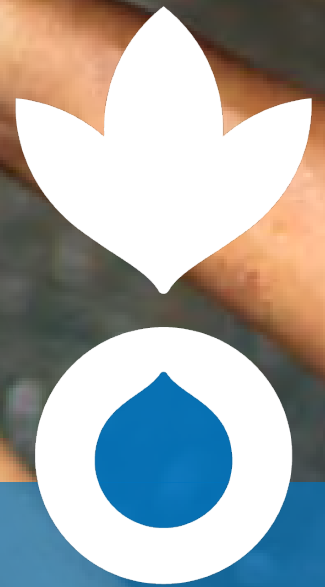




# THE WORLD'S WATER FUNDING CRISIS

HOW DONORS ARE MISSING THE MARK



# OUR ANALYSIS

Climate change, conflict, and chronic inequality are creating a global water and sanitation crisis. More than [2 billion people](#) lack access to safely managed drinking water and [4.2 billion](#) lack adequate sanitation. This report reveals the dangerous gap in funding for water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) programs, which are key to promoting health, preventing malnutrition, and reaching UN Sustainable Development Goals.

We focus exclusively on humanitarian funding—that is, emergency support in the wake of natural disasters, climate shocks, war, and other acute crises. In those contexts, clean water and safe sanitation are key to saving lives and promoting stability.



## THE NEED

**494 MILLION**  
PEOPLE ENGAGE IN  
OPEN DEFECACTION

**2 BILLION**  
PEOPLE LACK ACCESS  
TO CLEAN WATER

**4.6 BILLION**  
PEOPLE DON'T HAVE ACCESS  
TO SAFE SANITATION

Photos: Cover: Daniel Burgu for Action Against Hunger  
This Page: Sandra Calligaro for Action Against Hunger



# OUR FINDINGS

1

## ACROSS 41 COUNTRIES, THERE IS A 70.3% GAP IN FUNDING FOR WATER-RELATED PROGRAMS

We found<sup>1</sup> that in 2022, the world met fewer than 30% of requests for WASH funding made through the UN humanitarian system. This means there is an average funding gap of 70.3% across 41 countries that rely on the UN system for essential humanitarian support.

1 | Reflects data in the UN system as of February 28, 2023

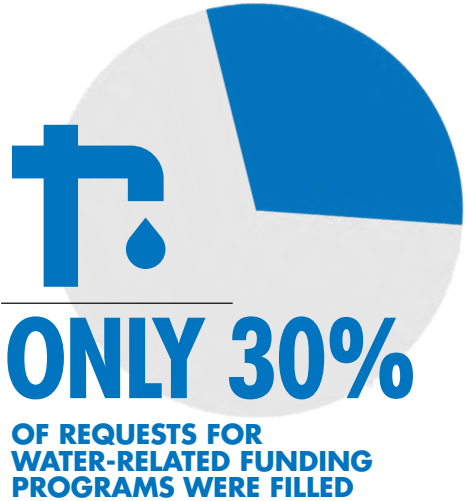
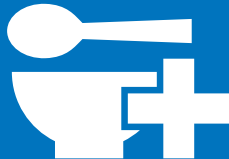


Photo: Olivia Acland for Action Against Hunger



**PREVENTABLE DISEASES RELATED TO WATER AND SANITATION ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR 27% OF DEATHS OF CHILDREN UNDER 5 (WHO 2020).**

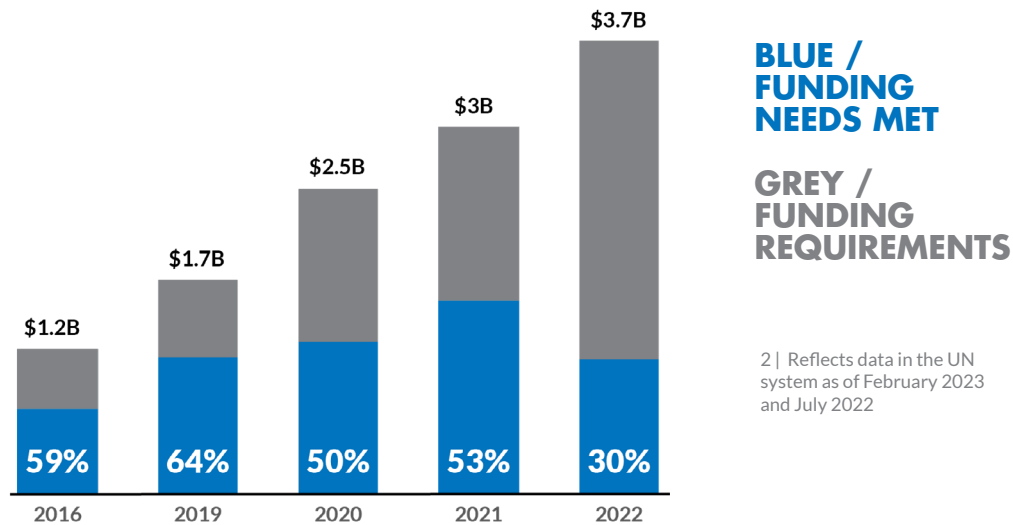
Graphic Source: The UNICEF Extreme Water Vulnerability Index (EWVI); Methodology paper, WASH technical paper, TP/14/21, New York: United Nations Children's Fund; 2021

