



## Strong Women, Strong World (SWSW): Beyond Access

# LEARNING INITIATIVES

### SWSW: Beyond Access overview

Vulnerable populations, including women and girls, are among those disproportionately affected by poor access to economic empowerment opportunities and inadequate WASH services. This increases their risk of injury, illness, harassment, and violence.

To address this, World Vision's past work has accommodated the needs of women and girls, specifically considering their needs in infrastructure design. Our vision going forward is to provide even more transformative WASH services that appropriately respond to and reflect the choices and desires of the most vulnerable members of communities where we work.

World Vision's SWSW: Beyond Access program helps remove barriers and open doors so women and girls can shine. We launched this program with a clear goal to go beyond providing access to conventional WASH and livelihoods programs by truly placing women at the center of all program activities. By intentionally designing WASH, economic empowerment, and microfinance activities to build upon each other, we nurture women's confidence and skills and address systemic barriers to their participation and agency.

Through deliberate WASH and economic empowerment activities, we work side by side with community members to nurture equitable participation, ownership, and decision-making for community transformation. When a woman has access to clean water nearby, it opens a fountain of opportunities, especially economic freedom.

This three-year program (2022–2025) spans four countries—Guatemala, Honduras, Kenya, and Zimbabwe—to define, refine, and measure a scalable, effective programmatic model to empower women and girls through transformative WASH and economic opportunities.

### Our iterative learning approach

Evidence exists on transformative approaches to WASH that focus on women and girls. However, limited programs in the WASH sector have applied more transformative ideas into their programming. This limited focus is not from a lack of data or goodwill; however shifting business-as-usual approaches is difficult. This is why learning is a core priority for Beyond Access.

SWSW: Beyond Access focuses on women's and girls' empowerment-centered interventions that are integrated and sequenced in a new way. World Vision wants to understand what is working well and what is not, so we can capture best practices that can be applied in future programs. For such an innovative program, a more iterative learning approach is needed.

Rather than a more traditional learning approach, which focuses on regular monitoring activities and perhaps a program evaluation at the middle and end of the project, World Vision has structured learning for Beyond Access in four key areas:

- Tracking progress over time
- Deepening understanding of context and programmatic implications
- Evaluating aspects of program processes to gain participant feedback and improve implementation quality
- Analyzing learnings to inform program decisions and contribute to work within the sector

### Transforming gender norms in WASH

Transformative approaches work to identify and address underlying barriers to empowerment and build systemic supports to enable empowerment. This includes addressing harmful social and gender norms and roles and working to support a more equal distribution of power, resources, and services.

—United Nations Population Fund

## Our learning partner: Emory University

Our learning partner Emory University is a world-renowned institution with a strong reputation in WASH research, action-centered learning, and understanding women’s empowerment. Each SWSW country also has a partnership with a local-level learning institution to ensure the best possible opportunities to understand and contextualize learnings locally.

The Emory University team has extensive expertise in understanding challenges and opportunities involved in measuring women’s empowerment, and the team includes individuals with WASH and economic empowerment expertise. Our principal investigator, Dr. Bethany Caruso, is the lead author on a recently published metasynthesis described as “the most comprehensive synthesis to date of current evidence on water and sanitation and women’s and girls’ empowerment.”

Emory University is an essential partner in the design and execution of the core learning components of the program. These will significantly inform World Vision’s efforts to build supports and remove barriers to women’s empowerment, improve program quality, and support the broader development sector in the journey toward more transformative approaches.

“Improving WASH conditions may not only prevent or reduce the negative impacts experienced by women, but could also transform their lives. Intentionally designed WASH initiatives could save women time and labor, engage them in leadership roles, enable economic opportunity, and more. Yet, despite all the potential harms and benefits of WASH that these studies show, scant action has been taken.”

—Dr. Bethany Caruso, Emory University

## Core learning components

The research for SWSW: Beyond Access is one aspect of World Vision’s overall WASH learning agenda, which has a dedicated gender equality and social inclusion focus. To go even further, our four key learning components will support World Vision’s learning objective of understanding the impact of WASH and economic empowerment activities on increasing the empowerment of women and girls. These include program surveys, a formative assessment, process evaluation, and learning synthesis (for more details, reference the table below).

### Program surveys

The Strong Women Strong World: Beyond Access team developed a survey that was used in the startup phase of the program and will be repeated at the middle and end of the program. This survey, implemented across all four countries, focuses on capturing key information related to access, participation, decision-making, and well-being.

It will help us track improvements in WASH access and women’s participation in economic activities, as well as women’s participation in decision-making, community leadership, and their personal sense of well-being. This survey compiles questions from validated surveys and indices, with insights from Emory University.

The initial survey was completed in June 2023 in partnership with local consultants in Honduras, Guatemala, Kenya, and Zimbabwe. The survey will be repeated at the midterm phase of the project in early 2024 and at the end of the project in late 2025. Learnings from the survey will be analyzed and used to ensure activities remain focused on the areas of greatest need.

**Program learning objective: Understand the impact of WASH and economic empowerment activities to increase the empowerment of women and girls**

### World Vision surveys

Include:  
initial formative survey,  
midline survey,  
endline survey

**WHERE WE ARE:  
TRACKING CHANGE**

### Emory-led field research

Informs program improvement;  
deepens knowledge about  
context, enablers, and barriers;  
informs improvement of  
interventions during a program

**DEEPENING  
UNDERSTANDING**

### Emory-led process evaluation

Determines whether  
program activities are being  
implemented as intended;  
important for  
implementation quality and  
scale

**LEARNING FOR  
QUALITY**

### Emory and World Vision learning synthesis

Analyze project data;  
document learnings and  
make recommendations;  
influence future  
programming and thought  
leadership

**IMPACT &  
INFLUENCE**

### Formative assessment

This component of learning focused on deepening contextual understanding that is not easily captured in surveys. It included various means of data collection, including focus group discussions, key informant interviews, observation, go-along interviews, and quantitative activity tracking.

In consultation with field teams, Emory University developed three key learning themes that are the focus of the formative assessment phase (data collection phase June to August 2023).

1. Understanding women's experiences collecting water and engaging in water activities for their households
2. Listening to women about how water access and availability affects their lives, especially in the area of economic participation and empowerment
3. Learning how men perceive the program to inform how to better engage men in women's empowerment programs

### Process evaluation

Emory University will lead efforts to review how the program was implemented compared with the program design and plan, and it also will gain feedback from program participants on their satisfaction with the program. This is a key step to understanding and improving program effectiveness and providing recommendations for future delivery of programs at scale.



### Learning synthesis

Data and learnings captured through surveys, formative assessments, and process evaluations will be triangulated and shared with program participants, local learning partners, World Vision staff, and with the broader development sector. This is the most critical step to ensure World Vision's investment in learning bears fruit through improved programming and, most of all, impact in communities—especially the empowerment of women and girls.



**SWSW: Beyond Access  
Learning Initiatives**

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