Towards a Sanitation Strong **GWOPA** Strategy

2023-2025

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GWOPA Strategy

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Summary

The Global Water Operators' Partnerships Alliance (GWOPA), facilitated by UN-Habitat, supports SDG 6 by strengthening the capacity of water and sanitation operators through Water and Sanitation Operators' Partnerships, known as WOPs and SWOPs. Created in 2009, the Alliance today comprises more than 140 institutional members. GWOPA promotes not-for-profit peer partnerships among these operators, focusing on enhancing their capacities and performance to ensure equitable access to quality services in alignment with the fundamental human right to water and sanitation.

Although often bundled as 'water and sanitation', historically, the number of resources, activities, and general interest has been skewed to focus on water supply. Particularly in low- and middle-income countries, this is visible with substantial infrastructure and service delivery backlogs in sanitation. This is also reflected in WOPs recorded by GWOPA, with the number of Sanitation-focused Water Operators' Partnerships (henceforth referred to as SWOPs), sanitation-focused members, knowledge products, and partnerships far lower than for water supply.

GWOPA is committed to improving sanitation services along the entire value chain through the WOPs approach. GWOPA also recognizes the need to redesign SWOPs in transforming the sanitation sector to achieve universal access to sanitation, adapting to evolving needs in sanitation.

This strategy complements GWOPA's overall 2020-2024 Strategy to ensure the boosting of sanitation consideration across the Alliances' strategic plan.[1] The mid-term review of GWOPA´s 2020-2024 Strategy recommends refinements to the overall Results Framework to be addressed by the GWOPA Secretariat in the coming months, to which this sanitation complement will also be aligned. The overall GWOPA strategy will, in the same exercise, be extended to 2025 to align with the Strategic Plan cycle of its host UN-Habitat.

In March 2023, as a part of the Water Action Agenda, GWOPA has committed to scale up to at least 100 new WOPs/SWOPs by 2030. Aligned to this pledge, this complementary Strategy puts forward a goal of:

1. **Using SWOPs as a mechanism to accelerate universal access to sanitation by transforming GWOPA's approach to sanitation involving all sanitation stakeholders.**

2. **Committing that at least 35 of the committed new partnerships by 2030 shall be focused on sanitation (SWOPs).**

Sanitation, as defined by the World Health Organization (WHO), includes the safe disposal of human waste (faeces and urine), as well as services to maintain hygienic conditions, which include liquid and solid waste management. Globally, sanitation service providers are categorised by the skill set and infrastructure

[1] This document has been drawn from the inputs of its wide network of GWOPA member organizations and UN-Habitat expertise. It is to be viewed and treated as a complement to GWOPA's main strategy (2019-2023, extended to 2025) as a global alliance.

required for the service. The responsibility of water supply, wastewater management, and stormwater management are either carried out by a single water utility or split between municipal administration and water utilities. Solid waste management is usually carried out by municipal administration or through a separate utility or department.

The stakeholder groups involved in both services vary extensively in low- and middle-income countries where formal and informal actors co-exist in solid waste management, water supply, and wastewater management. The liquid waste management component of sanitation which includes wastewater and faecal sludge, is within the realm of GWOPA's work, formed with a mandate to work for developing peer-to-peer learning between water utilities.

By using the term sanitation, the Strategy refers to the management of liquid waste, which includes both sewered and non-sewered services. The linkages with solid waste management are explored whenever there is a direct or indirect relationship with the work of water and sanitation operators.

Globally, the SDG 6 Global Acceleration Framework is a unifying initiative to accelerate the progress towards SDG 6. The framework comprises five cross-cutting 'accelerators' – (i) Financing, (ii) Data and information, (iii) Capacity development, (iv) Innovation, and (v) Governance. Partnerships involving sanitation operators can help in optimising financing, developing reliable data and information systems, and promoting innovative approaches to sanitation. Capacity development and strengthening governance systems are integral to all peer-to-peer learning activities. Hence working with sanitation operators provides the unique opportunity to work on all five accelerators and influence the progress towards SDGs positively. Sanitation operators' work influences the strategic priorities of UN-Habitat. While their day-to-day work is an essential element of developing affordable housing and in climate action through the provision of sanitation services in an environmentally and socially sustainable manner, they play a vital role in crisis recovery and local progress towards the SDGs as key decision-makers and implementers of services.

The strategy guides how GWOPA will support building sustainable sanitation services globally. It identifies the opportunities for the GWOPA network to engage more sanitation service providers, increase visibility and advocacy around inclusive and ecological sanitation services, and advance knowledge and knowledge sharing for improved sanitation service provider capacity, performance, and sustainable financing, all along the service chain. It promotes the uptake of SWOPs, reviewing how they are currently working, how they differ from other WOPs and the opportunities they hold for service providers in different contexts.

Background

The world is alarmingly off-track on the **Sustainable Development Goal targets 6.2 and 6.3** - to deliver sanitation for all by 2030. Despite progress, in 2022, only 57% of the world's population (3.6 billion people) used sanitation services that leave human waste untreated, threatening human and environmental health. Of these, 419 million still practice open defecation.[2] In 2020, only 1/3 of the population (2.6 billion people) used private sanitation facilities connected to sewers from which wastewater was treated. Globally, 58% of the household wastewater generated is discharged without safe treatment. While this is over 70% in high-income countries, the ratio drops to 38% in upper-middle-income countries and down to 8% in low-income countries.[3]

This has serious health implications, as 10% of the world's population is thought to consume food irrigated by wastewate.[4] Lack of sanitation management also has severe environmental and economic implications. It adds to environmental degradation such as eutrophication, substantial methane emissions as well as loss of biodiversity. Most of these challenges and service gaps are in low- and middle-income countries. In many of these countries, public utilities play a minor role in providing sanitation services for the most vulnerable communities, as sewered systems are often only present in the inner areas of big cities. With only a fraction of faecal matter being effectively treated, sanitation remains a major issue in many countries.

The challenges in the sanitation sector are not new, but they need better attention. At the end of the Millennium Development Goals, the target on water was achieved, but sanitation was the most off-track of all MDGs. Even after years of work on the SDGs globally, water supply still receives higher focus and funding consistently.[5] The gaps in attaining the SDG 6 sanitation target remain much higher than that of water. Local water and sanitation service providers (formal, informal, private, and public) have a tremendous role in reaching sanitation targets. From public utilities that supply water and sewerage services to millions of customers in capital cities to small units in local governments of small towns and community-based operators in rural areas or slums, sanitation operators provide fundamental services that enable progress in all aspects of sustainable development.

Over the last decade, public service providers in several cities, especially in low- and middle-income countries, have expanded their mandate to address sanitation challenges, including non-sewered services. There have been efforts to

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[2] UN-Water (n.d.d) "SDG 6 data portal." Available at www.sdg6data.org.

[3] EIB (2022) "Wastewater as a Resource." Environment and Natural Resources Department, European Investment Bank.

[4] World Health Organization (2020).

[5] World Health Organization (2022) "Strong systems and sound investments: evidence on and key insights into accelerating progress on sanitation, drinking-water and hygiene." UN-Water Global Analysis and Assessment of Sanitation and Drinking-Water (GLAAS) 2022 report. Geneva: World Health Organization.

make these services inclusive, affordable, and available for all. This expansion of mandate is yet another reason to work with sanitation operators across the world through the operator partnership approach. The challenges sanitation operators face are complex and diverse and key to designing SWOPs. The following characterisation summarises the key challenges faced by these operators in low- and middle-income countries.

