

EVENT SNAPSHOT

ADB–Gates Foundation Learning Week

Event Details

Date

1–4 December 2020

Venue

MS Teams

Related water subthemes

| | | | |
|---|--|---|---|
| x | Water supply, sanitation, and wastewater | | Flood/drought risk management and disaster resilience |
| | Irrigation and productivity | x | Water governance and finance |
| | IWRM, storage, water-food-energy nexus | x | Water and health |

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF) held its first ADB and Gates Foundation Learning Week on the first week of December 2020 online. This was a four-day interactive discussion on the Sanitation Financing Partnership Trust Fund – which BMGF supports – and an opportunity for ADB project officers to convene with BMGF counterparts to dive deep into ADB sanitation projects, citywide inclusive sanitation (CWIS) principles, and progress on CWIS investments. The Learning Week also focused on challenges related to carrying out new technologies, financing models, and accompanying institutional changes, and the upcoming CWIS guidelines. Below is a brief breakdown of topics covered per day.

Day 1: The Learning Week opened with a session on the Water Financing Partnership Facility (or the Asia and the Pacific Water Fund, as it is commonly called), its achievements, challenges, and what the future holds.

Day 2: The focus shifted to BMGF with a presentation about the results BMGF is aiming for, followed by ADB project case studies and a discussion about challenges and potential solutions.

Day 3: The session first centered on ADB’s work on developing CWIS guidelines and indicators, while the second half was on two case studies showcasing implementation of CWIS elements and the technical resources that were leveraged.

Day 4: ADB and BMGF managers joined the session to hear a briefing about the themes, insights, and lessons gathered from the Learning Week. This was followed by an open discussion among participants and the managers to gather more views and feedback, and to position the path forward.

For a more detailed look into the sessions and the objectives of the Learning Week, please see separate Agenda.

Key Takeaways

Four recurrent themes on (emerging) barriers or enablers to implementing inclusive sanitation were identified. These are capacity, sustainability, equity and inclusion, and financing and service models:

- (i) Capacity: Participants unanimously recognized that building human and institutional capacity is a process that takes time; for example, addressing the low capacity of utilities, local government units, and implementing and executing agencies. The capacity of consultants was also discussed and the recent ADB Institute training for staff and consultants was highlighted as a welcome move. The Gates Foundation shared other capacity building opportunities as well.

Several project case studies proved that with strong and specific terms of reference and the right specialized consulting skills, small technical assistance assignments can have big impacts on the overall design of large investment projects. Available tools and mechanisms should also be used more effectively.

- (ii) Sustainability: The sustainability of investments and the operation and maintenance (O&M) of centralized, decentralized, and on-site sanitation systems are closely linked to capacity. Several approaches were discussed during the presentations, including public-private-people partnerships in Cambodia or different contract modalities such as design-build-operate contracts in Nepal. Mainstreaming these approaches remain a challenge and exploring similar existing tools is a step moving forward.
- (iii) Equity and inclusion: How to expand access to safe, sustainable sanitation services to low-income communities is a huge challenge toward mainstreaming inclusive sanitation. There is a need to develop a better baseline understanding of low-income communities during the project assessment and planning phase. These are difficult issues, but addressing this cuts to the very heart of ADB's commitment to achieving a prosperous, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable Asia and the Pacific.
- (iv) Financing and service models: In addition to financing, O&M sustainability came up several times in the dialogue. Everyone recognized that far too many water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) infrastructure fall into disrepair after 3 or 4 years. Participants noted private sector engagement, new business models, reuse of byproducts, and how to organize and restructure fecal sludge markets as opportunities to increase financing and improve service models.

Many projects highlighted the critical role of embedding sanitation within broader governance systems, tariff reform, and generally ensuring that sanitation is not neglected in discussions about municipal and utility services, which are usually dominated by water. Progress in all these areas is predicated on clarity around institutional mandates and clear accountability mechanisms. However, questions remained: What is the role of development finance institutions-supported projects in this space, and how can you strike the right balance between financing for badly needed infrastructure and ensuring that governments have the right systems in place to maintain that infrastructure over time?

Several key opportunities for collaboration were identified, namely CWIS guidance and indicators, adjustments to modus operandi, and opportunities for more donor collaboration:

- (i) CWIS guidance and indicators: The draft CWIS Guidance and Indicators elicited a lot of enthusiasm from participants. Overall, the response from project officers was ‘when can we get these?’ Participants had ideas about what could be included – like model bidding documents – and everyone appreciated how integrated these tools will be into existing ADB processes, and their flexibility, recognizing the huge variety of projects and contexts. Many remarked on how well this new guidance aligns with Strategy 2030 and the corporate priorities of ADB. Gates Foundation was incredibly impressed by these materials and their potential to vastly accelerate good practices within ADB and with clients.
- (ii) Modus operandi: Adjustments to the ADB modus operandi – how and where ADB works, and along with partners – was another key area of opportunity and follow-up. Ways to improve collaboration across very different operating models were identified. ADB noted it could use more visibility and mapping of Gates Foundation partners and key focal points to engage, while Gates Foundation noted more visibility into pipelines and plans will help ADB leverage partners more effectively. There is also some work to do to continue to improve communication structures in ADB developing member countries. There was a lot of enthusiasm for deepening our emerging partnership in India and expanding to the Pacific region and the People’s Republic of China.
- (iii) Donor collaboration: How can bilateral partnership support improved donor collaboration? It was recognized that there are more ‘low-hanging fruits’ in terms of sharing good practices, challenges, and tools across financing institutions, since many of the challenges faced are similar.

