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Focus Area: 2 Universal water supply and sanitation services

Drivers, benefits and challenges of gender equality partnerships to strengthen WASH systems in Timor-Leste

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Context

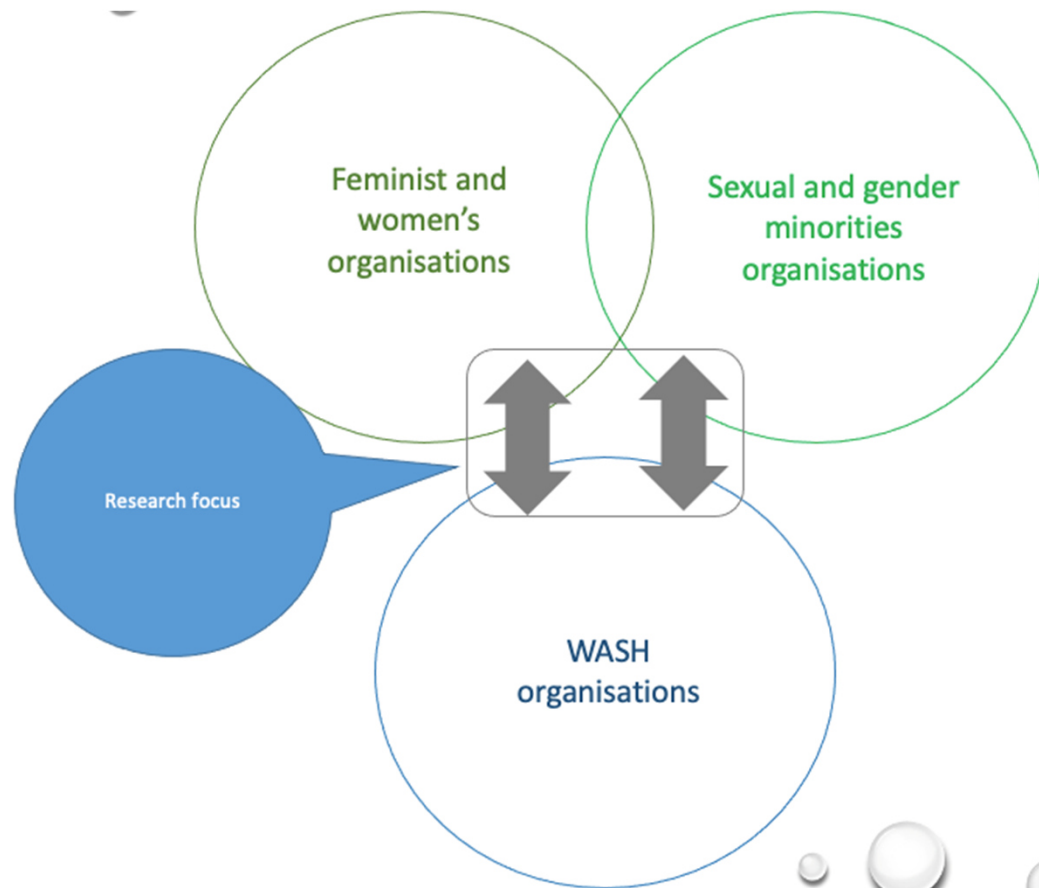
- Significant progress water supply coverage, sanitation progress lagging.
- Persistent urban-rural disparities.
- Significant capacity gaps in WASH systems
- Decentralization of power to municipalities
- High-level government commitment to rights
- Demonstrated effectiveness in achieving open defecation free (ODF)
- Government collaboration with CSOs and communities to reach “Hygienic Status”





Research question: WASH and Gender CSO partnerships

1. What are the drivers, benefits, and challenges of engagement between WASH sector CSOs and gender equality organisations?
2. How can CSOs partner more effectively to maximize WASH, gender equality and inclusion outcomes?





Methods

1. Literature review on partnerships, coalitions, feminist theory, and history of civil society in Timor-Leste.
2. In-depth interviews with **18 civil society organisations**
3. Longitudinal interviews of collaborations between **4 WASH and rights CSOs over 2.5 years** (two rounds of interviews)
4. Joint analytical processes, and action-research applications. Research partners provided a partnership tools.



Findings: Types of Collaboration





Findings: Drivers of Collaboration



Researchers and interviewee discussing CSO partnerships in Timor-Leste for the study 2018 – 2020

Six GESI-focussed organisations that work closely with communities were motivated to cooperate with WASH-focussed organisations due to the WASH-related need they saw in communities, particularly for women:

“We need to work together so that the community can benefit from our partnership. Community needs can become a factor that push us to work together”.

1. Community WASH service gaps
2. Gender and rights outcomes
3. Partnership and agenda shaping





Findings: Benefits of partnership

1. **Increasing participation and inclusion** – For example, securing WASH rights for people with disabilities by elevating their needs to relevant parties.
2. **Mutual learning and capacity building** - Positive outcomes for mutual learning and developing capacity.
3. **Advocacy opportunities and connections with government** - Women's organisations at the forefront of WASH influencing.
4. **Shifts in gender norms, perceptions and responses**- Partnership activities led to a positive change in the community's (eg women and men's equal work sharing)



“Bringing rights-based CSOs into the WASH forum has enabled an increased awareness of GESI within purely WASH CSOs and has also allowed the rights-based CSOs to better appreciate the importance of WASH for the fulfilment of human rights and development”.



Findings: Benefits continued..

Top 3 benefits reported by gender CSOs:

1. Capacity building;
2. Training;
3. Creating networks and forming new links.

Top 3 benefits reported by WASH CSOs:

1. Government engagement;
2. Improved data and information in communities;
3. Women's groups leading WASH advocacy.



Findings: Challenges of collaboration

Organizational barriers

- Misalignment of organizational strategy, focus
- Lack of confidence on 'WASH literacy'.

Weak links in the WASH system

- Misperceptions of who is responsible for WASH.

Power dynamics and relationship aspects

- The challenge of collaborating outside of technical expertise (noted by rights CSOs).
- Concern about sustainability, financial viability and the role of government in ongoing delivery of services.





Recommendations for more effective collaboration

Setting foundations and shared vision	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identifying alignment in strategic priorities as a foundation for establishing a partnership.• Setting clear commitment, agreement and terms of reference with agreed tasks and responsibilities is critical.
Partnership practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Taking the time that is needed for CSOs to get to know each other and strengthening trust between CSOs.• Considering training to gain a deeper understanding of universal WASH and the specific components and functions of full WASH systems.
Building on complementaries	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• There is the opportunity to elevate community needs into advocacy efforts particularly at the national level.