Lack of a Public Service Approach to Sanitation

Sanitation services are often provided informally, given the lack of a public service approach. The conventional approach defined sewered sanitation as relevant for public investment and management, and all other technology approaches were managed outside of public service systems. The "Faecal Sludge Approach" failed to correct this by emphasising its inherent advantage over sewers for reaching the poor without considering the context or need for broader planning and public service delivery systems. New approaches like the Citywide Inclusive Sanitation service framework identify core outcomes and functions for public sanitation service delivery systems.[6]

Lack of Institutional Arrangements

In several countries, the institutional framework for sanitation is either complicated or non-existent. Public utilities are often only responsible for the provision of services to households that are connected to sewer networks. Still, in many cities, conventional sewerage networks cover only a part of the main cities. Off-grid households and settlements are forced to manage faecal sludge through private or informal service providers. Lack of clarity on key regulatory functions, including setting service tariffs, creation and enforcement of national treatment standards, and the issuance of licensing and discharge permits for wastewater and faecal sludge treatment plants as a part of the public service approach continues to be a bottleneck to service improvements.[7]

Lack of Infrastructure

Population growth and rural-urban migration have driven the rapid expansion of the cities, often creating areas where infrastructure for water, wastewater, stormwater, and sanitation services are not available. Provision of conventional sewerage services in dense settlements, discontinuous settlements, or unplanned areas will require massive construction projects that have high costs and are sometimes further limited by the availability of space. Failure to recognise and integrate decentralised sanitation systems and lack of integrity among stakeholders while executing sanitation infrastructure projects creates further challenges.

Lack of Financial Systems

Mitigating sanitation infrastructure backlogs in most cities requires large financial investment projects that often span over a decade of work. In addition to finding finances for the infrastructure costs, the operators often must create revenue

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[6] Schrecongost, A., Pedi, D., Rosenboom, J.W., Shrestha, R., Ban, R. (2020) "Citywide Inclusive Sanitation: A Public Service Approach for Reaching the Urban Sanitation SDGs." Frontiers in Environmental Science, 8:19. doi: 10.3389/fenvs.2020.00019.

[7] UN-Habitat (2023) "Global Report on Sanitation and Wastewater Management in Cities and Human Settlements".

collection systems for cost recovery in wastewater management. Compared to water supply, the operational costs in wastewater management are often higher as it often requires pumping of wastewater from multiple points of the city while carrying solids. Further, wastewater treatment is often associated with high inputs of chemicals and energy. In several high-income countries such as Germany, the sewerage tariff is set at a higher scale than water tariffs. However, with limited infrastructure, weak institutional arrangements, and low political will, a tariff system for liquid waste management is nonexistent in many parts of the world. Setting up new tariff and collection systems has political and socio-economic implications that are beyond the direct work of the operators.

Lack of Capacities

Inadequate human resources and limited skills in managing sewered and non-sewered wastewater systems are common challenges for public water and sanitation operators. Even when private operators are available, the services are often carried out without health/safety measures. Guidelines, regulations, and laws on managing sanitation services are also often missing or incomplete.

Lack of Coordination and Integration

Poor policies and strategies coupled with a lack of proper institutional framework for sanitation services with the involvement of multiple authorities is a common issue. Small-scale and private operators are often not integrated into the public system.

Impact of Climate Change

The extreme weather conditions resulting from climate change adversely affect the daily operations of sanitation operators. Operators across the world urgently need to be capacitated to develop climate-resilient sanitation systems. In 2022, a call to action to ensure access to climate-resilient sanitation services for 3.6 billion people by 2030 was launched by a coalition of UNICEF, the Global Green Growth Institute, the University of Technology Sydney, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, UN-Habitat, the World Health Organization, the Asian Development Bank, the African Development Bank, Resilient Cities Network, WaterAid and SNV urging all stakeholders to accelerate efforts.

Systemic issues such as a lack of political will, people's behaviours, and attitudes, towards the topic of sanitation, limited community participation, inadequate gender inclusion, and unreliable data further limit the development of sanitation services. Additionally, given their key role in service delivery, public utilities will have to act as institutional anchors, working in partnership with municipalities, regulators, NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations), CBOs (Community-Based Organizations), and small-scale private operators that provide partial services.[8]

The concept of WOPs is anchored on tackling these challenges by creating a learning environment between operators and facilitators, encouraging capacity building and knowledge sharing to address specific issues. As public

[8] World Bank (2003).

water and sanitation service providers need to go beyond the sewered sanitation approach, adapting ways and means to non-sewered sanitation, and finding ways to ensure inclusive and affordable sanitation coverage through optimal systems, SWOPs can nurture co-learning and scale up city-wide inclusive sanitation through peer-to-peer partnerships.

SWOPs can be defined as peer-to-peer partnerships among public operators (or service providers) with the primary aim of improving the state of sanitation as a public service and strengthening the public institutions in providing or/and regulating sustainable services. The collaborations seek the active involvement of formal and informal actors in providing, managing, financing, or regulating sanitation services.

GWOPA is the global mechanism established to scale up the practice of Operators' Partnerships. It was formed in 2009 following a call by the UN Secretary-General's Advisory Board on Water and Sanitation for the enhancement of water utility capacity through peer-to-peer partnerships, aiming to meet the Millennium Development Goal targets for water and sanitation. Recognising the importance of strong utilities and the potential for peer-to-peer partnerships for accelerating SDG6, GWOPA has been working on advancing the understanding and the practice of WOPs with operators across the world.

As a home for WOPs, GWOPA has expanded its global network, helping to establish regional and national WOP platforms, engaging major donors and development banks from every region, facilitating the implementation of dozens of WOPs, documenting, monitoring global WOPs practices, and developing WOP guidance material, contributing to a significant rise in global awareness and momentum for WOPs around the world.

GWOPA contributes to the delivery of UN-Habitat's work programme by encouraging local sanitation operators to join the Alliance for access to a wealth of knowledge and technical support. Learning from over 400 WOPs documented by GWOPA so far, the capacity development and peer-to-peer learning through WOPs can provide a significant boost in strengthening public institutions providing sanitation services. GWOPA is committed to strengthening its work on sanitation, as outlined in the sections below.

Image: © Marjolein van der Male.

