

## EVENT SNAPSHOT

# Scaling Up WASH Services in a Pandemic Seminar Series: Part 1 – COVID-19 Response

## Event Details

### Date and Time

9 June, 3:30–4:30 p.m.

### Venue

MS Teams

### Related water subthemes (based on Water Advisory Teams)

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

Handwashing with soap and proper hygiene are the first lines of defense against the spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19). ADB, together with world leaders and heads of international organizations, in a [joint statement](#), recognized that water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) services must be prioritized at the local, regional, and global levels.

In this regard, to support developing member countries (DMCs) in improving their WASH services, the Water and Health Sector Groups, led by the recently formed Water and Health Advisory Team, have collaborated with WaterAid – an international development agency specializing in WASH and behavior change – to provide needed knowledge and insights that can inform project design and implementation through a four-part seminar series.

For the first session, which gathered close to 70 participants, WaterAid shared their response to COVID-19 in Asia and the Pacific, specifically in the eight countries they work in: Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, and Timor-Leste. Given the changing dynamics of the pandemic, WaterAid has taken a context-specific and phased approach to support government-led action plans, depending on rate of transmission and lockdowns, and prioritizing the most marginalized groups. They also discussed how they were able to implement a quick and strong WASH response against COVID-19, as well as their longer-term planning to ensure WASH is prioritized and sustained.

## Key Takeaways

**Strong context and systems awareness are essential to responding to COVID-19 in communities.** Understanding barriers, motivations, and where capacity is high (from local to national level government) is needed to take action that will achieve the stated health goals and ensure that the behavior change will last. In Papua New Guinea, for example, government roles were reinforced as well as coordination with civil society. This included guidance on building low-cost handwashing stations, dispelling myths, and answering frequently asked questions.

**Leave no one behind.** Conduct a rapid analysis of who is vulnerable, marginalized, and at risk of exclusion. Work with representative groups in planning and delivery to design inclusive and

empowering behavior change campaigns and to monitor data and information systems that look at inequalities.

**In South Asia, four COVID-19 response priorities were identified:** (i) mass promotion of COVID-related hygiene behaviors; (ii) continuity and expansion of WASH services; (iii) integrating WASH in health system strengthening; and, (iv) supporting the rights of sanitation workers. For hygiene promotion, this included placing handwashing facilities in critical locations (healthcare centers, quarantine centers) and providing hygiene kits for marginalized sectors. For expansion of WASH services, this meant ensuring safe and adequate water supply in Lahan, Nepal.

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**“The Beacon project’s support to NWSC has created an enabling environment to work even during the lockdown, with upgraded skills, right equipment and materials. Our resilience to work in harsh situations with the joint team effort to augment water for at least one hour [a day] is a remarkable contribution in the fight against COVID-19.”**

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— Shirish Rajbhandari, Nepal Water Supply Corporation (NWSC),  
a quote cited in the presentation

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**Maintaining WASH facilities is a critical challenge.** The provision of soap and facilities themselves in schools, for example, is a gap. To ensure these, WaterAid works with institutions and prioritizes training. Understanding the cost of maintaining the facilities and incorporating these in the budget is key to maintaining the behavior and facilities. For hygiene work, it was changing from information to behavior change design, understanding people’s behaviors, and changing mindsets and not just instructing them what to do.

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**“People look for these golden indicators, but oftentimes motivations can be buried. So, we use political economy analysis. It’s about finding mutual priorities to work in an integrated way.”**

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— Thérèse Mahon, WaterAid UK

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## About the Speakers

### Rosie Wheen

Chief Executive, WaterAid Australia

[rosie.wheen@wateraid.org.au](mailto:rosie.wheen@wateraid.org.au)

Rosie is a passionate advocate for human rights, gender equality, and universal access to water, sanitation, and hygiene. She has over two decades of international development experience, having lived and worked in Indonesia for six years before joining WaterAid Australia at its inception in 2004. She was Director of International Programs prior to becoming Chief Executive in 2016. Rosie’s leadership manifesto focuses on being an authentic servant leader who always pushes herself beyond her comfort zone—this is where Rosie believes she learns most and performs at her best. She serves on a number of Boards, including the Australian Council for International Development.

**Meredith Hickman**

Head of Strategy, WaterAid Australia

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Meredith is a development professional dedicated to the global movement for clean water, decent toilets, and good hygiene for everyone, everywhere by 2030. As Head of Strategy, she manages a team of technical and business development experts driving the strategic direction of WaterAid's work in Southeast Asia and the Pacific. Prior to joining WaterAid, Meredith supported initiatives around governance, accountability, and decentralization.

**Thérèse Mahon**

Regional Program Manager – South Asia, WaterAid UK

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Thérèse Mahon is a senior international development programs manager and leader with 18 years of experience in the WASH sector focusing on South Asia. She is responsible for program quality assurance, supporting capacity development of country program teams and partners, and leading regional learning and influencing initiatives with WaterAid and in collaboration with regional partners and research institutes. Thérèse has worked at WaterAid since 2002, which includes roles as interim Country Director for Nepal and interim Regional Director for South Asia, and secondment as global WASH in Education and Menstrual Health Specialist to strategically develop WaterAid's work in these areas. She is the global lead for menstrual hygiene at WaterAid and has made significant contributions over the past ten years to building the evidence base, particularly more rigorous documentation of development practice relating to menstrual health and hygiene.