought leadership contributes to a powerful global WOP alliance (results area 2), continuously developing and refining the WOP approach and thus contributing to equitable, environmentally sound, climate-resilient WSS provided by operationally efficient WS operators.

In results area 1, key assumptions connecting the activities with outputs and outcomes are:

1. WOP partners are well-matched, bringing appropriate technical knowledge and skills into a healthy partnership
2. WOPs are implemented faithfully, i.e. following the WOP approach
3. WOPs respond to their local contexts
4. WOPs successfully and visibly demonstrate their success
5. WOPs are scaled up
6. Appropriate funding makes WOPs more efficient and effective
7. There is a growing and engaging WOP membership in the Alliance
8. GWOPA fulfils its role as thought leader on WOPs

Results Area 2: Strengthening the WOP Alliance

GWOPA's direct engagement with WOPs and its knowledge management, networking and communication are expected to make knowledge on and from WOPs accessible across the WOP Alliance. Growing, diverse and engaged WOP membership contributes to a powerful global WOP Alliance, which continuously develops, implements and refines the WOP approach and thus contributes to the efficiency and integrity of WS operators.

A flourishing community of practice, supported by good communication, contributes to a powerful global Alliance. The growth and development of stronger, visible national and regional WOP platforms feed into a powerful global WOP Alliance and strengthen the voice of WS operators in advocacy at various levels to hold duty bearers accountable for SDG 6, SDG 11 and 13 (reaching into results area 3).

In results area 2, central assumptions are:

9. Successful WOPs will strengthen the Alliance
10. Alliance members actively contribute to GWOPA's mandate
11. A strong Global WOP Alliance can influence normative frameworks for WOPs and for WS operators in general

Results Area 3: Advocacy for an enabling environment for WS operators

GWOPA's knowledge management, research, public communication, networking and engagement with strategic partners and government are essential for its advocacy for WOPs and an enabling environment for WOPs. Activities include collaboration with the UN and



partners at the country, regional and global levels to hold national duty bearers accountable for SDG6. Advocacy engagement at the local level enables international and national normative frameworks for equitable, sustainable WSS.

The activities are expected to strengthen WS operators' links with wider urban processes at the local and national levels. It will also lead to closer and systematic integration of WOPs into UN and partner country plans, including the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks (UNSDCFs)

They are also intended to advocate for WS operators' role in achieving the SDGs locally, including by referencing their work and capacity development needs in National and Local Voluntary Reviews. Activities make WS operators' voices heard, and the need to support their front-line work is acknowledged, holding duty bearers accountable on SDG6. That is expected to generate local government support for operators through more funding and favourable local regulatory frameworks.

Results area 3 builds on GWOPA experience and that of its host organization, UN-Habitat, and will be further developed in the following strategic phase aligned with UN-Habitats Strategic Plan 2026-2030. Central assumptions are:

12. GWOPA, jointly with national and regional WOP platforms, UN-Habitat country offices and partners, develops and implements effective advocacy for better integration of WOPs into local, national and global development frameworks.
13. GWOPA, jointly with national and regional platforms, UN-Habitat country offices and partners, develops and implements effective advocacy for enabling frameworks for equitable and sustainable WSS

Annexe 1: GWOPA Theory of Change Visual