Strategic Pillars of GWOPA's Approach to Sanitation

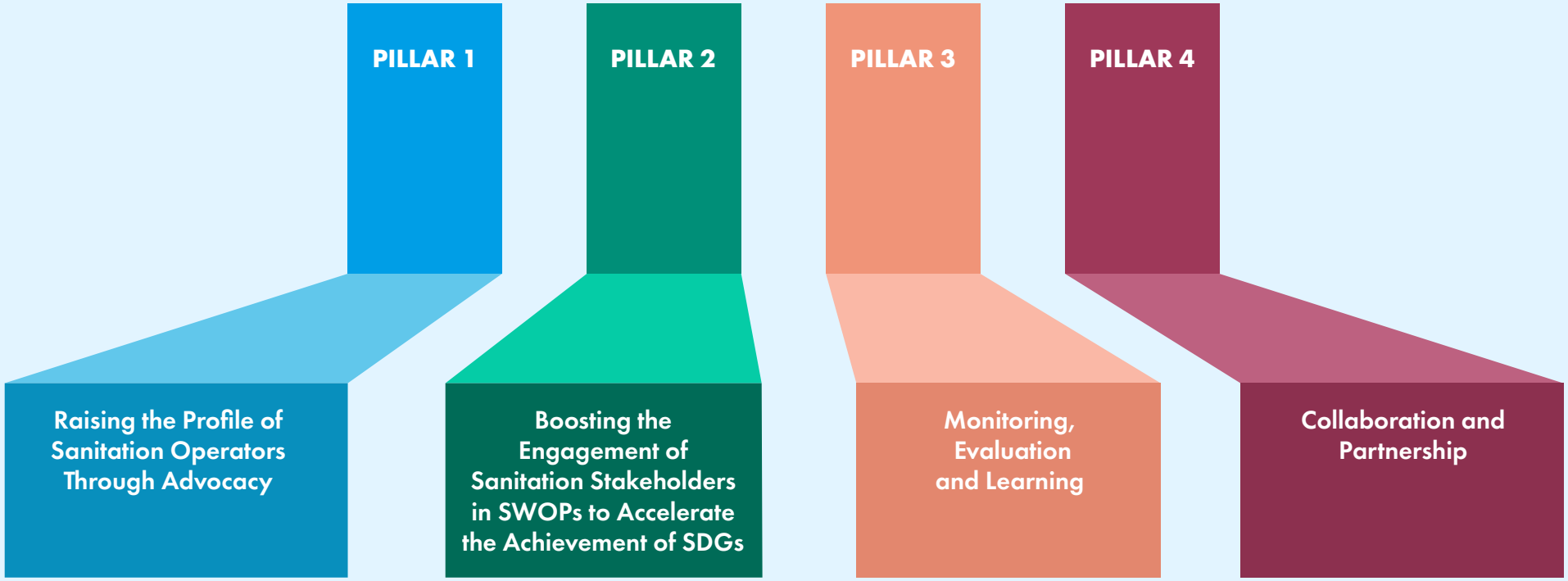


Figure 1: Strategic Pillars of GWOPA's Approach to Sanitation.

Pillar 1

Raising the Profile of Sanitation Operators Through Advocacy

Increasing visibility and advocacy around inclusive sanitation services as a public service approach; for strengthening operator services through peer-to-peer learning, supporting the development of regulations for sanitation, supporting the strengthening of public institutional frameworks, and policies by creating an enabling environment for sanitation stakeholders to develop partnerships and deliver services.

Supporting regional and national associations in global platforms and working with them at the regional level to address challenges through operator partnerships.

Being a thought leader in advancing knowledge and knowledge sharing for improved sanitation services by developing and disseminating knowledge products for improving capacities, performance, climate resilience, environmental sustainability, circular economy, ensuring the safety of sanitation workers, achieving gender equality, service delivery to underserved communities in slums and informal settlements and sustainable financing of sanitation operators across the service chain.

Strengthen SWOPs by learning how they are currently working, how their needs differ from WOP methodology, and the opportunities they hold for service providers in different contexts and improving the partnership frameworks to adopt these learnings and thereby promoting SWOPs.

Expanding the membership and engagement in GWOPA governance by sanitation experts in leading up to the next GWOPA General Assembly (November 2024) through the work of the GWOPA Secretariat, its International Steering Committee and the Global WOPs Community supporting the above commitments.

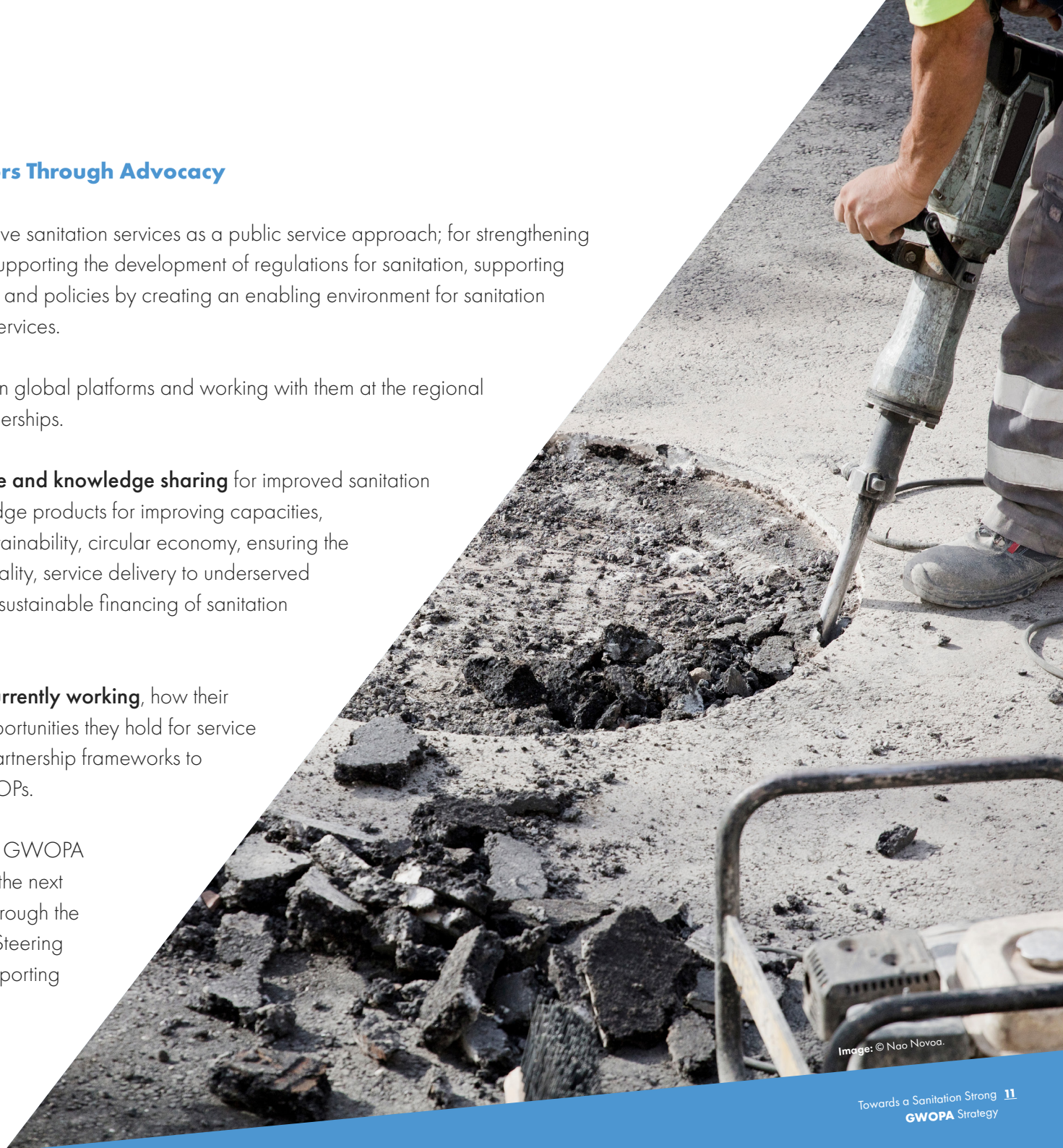


Image: © Nao Novoa.

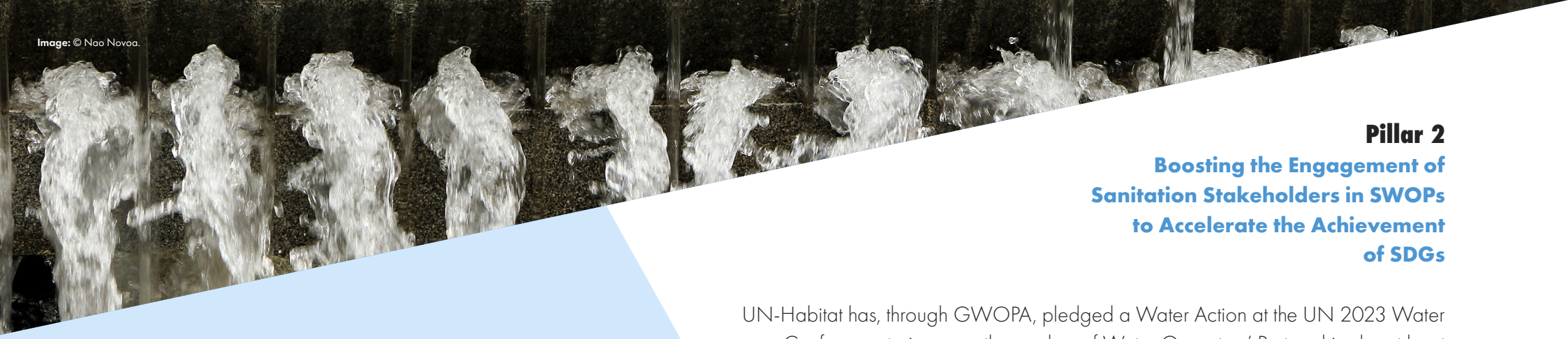


Image: © Nao Novoa.