# 2

## THE WATER FUNDING GAP IS GROWING

The funding gap has grown over time, from 41% to 70%, meaning funds for WASH programs are spread even thinner now than they were before.

It would take \$2.6 billion to fully fund these WASH-related appeals, less than half of what Americans will bet on [March Madness](#) this year. While the world also needs to invest in developing sustainable, long-term WASH solutions, development funding is outside the scope of this report.



**“THE GLOBAL COMMUNITY NEEDS TO QUADRUPLE ITS PROGRESS ON WASH TO MEET SDG 6. ULTIMATELY, FUNDING AND FINANCING FROM THE PUBLIC SECTOR, PRIVATE SECTOR, AND DONORS MUST INCREASE DRAMATICALLY, WATER SERVICE PROVIDERS MUST IMPROVE EFFICIENCY AND PERFORMANCE TO ENSURE FUNDS ARE USED OPTIMALLY, AND GOVERNMENTS SHOULD PROVIDE A STABLE AND TRANSPARENT ADMINISTRATIVE, REGULATORY, AND POLICY ENVIRONMENT THAT ENCOURAGES INVESTMENT.”**

Dr. Jean Lapegue,  
Senior Advisor WASH, Action Against Hunger

## SOLUTIONS CAN BE AFFORDABLE

At the household level, small and relatively inexpensive interventions can have a large impact on access to clean water and sanitation.

**\$15** HYGIENE KIT

**\$19** CERAMIC WATER FILTER

**\$2,600** LIFESAVING WELL





# WHAT IS WASH AND HOW IS IT LINKED TO HUNGER?

WASH stands for water, sanitation, and hygiene, a key global priority. In 2020, [2 billion](#) people lacked access to clean water. WASH programs are key to saving lives, preventing disease, and promoting stability in crisis situations.

The climate crisis is causing large-scale floods and multi-year-long droughts. As water sources dry up, crops and livestock die, leaving entire communities without their primary sources of food and income, therefore increasing hunger. Both floods and drought make sanitation more difficult. This leads to an increase in waterborne diseases, like diarrhea and cholera, which can prevent children from absorbing key nutrients and make them more susceptible to malnutrition.

A lack of clean water makes sanitation more difficult. Water and sanitation are essential for preventing hunger. The world's hunger crisis is deeply intertwined with a growing water crisis.

Globally, diarrhea remains a leading cause of mortality among children under five, with a particular concern in [sub-Saharan Africa](#). Children under five who live in conflict zones are [20 times more likely to die](#) from diarrhoeal diseases linked to unsafe water than from direct violence as a result of war.

Each year, dirty water causes more than [1.5 million deaths](#) that could be prevented with effective and fully-funded programs to improve access to WASH at home, in schools, in healthcare settings, and beyond.



# 3.

## ACROSS 13 COUNTRIES EXPERIENCING CRISIS LEVELS OF HUNGER, NO WASH PROGRAMS WERE FULLY FUNDED.

Since WASH is deeply linked to hunger, we also considered the WASH funding received by each of the 13 countries<sup>3</sup> experiencing high levels of hunger—a narrower focus than our initial analysis above.

We found that in 2022, no country experiencing a hunger crisis had any of their WASH appeals fully funded. In fact, these vulnerable nations saw just 38% of their WASH-related needs met, leaving a WASH funding gap of 62%—making it even harder to prevent and treat malnutrition in those areas.

For this portion of the analysis, we used 2021 WASH and hunger data from the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) and 2022 funding data from the [UN OCHA Financial Tracking Service](#). This approach ensures that donors were aware of the level of need prior to making funding decisions and helps control for a degree of causality—i.e., the hunger levels were not a result of the funding, since the funding came later.