Participants also reflected on the most important issue that is often neglected: the issue of donor coordination in countries. Given the critical task to build awareness of country clients to consider new ways of working, stronger donor alignment and shared advocacy goals, underpinned by good data and evidence to build the case for inclusive sanitation will be fundamental to increasing country demand for CWIS investments.

At least three cross-cutting themes were agreed upon that need further and deeper discussion and to find ways of working more closely. These include how to embed sanitation (and WASH) within health and climate dialogues, and how to mainstream gender in as part of the work:

- (i) Sanitation (and WASH) within health: The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) has underscored the need to integrate WASH as a critical health priority. However, breaking down internal silos remains to be achieved. ADB and Gates Foundation are both actively looking to understand how to do this within their own structures. There are some clear opportunities, such as wastewater and fecal sludge surveillance, but more can be done – and this issue extends far beyond the current pandemic. Participants acknowledged that this is a big undertaking, and welcomed leadership guidance and reflections on how to better integrate sanitation in the health sector and vice-versa.

- (ii) Sanitation in the climate dialogues: ADB and the Gates Foundation are exploring how to scale up the evidence, advocacy, and investments in sanitation within the climate sector. This is an area that needs more dedicated time to compare notes and share, so that concrete areas can be studied and pursued.

- (iii) Gender: It was not lost on participants that 5 of the 6 project team leaders who presented in the Learning Week were women. This is not trivial in a sector that has tended to be male-dominated and engineering-heavy. There is a need to learn from each other in terms of gender policies and strategies, research on gendered impacts of sanitation, who is included and excluded as customers and citizens, and roles of women and men as operators, entrepreneurs, and professionals.

**“It’s been great to see how our partnership evolved,
from a somewhat ad hoc approach to an increasingly strategic approach.”**

— Thomas Panella, ADB Chief of Water Sector Group

**“We have lots of follow-up actions and we will be continuously working together
for many more years! This is not only an organizational partnership,
this is an association between like-minded people.”**

— Roshan Shrestha, Deputy Director of Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene,
Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

Related ADB Projects

Cambodia: Second Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Sector Project - Additional Financing

Project Officer: Siti Hasanah

<https://www.adb.org/projects/38560-024/main#project-overview>

India: Madhya Pradesh Urban Services Improvement Project - Additional Financing

Project Officer: Laxmi Sharma

<https://www.adb.org/projects/42486-018/main#project-overview>

Mongolia: Management and Reuse of Sewage Sludge from On-site Sanitation Facilities and Decentralized Wastewater Treatment Plants

Project Officer: Tuul Badarch

<https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/linked-documents/42184-024-ata.pdf>

Nepal: Second Kathmandu Valley Water Supply Improvement Project

Project Officer: Saugata Dasgupta

<https://www.adb.org/projects/45339-001/main#project-pds>

Papua New Guinea: Support for Water Sanitation Sector Management (Supplementary)

Project Officer: Alexandra Conroy

<https://www.adb.org/projects/49454-001/main#project-pds>

Philippines: Baguio City Sanitation Improvement Project (Proposed)

Project Officer: Thuy Trang Dang

<https://www.adb.org/projects/54220-001/main#project-pds>

List of Speakers

1. **Robert Guild**, Chief Sector Officer, Sustainable Development and Climate Change Department (SDCC), ADB (for opening remarks)
2. **Thomas Panella**, Chief of Water Sector Group, SDCC, ADB
3. **Roshan Shrestha**, Deputy Director, Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation
4. **Christian Walder**, Water Supply and Sanitation Specialist, SDCC, ADB
5. **Neeta Pokhrel**, Unit Head, Project Administration, South Asia Regional Department (SARD), ADB
6. **Siti Hasanah**, Urban Development Specialist, Southeast Asia Regional Department (SERD), ADB
7. **Laxmi Sharma**, Urban Development Specialist, SARD, ADB
8. **Sakshi Gudwani**, SPO, India Capacity Building and State Support, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation
9. **Maggie Clout**, SPO, Industry and Market Development, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation
10. **Alyse Schrecongost**, SPO, Citywide Inclusive Sanitation, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation
11. **Danielle Pedi**, SPO, Urban Sanitation Financing, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation
12. **Tuul Badarch**, Senior Project Officer (Infrastructure), East Asia Regional Department, ADB
13. **Alexandra Conroy**, Urban Development Specialist, Pacific Regional Department, ADB
14. **Isabel Blackett**, Urban Sanitation Specialist, SDCC Consultant
15. **Sujan Rej Regmi**, Project Analyst, Nepal Resident Mission, ADB
16. **Thuy Trang Dang**, Senior Urban Development Specialist, SERD, ADB
17. **Brian Arbogast**, Director, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (for closing remarks)