Pillar 2

Boosting the Engagement of Sanitation Stakeholders in SWOPs to Accelerate the Achievement of SDGs

UN-Habitat has, through GWOPA, pledged a Water Action at the UN 2023 Water Conference to increase the number of Water Operators' Partnerships by at least 100 more by 2030.[9] As part of this pledge, GWOPA will strengthen its sanitation portfolio through the implementation of at least 35 new SWOPs by 2030. SWOPs will work beyond the usual stakeholders (public utilities) that are active in current WOPs and include subnational/local governments, private service providers, non-governmental organizations, and regional and national bodies that can play important roles in SWOPs. The objective of the collaboration shall be towards the improvement of the state of sanitation as a public service and strengthening the public institutions in providing or/and regulating sustainable services. Due to the diversity of sanitation sector actors, it is important to assess and identify the stakeholder groups and define the structure of SWOPs accordingly.

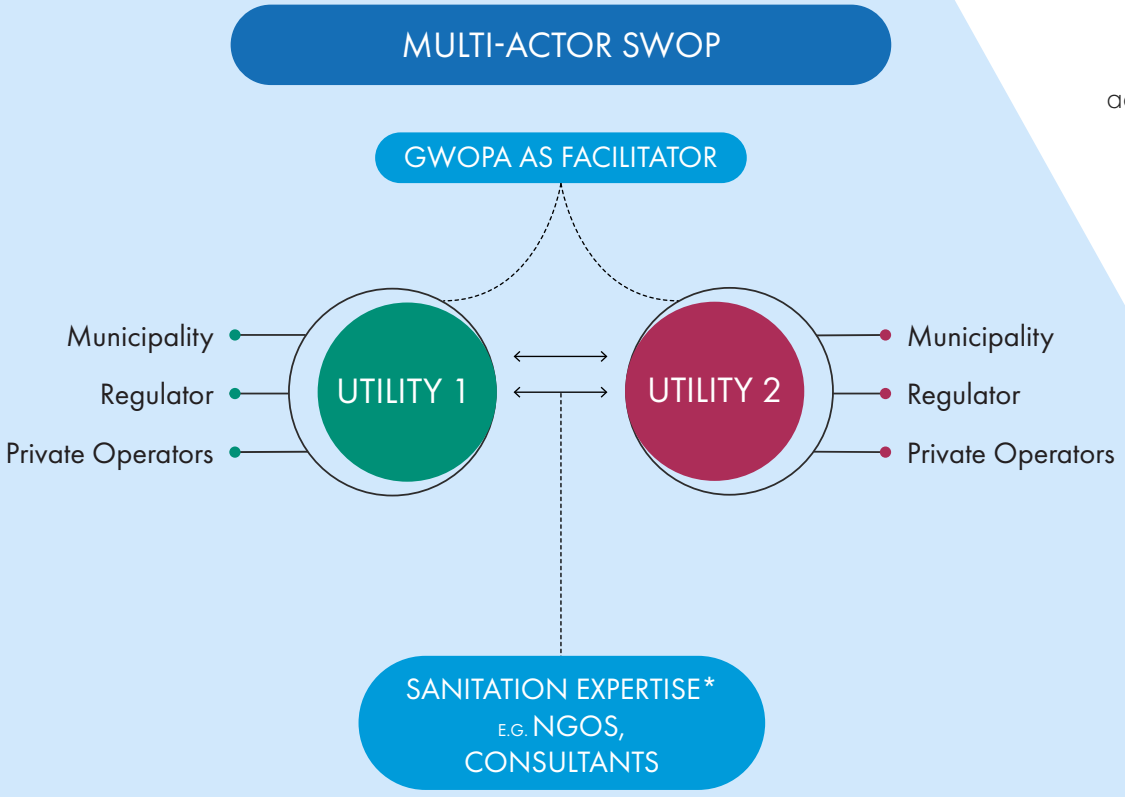


Figure 2: Stakeholder Mapping for SWOPs.

[9] United Nations. (n.d.). Localizing SDG 6: Transforming Access to Water through Strengthened Capacity of Operators Closest to the Community. Retrieved on 4 December 2023 from sdgs.un.org/partnerships/localizing-sdg-6-transforming-access-water-strengthened-capacity-operators-closest.

The national and regional associations will be strengthened by engaging in regional SWOPs and learning from them to create the ripple effect addressed in GWOPA's main strategy.[10] Based on the WOP methodology, SWOPs will be designed as mentor-mentee collaboration to help mentee utilities fast-track their learning with guidance from mentor utilities. The SWOPs will also be bringing together expertise from individuals within and outside the mentor and mentee utilities to support with critical skills. In the cities of the global south, different types of sanitation systems co-exist. Depending on the type of challenge addressed to the mentees, the corresponding mentor shall be identified based on the mentee's challenges and sanitation implementation framework in the locality.

Regionally based partnerships between cities within a country or region can facilitate sanitation operators who have similar challenges and contexts to work together. Multi-stakeholder partnerships, which involve both private and informal actors as supporting partners to the respective public operators of the city, are also relevant approaches as they recognise the diversity of sanitation services. Such regional and multi-stakeholder methods provide space for peer-to-peer exchange in a localised or regional cluster, including more than two implementing organizations. This can also bring together stakeholders in the same or neighbouring areas which otherwise have no mandate to collaborate and find synergies. Figure 2 shows a mapping of diverse stakeholders who could potentially be involved in SWOPs.

The roles and responsibilities of each stakeholder group might be different even between two cities that are involved in a SWOP. Apart from the responsible public water utility, the municipal administration and regulatory body are closely involved in sanitation issues. The formal and informal public operators play a crucial role, especially in parts of the city where sewer services are not available. External agencies such as NGOs and community-based organizations might also play a critical role in the development of know-how or provision of services. Depending on the context, the partnerships can be formulated with such a diverse group of stakeholders. The agency responsible for delivering sanitation services should be the main partner on each side. There may be misalignments in the function played by individual actors in each city but the peer-to-peer learning within SWOPs can create space for mutual learning and finding ways to improve services and strengthen the institutional system in both cities.

[10] The WOPs' Ripple Effect: Utilities that have significantly improved with the help of WOP mentors often become mentors in their own right, supporting other utilities within their country or region to improve.

Image: © Jerome Romme

Pillar 3
Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning

The importance of monitoring and learning is particularly high for SWOPs as the diversity of stakeholders and complexity of challenges in SWOPs are unique. The global WOPs Database which includes information on WOPs managed by several organizations, including the GWOPA Secretariat, is a key part of GWOPA's work.

GWOPA has, to date, recorded 468 WOPs on its global WOPs database, with 407 completed and 61 still ongoing.[11] Of these, only 69 WOPs had activities that contributed to improving sanitation conditions. Twelve of these are currently ongoing, and 57 are completed. Geographically, these WOPs have been evenly spread across Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean, and South Asia. South-South and North-South partnerships have been realized through these WOPs, and in 3 cases, it was a triangular partnership.

A detailed analysis of the WOPs recorded in the GWOPA database until 2021 shows that a significant part of WOPs indicated to have addressed sanitation has done so only as a minor component. The overall impact on sanitation was far less than what could have been achieved through a sanitation-focused WOP. Considering these factors, among the analysed WOPs that can be considered as "sanitation-focused" initiatives are less than 40.

Even though there are several ongoing initiatives to improve the sanitation situation, SWOPs have been used as a capacity-building tool in only a few countries. As shown in Figure 3 below, even among countries where WOPs have been happening, SWOPs have not been taken up as a tool.

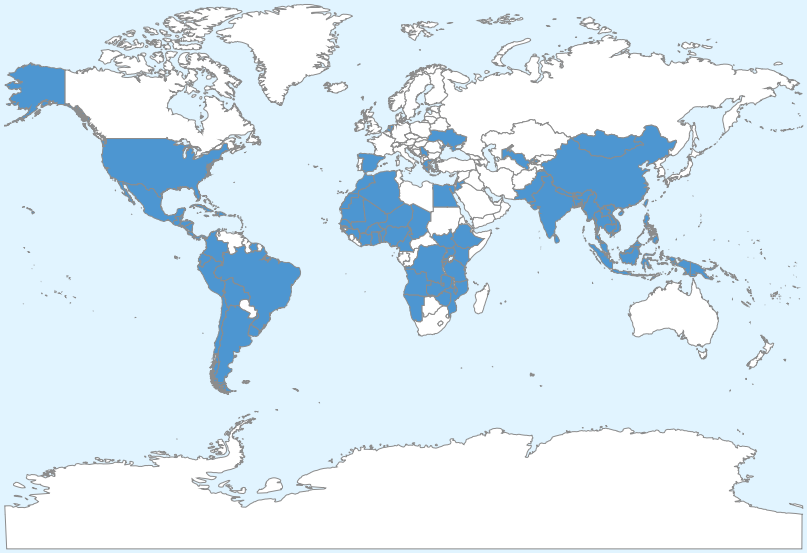
This currently ongoing program at the GWOPA secretariat also reflects a similar trend. While promoting the use of SWOPS, monitoring and learning can enhance understanding, access new locations, and develop methodologies for achieving higher impact.

Pillar 4
Collaboration and Partnership

WOPs are generally structured as a small financial initiative (EUR 300,000 – 2,000,000) formed through the collaboration of 2 or 3 water operators. It follows the principles of a mentor-mentee structure where the mentor utility(ies) support the mentee in addressing issues in key thematic areas determined through an exercise of an audit of the management and service delivery system, concluded by the elaboration of a Performance Improvement Plan (PIP).

To promote the use of SWOPs, GWOPA will work proactively with regional and national partners to encourage international and local organisations active in the sanitation sector to use SWOPS as a tool for capacity building. This includes recognising and facilitating partnerships to work in a diverse set of areas related to sanitation involving a diverse stakeholder group which is related to sanitation services. It also includes advocacy for SWOPs among funding agencies, governments, and civil society.

[11] Data as on 4 December 2023. The Global WOPs Database (2023), facilitated by UN-Habitat/GWOPA.



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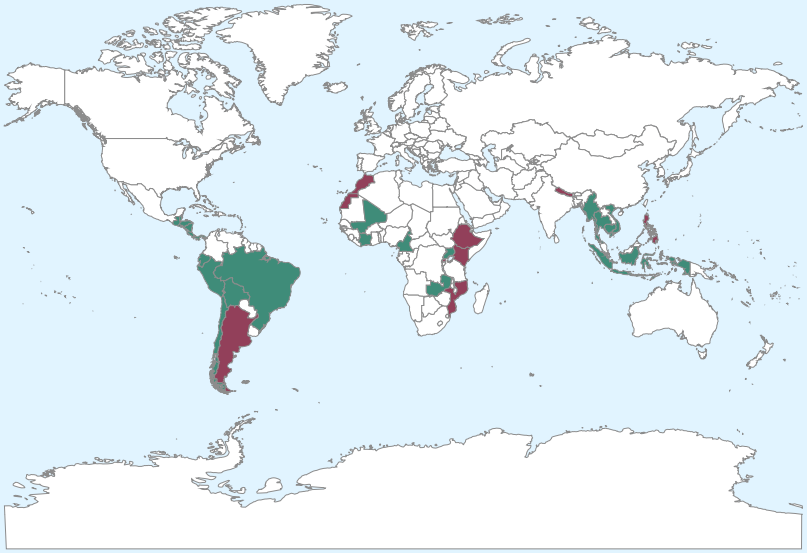

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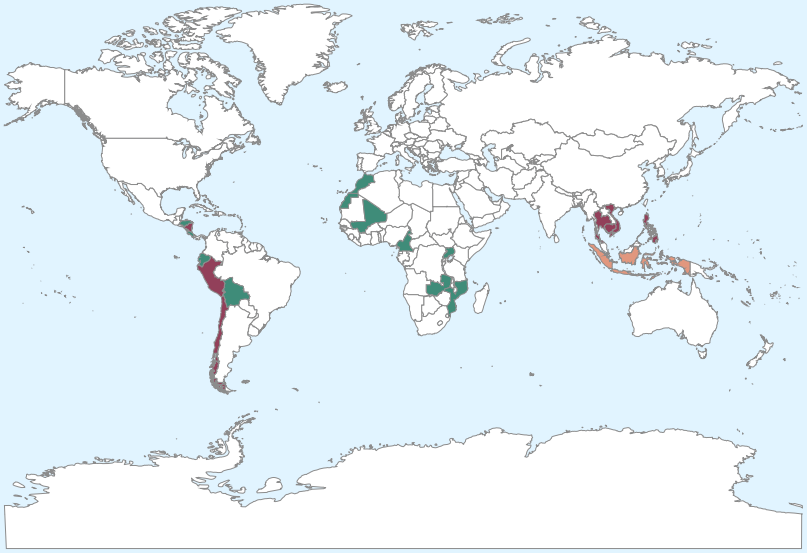

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Figure 3: Analysis based on all WOPs started before 2021 – a. all countries where WOP mentee utilities were located; b. Mentee countries from all WOPs where sanitation-related actions were included; c. Mentee countries from all WOPs where Sanitation actions were a substantial component of work. Green indicates South-South WOPs, Red indicates North-South WOPs, and Pink represents triangular WOPs.

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Disclaimer: The designations employed and the presentation of the material on all maps in the report do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of UN-Habitat and partners concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.

Collaboration Areas

Working on sanitation systems invokes a link to several issues directly and indirectly linked to the work of operators. The collaboration areas detailed below are potential collaborations GWOPA will explore while developing and promoting SWOPs.

Technology Solutions

As infrastructure gaps are one of the high-priority challenges in the sanitation sector, technical solutions are expected to be a significant area of interest among SWOPs. This could include appropriate technology selection, digitalisation, and integrated management information systems. While these are similar to the work carried out in water supply, there is a higher degree of complexity while working on sanitation due to the existence of multiple approaches (such as sewered and non-sewered, water-based and waterless, container-based, ecological, etc.). This would be reflected in selecting appropriate technologies, carrying out the digitalisation of services for information management, and developing monitoring and operational capacities. In most cases, the funding from SWOP projects itself will not be sufficient to implement these solutions. Hence, the most appropriate way of developing SWOPs on this topic is to develop the SWOP as a supporting action to an upcoming or secured infrastructure funding through collaboration with infrastructure funding agencies such as development banks, local governments, and larger funding programmes.

Setting Up Sustainable Service Systems

As detailed out in concepts such as Citywide Inclusive Sanitation (Box 1), sustainability of public services requires a strong enabling environment that includes financial, institutional, and regulatory systems to support these services. For most cities, financing is an important step in filling the gaps in sanitation services. This includes financing investment, bridging operational deficits, and developing revenue systems. The experience of mentor utilities in developing strong financial systems could be useful in setting up tariff systems, improving revenue collection efficiency, and ensuring equitable pricing for services. In many cities, large parts of service provision are carried out by informal or private operators. Formalising their services and aligning with the services of public sanitation operators both in conveyance and treatment would require policy and legislative reforms, capacity building, and improved data systems. Building regulatory systems for ensuring service quality, accountability, and affordability could also be potential areas for peer-to-peer learning as public operators often go through a similar process in developing them.

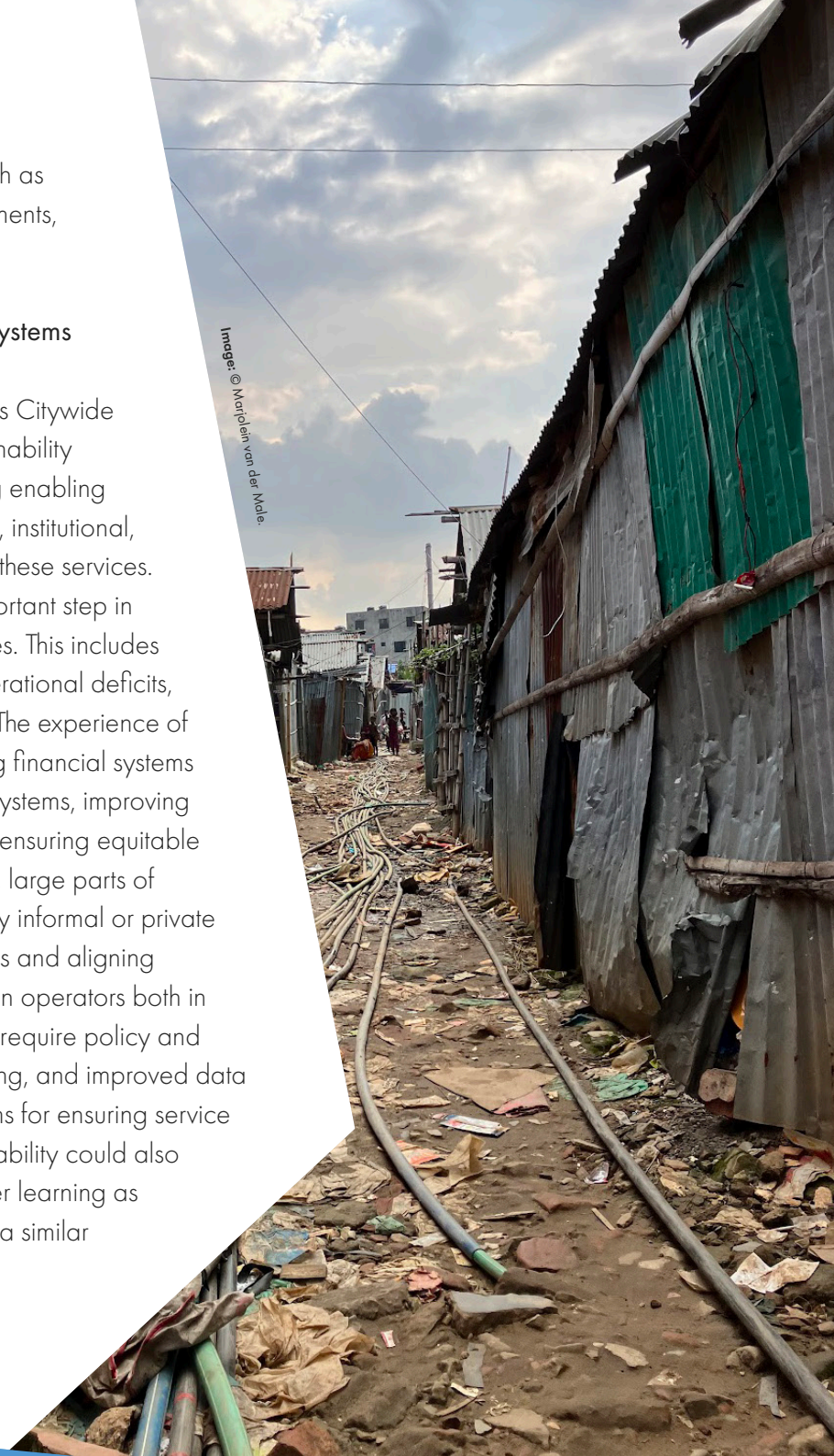

Image: © Marjolein van der Male.

CWIS Service Framework[12]			
Core CWIS Outcomes	**Equity**	**Safety**	**Sustainability**
			
	Services reflect fairness in distribution and prioritization of service quality, prices, and deployment of public finance/ subsidies.	Services safeguard customers, workers, and communities from safety and health risks- reaching everyone with safe sanitation.	Services are reliably and continually delivered based on effective management of human, financial and natural resources.
Core CWIS Functions	**Responsibility**	**Accountability**	**Resource Planning and Accountability Management**
	An authority(ies) executes a clear public mandate to ensure safe, equitable, and sustainable sanitation for all.	Authorities' performance against their mandate is monitored and managed with data, transparency and incentives.	Resources-human, financial, natural, assets- are effectively managed to support execution of mandate across time/space.

Box 1: CWIS Service Framework.

Citywide Inclusive Sanitation (CWIS) looks to shift the urban sanitation paradigm, aiming to ensure everyone has access to safely managed sanitation by promoting a range of solutions—both onsite and sewered, centralised or decentralised. The focus of CWIS is on service provision and its enabling environment, rather than on building infrastructure, is aligned with GWOPA's goal. However, this calls for a shift in the mindset and work of public utilities as the conventional solution wastewater management have only been sewer systems. The peer-to-peer learning environment created through SWOPs can facilitate CWIS transformation of cities by learning from other cities, finding ways to work with informal and private sector operators, identifying cost effective intervention to ensure safe sanitation for all.

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[12] Schrecongost, A., Pedi, D., Rosenboom, J.W., Shrestha, R., Ban, R. (2020) "Citywide Inclusive Sanitation: A Public Service Approach for Reaching the Urban Sanitation SDGs." Frontiers in Environmental Science, 8:19. doi: 10.3389/fenvs.2020.00019.

Adapting to Sector Trends

Sanitation services are highly interlinked with environment, sustainability, inclusion, and public health. Concepts such as city-wide inclusive sanitation (Box 1), climate-resilient sanitation[13] (Box 2), and water-sensitive urban design provides space for developing sanitation services to ensure equitable access to services and to address challenges of the future. The experiences of public utilities involved in topics such as the development of energy-efficient wastewater treatment, decentralised storm, and wastewater management, and digitalisation of services show that the learning process itself is a time and resource-consuming one. Peer-to-peer support can help in fast-tracking this process and enable mutual learning. GWOPA will identify and develop guidelines for such emerging areas for partnership understanding and responding to sectoral needs. SWOP programmes will be developed by collaborating with funding agencies active on such thematic issues.

Climate Resilient Sanitation Systems

All steps of the sanitation service chain are vulnerable to climate change. The poor and the underserved are likely to be affected the most when an extreme weather event occurs. In order to build climate resilient sanitation systems, the operators need to ensure that the following criteria are met:

- A risk analysis (hazard, exposure, vulnerability, and capacity) is carried out identifying potential impacts of climate and extreme weather events, and preventive measures have been incorporated.
- Essential mitigation measures to reduce the risk of sanitation system failure are identified and put in place.
- Ensure that the Sanitation services and systems are designed for reliability, flexibility, robustness and responsiveness to seasonal variability and extreme weather events (e.g., during droughts/floods) or quick recovery after a shock.
- Contingency plans and capacity are in place to anticipate, cope with and respond to climate shocks, while ensuring minimal disruption to services.
- Where possible, emissions are reduced (e.g., biogas capture), and wastewater is effectively treated and water reused, using low-carbon or nature-based solutions.

Sanitation operators must also consider the principles of climate justice and inclusion while building systems to prioritize the well-being of the most vulnerable population. With many cities facing similar challenges but of varying degrees of vulnerability, SWOPs can accelerate the uptake of climate resilient systems.

Box 2: Climate Resilient Sanitation Systems.

[13] GWP and UNICEF (2022) "Technical Brief Climate-Resilient Sanitation in Practice", UNICEF WASH Section.

Image: © Geermy Photography

Enabling Environment for Partnerships

GWOPA will develop a strong organizational understanding (Box 3) and develop resources on the following areas/topics.

Diversity of Institutional Arrangements

Mapping of operators to understand different tiers in terms of service provided mandate types, service system maturity, and service inclusivity. For example, Figure 4 shows countries in Africa classified according to sanitation mandates as an example of how sanitation policies may influence sanitation service delivery differently in different countries. Utilities and organizations or stakeholders with similar mandates and sanitation systems can be brought together in WOPs for peer learning and exchange. SWOPs can be classified based on these similarities in the mandate, service systems, or priority areas, and the programmes can be developed accordingly.

Capacity Needs

As capacity development is central to all WOPs, the specific needs among the diverse set of sanitation stakeholders must be assessed to improve sanitation service delivery and collaboration with public water operators. To develop and assess SWOP programmes, an internal understanding of the capacity needs specific to the sanitation sector needs to be developed.

Collaborations Areas

- Technology solutions
- Setting up sustainable service systems
- Service delivery to underserved groups
- Adapting to sector trends

Stakeholders

- Public Utilities
- Regional and National associations for operators and regulators
- Municipal administration
- Provincial/National Organizations
- Private service providers
- Community based organizations
- Non-Governmental

Mentors

- Mentor - Mentee approach
- South-South partnerships
- Peer to peer learning
- Regional/local partnerships
- Regional, Multi-stakeholder partnerships

Box 3: Elements for Enabling SWOPs.

Countries in which a water utility does not have a role on sanitation - 36

Countries where the water utility has a role to play in Sanitation -18

Figure 4: Mandate of Utilities in Africa. Source: Dennis Mwanza.

Collaboration Bottlenecks

Nurturing collaborations in a multi-stakeholder environment is a challenging task. In the sanitation sector, lacunae or overlaps in roles and responsibilities can be seen very often. For example, private enterprises (both formal and informal) that provide sanitation services may not often respond to public bodies as they are often working on legally undefined tasks. This could create a competing environment and hinder the formation of SWOPs. Understanding the bottlenecks that exist in including such collaborations in the sanitation sector and modifying/facilitating the collaboration space is needed to access the stakeholder diversity in the sanitation sector.

Regional and Local Needs

Geo-climatic and socio-economic factors and the way cities have developed, play a significant role in the success of sanitation systems. Working in SWOPs calls for internalising the diversity in sanitation systems and challenges across different regions and perhaps the development of regional focal points within the GWOPA team to best understand SWOPs developed in the respective regions. This can be nurtured by working closely with the national and regional associations including the national and regional WOP platforms which are already well integrated within the GWOPA system. Involvement of regional association in designing and evolving sanitation partnerships according to changing environment and transition of public operators to provide sanitation services. Understanding the regional factors and the concepts and systems that feature in the sanitation systems in each region is important for successful SWOP programmes.

New Approaches

Citywide Inclusive Sanitation, Climate Resilient Sanitation, and Water Sensitive Cities have developed innovative and sustainable concepts for wastewater management. Understanding these concepts and developing knowledge products that could guide operators to include such concepts in their partnerships will help the development of a diverse set of SWOPs.

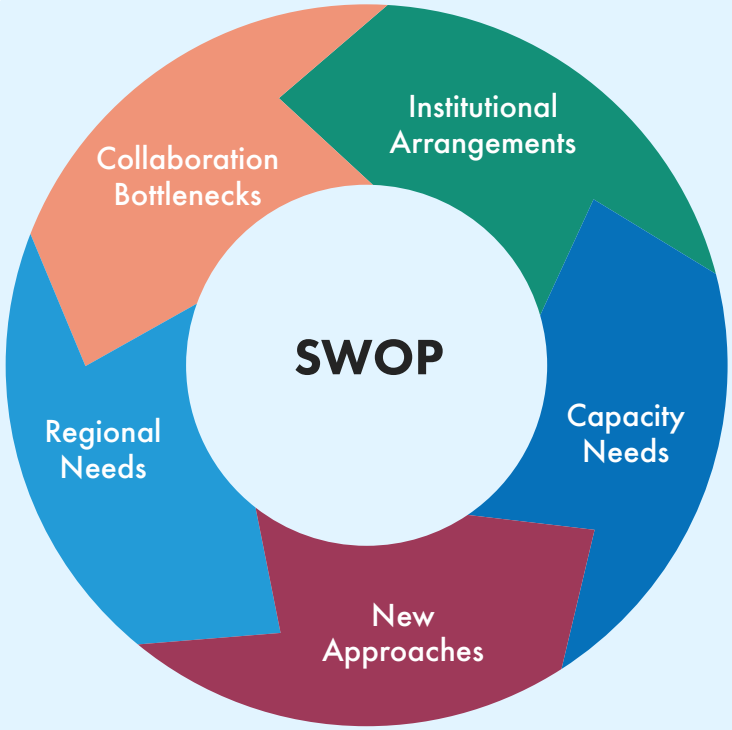

Figure 5: A structured study of these knowledge areas is required while developing SWOP programmes.

Key Considerations in the Implementation of The Strategic Pillars

The following section details several aspects which shall be considered. These considerations shall be used by GWOPA to design, implement and support SWOPs. The participating urban sanitation actors shall be encouraged to develop outcomes and activities that can contribute to these themes.

Sustainable Public Service Systems

The provision of sustainable services is needed for SDG target 6.2 to 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. Reliable and continual delivery of services by operators requires effective human, financial, and natural resources, and other types of resources. Most operators are unable to find infrastructure financing and further meet the operating costs of systems due to a lack of city-wide sanitation planning. Through SWOPs, the extent of services will be assessed and interventions to strengthen service delivery through appropriate technology and management solutions recommended and implemented. SWOPs shall also focus on streamlining institutional structures as well as establishing regulatory and monitoring systems that can develop the enabling environment for the sanitation sector.

Equity and Inclusion

In urban sanitation, a pro-poor orientation is needed to reduce inequalities in accessing sanitation as a basic service. The present situation in water and sanitation services for millions of people residing in peri-urban areas, expanded and informal settlements is starkly anti-poor. They mostly do not have access to public services and obtain informal services often at a higher cost. Service providers struggle to provide complete coverage through conventional sewerage systems. Low-cost sanitation technologies and non-sewered sanitation services are promising in terms of technology but have not been scaled up due to issues such as lack of investment in sanitation, insufficient cost recovery for sanitation services for operators, conservative technical standards, poor regulation, and lack of mandate. SWOPs may focus on building operators' capacities around low-cost sanitation service provision appropriate for low-income populations and the infrastructure available.

The transformative promise of the SDGs of "leave no one behind" and the human rights to water and sanitation is critical in how inclusivity plays a strong role in shaping the future of sanitation coverage across the world. With discrimination and marginalisation occurring in sanitation access among end users, the inclusion of gender mainstreaming and disability access in the planning of sanitation services is also essential. There is a need to train and equip operators with the right tools to ensure access and inclusivity. SWOPs may be designed to include activities such as gender mainstreaming among operators, gender-sensitive approaches, etc., in sanitation service provision.

Public Health and Community Involvement

Poor sanitation is linked to the transmission of waterborne diseases such as diarrhoea, cholera, dysentery, typhoid, and other diseases such as intestinal worm infections and polio. It exacerbates stunting and contributes to the spread of antimicrobial resistance. Several

studies have confirmed the direct relationship of access to basic sanitation to public health and disease prevention in communities. With direct links to solid waste management, service provision in sanitation through local participation can support the strengthening of public health systems irrespective of the location. Sanitation operator partnerships may expand to work with community engagement and health sector stakeholders due to indispensable interlinkages between service provision and the health of communities. The health and well-being of end users could be included as a broader goal of SWOPs for operators to be aware of the impact of their work.

Climate Resilience

Climate change heavily impacts sanitation systems. While extreme weather conditions affect stormwater and water supply systems alike, the stakeholders with limited sanitation systems are often also highly vulnerable to the effects of climate change. The energy intensity of conventional wastewater management systems and the direct emission of greenhouse gases such as methane from wastewater and faecal sludge containment and treatment further connect the two topics closely. Capacitation of operators to adopt their sanitation systems to reduce emissions, increase energy efficiency, and provide sanitation services for all users under changing and adverse conditions is an essential element of sustainability. SWOPs may focus on resilient sanitation systems and capacity building for operators on climate-related challenges and sanitation services.

Data and Monitoring Systems

Monitoring wastewater and faecal sludge data is essential in understanding their quality, reuse, and energy potential, along with health-related data. Operators play a key role in monitoring wastewater and faecal sludge and would require improved data management systems to produce reliable data nationally and globally. Lack of data and monitoring of non-sewered as well as conventional sanitation systems have made the localisation of SDG 6 a challenging task. Hence SWOPs may also focus on enabling operators to produce reliable data through partnerships that can contribute to the global systems that monitor SDG progress.

Image: © Odisha India.

Image: © Kisumu Water and Sanitation Company Limited.

Collaborating with Local Private Service Providers

The inclusion of formal and informal small-scale private operators' companies that provided services either wholly or partially has been instrumental in decentralised sanitation. Little attention is paid to reaching the poor, non-sewered areas, long-term service provision, or prevailing climate and urban conditions. Lack of attention to urban areas has also given rise to informal services in these areas. Often, small-scale private operator companies operate with little or no compliance with tariffs and dump the faecal sludge in barren lands due to a lack of regulatory enforcement. Sanitation services would be efficient if local private (formal and informal) companies providing services were included in SWOPs along with other operators and stakeholders.

Health, Safety and Well-being of Sanitation Workers

The sanitation workforce bridges the gap between sanitation infrastructure and the provision of sanitation services. Sanitation workers provide an essential public service, but in low- and middle-income countries, they are working often at the cost of their dignity, safety, health, and living conditions. They are far too often invisible, unquantified, and ostracised, and many of the challenges they face stem from this fundamental lack of acknowledgement. Sanitation workers are exposed to serious occupational and environmental health hazards, risking illness, injury, and death.[14] There is little or no evidence base quantifying the issues or challenges faced by the workers. The lack of regulation on safety measures and standard operating procedures endangers their lives, and the quality of service provided affects the entire sanitation value chain. SWOPs have the potential to promote advocacy, guidelines on standard operating procedures, and highlighting best practices by operators that can help promote better working conditions for sanitation workers.

[14] World Bank (2019).

Action Plan for Strengthening Sanitation-Related Work Within GWOPA

In alignment with the current GWOPA Strategy, the following actions will strengthen the sanitation portfolio and promote sanitation-focused Water Operators' Partnerships. The actions are categorized in the following table based on the results of the framework of GWOPA Strategy 2020-2024, to be extended to 2025.

Code	Outcome/Indicator	Contribution towards outcome required to enable SWOPs	Potential Actions until 2025	Target/ Indicator until 2025	Resources needed/ committed
(Ref: GWOPA Strategy 2020-2024)					
SO1	WOPs are scaled up	SWOPs are scaled up	Fundraising and advocacy for a SWOP programme where all WOPs shall work on sanitation-related topics	Funding for 1 SWOP Programme secured	10% of 2-3 staff time on advocacy and fundraising with potential donors
			Sanitation as a promoted thematic area in future WOP programmes of GWOPA	At least 25% of all new WOPs formed through GWOPA programmes are SWOPs	No additional resources required
			SWOPs embedded as an action in GWOPA/partner projects involving multiple cities	At least 2 projects with SWOPs funded	10% of 1 staff time on collaborative project proposals
SO2	WOPs are contributing to water and sanitation service providers' improved capacity and performance, and progressive local realisation of the SDGs, to the benefit of all, particularly the poor	SWOPs are contributing to water and sanitation service providers' improved capacity and performance, and progressive local realisation of the SDGs, to the benefit of all, particularly the poor	Same as above	Value addition in capacity building and performance improvement and pro-poor orientation are included as selection criteria for SWOPs	No additional resources are required

Code	Outcome/Indicator	Contribution towards outcome required to enable SWOPs	Potential Actions until 2025	Target/ Indicator until 2025	Resources needed/ committed
(Ref: GWOPA Strategy 2020-2024)					
IO1	WOP actors make use of the knowledge products and services produced or co-produced by GWOPA	Knowledge products to be developed supporting the work of SWOP actors	Guidance publications/ trainings for utilities thematic focus areas such as CWIS	1 CWIS training for utilities disseminated	Ongoing/planned under the CWIS project
			Knowledge products on guidelines for SWOPs and assessment and monitoring of SWOPs	2 publications on the assessment and monitoring of SWOPs	Staff/Consultant time allocation - (approx. 2 months)
IO2	WOPs are well-known, widely supported and funded	Events, advocacy, and funding for SWOPs	Active participation in events where SWOP as a tool is promoted	SWOP presented in 4 sanitation events	Participation costs + Staff time
			Development and dissemination of communication products: Sanitation stories, informal settlements coverage, sanitation workers, World Toilet Day, etc	1 communication product related to sanitation every month	Staff time of approx. 1 day/month
SpO1	GWOPA is a strong and fruitful water solidarity network		Engage in a sanitation-specific membership drive	50 new institutional members with sanitation as a key area of work or utilities with a mandate for sanitation	Staff/Intern time for networking
			Mobilise partners through regional WOP Platforms	1 Expression of Interest (EOI) for partnerships	Staff/Intern time for networking

Code	Outcome/Indicator	Contribution towards outcome required to enable SWOPs	Potential Actions until 2025	Target/ Indicator until 2025	Resources needed/ committed
(Ref: GWOPA Strategy 2020-2024)					
SpO1	GWOPA is a strong and fruitful water solidarity network		Partner with research institutions to create more knowledge and tools for SWOPs.	At least 1 research partner in each region is identified	Staff time for networking
SpO2	GWOPA is efficiently and effectively operated and governed by the secretariat, UN-HABITAT and Steering Committee	Analyse and strengthen the enabling environment for SWOPs within GWOPA's framework – Governance, funding, knowledge and tools available	Include key sanitation actors and regulatory authorities in the steering committee	At least 25% of steering committee members have sanitation as the key area of work	Staff time for networking
			Convene an expert group meeting in sanitation to take into consideration current trends and challenges in materialising SWOPs	Feedback from the meeting operationalised	Organizational costs, staff time
			Call for Expressions of Interest (EoI) for UN entities to support GWOPA's sanitation work	1 EoI for partnerships	Staff/Intern time for networking
			Organize EU enablers workshop on sanitation	1 workshop organized	Organizational costs, staff time
GWOPA's 2020-2024 Strategy Mid-Term Evaluation Recommendation		Sanitation and SWOPs are integrated well into the theory of change (ToC) GWOPA Strategy with a distinct pathway to promote them.	Ensure sanitation is discussed as a thematic area while developing ToC. Carry out any supporting studies that are required.	Sanitation is defined well-defined in the next ToC	To be identified

Image: © Nao Novoa.

Towards a Sanitation Strong
GWOPA Strategy

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Global Water Operators' Partnerships Alliance

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