3 | According to the 2021 Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) reports



**13 COUNTRIES  
+ 350 MILLION PEOPLE**  
**0 WASH PROGRAMS  
FULLY FUNDED**

Photo: Sebastien Dujindam for Action Against Hunger



# 4.

## WASH GETS EVEN LESS FUNDING THAN HEALTH AND HUNGER-RELATED PROGRAMS

Everyone has a right to clean water and safe sanitation, and we believe resources should not be taken from programs that advance one UN Sustainable Development Goal to support another. The world has enough resources to meet the UN Sustainable Development Goals involving water, hunger, and health, yet, it is falling short of those priorities—and the gap is particularly striking for countries in a hunger crisis.

When looking at funding for countries dealing with crisis levels of hunger (or worse), we found a 53% gap in funding for hunger programs, a 62% gap in WASH funding, and a 55% gap in health funding<sup>4</sup>.

See the Action Against Hunger [2023 Hunger Funding Gap](#) report for more detail on the countries analyzed, the size of the hunger funding gap, and the methodology behind that analysis.

4 | According to the 2021 Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) reports

### FUNDING GAP PER PROGRAM

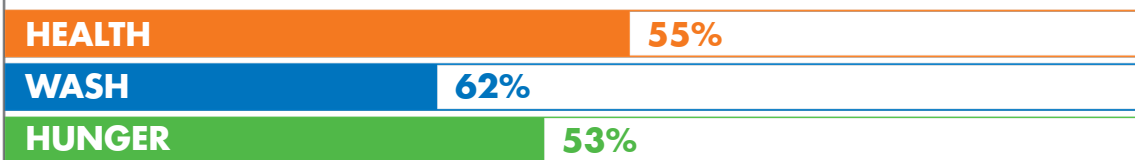


Photo: Sebastien Dujindam for Action Against Hunger

"IMAGINE HAVING ONLY DIRTY WATER AND UNSAFE SANITATION FACILITIES AVAILABLE WHILE TRYING TO KEEP A CHILD FREE OF DIARRHEA AND PARASITIC INFECTIONS THAT CAN PREVENT THEIR BODIES FROM ABSORBING VITAL NUTRIENTS. WE FACE THESE CHALLENGES EVERY DAY BUT WE KNOW HOW TO OVERCOME THEM. OVER THE YEARS, I HAVE SEEN FIRSTHAND THE TRANSFORMATIVE IMPACT THAT OUR WASH PROGRAMS CAN HAVE IN THE FIGHT AGAINST HUNGER. BY INVESTING IN WASH, WE CAN REDUCE MALNUTRITION, PROMOTE HEALTH AND GENDER EQUITY, AND ADDRESS THE IMPACTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE. I'M PROUD TO DO THIS WORK EVERY DAY, EQUIPPING COMMUNITIES TO BUILD A WORLD WHERE EVERYONE CAN THRIVE."

**Bizuneh Assefa,**  
Horn and Eastern Africa Regional WASH Specialist,  
Action Against Hunger



## EMERGENCY WATER TRUCKING PROVIDES RELIEF & SAFETY TO WOMEN IN SOMALIA

In the drought-stricken district of Wajid, Somalia, the few wells with water left are muddy and polluted, causing illnesses like diarrhea and cholera that leave children more vulnerable to malnutrition. The drought also caused water prices to spike 40% from February to March 2022. After seeing their livestock and livelihoods die, families cannot afford to pay more for water.

Sa'diyo Adan Hassan is a mother of five who used to carry a 20-liter jerrycan of muddy water on her back each day from the nearest well. "When our well dried up, many people from my area moved to other neighborhoods that had wet wells where they could get water," said Sa'diyo. "But I decided to walk about [a mile] every day to fetch water from the other end of the town."

During a drought, a woman's journey to find water is often longer and more dangerous. Since many

male-dominated communities prioritize the lives of livestock first and foremost, women must wait their turn—sometimes hours at a time—to get water. Other times, they're even attacked on their route.

"Walking to the well worried me a lot, as I was putting myself at risk by walking very early in the morning when the majority of the people were asleep," said Sa'diyo. "In one way, I feared for my children, whom I left with no one to look after, and on the other hand, I feared for myself, as anything could happen to me and my neighbors as women."

Then the well dried up, leaving her family and 270 others in her village of Balowka desperate for water. Sa'diyo and her family moved over 16 miles to Wajid, where she can receive clean water from Action Against Hunger, which trucks 45 liters of clean water per day to more than 1,100 families.

### ACTION AGAINST HUNGER'S RESPONSE

Despite funding challenges, in 2021 Action Against Hunger's WASH programs reached approximately 5.8 million people across 51 countries, responding as droughts became more frequent and severe, floods contaminated water sources, and conflict destroyed WASH-related infrastructure and prevented farmers from accessing local markets.

We have built 1,775 WASH facilities and 2,127 health facilities, and we are continuing to expand access to clean water, promoting hygiene to prevent disease and malnutrition, and developing innovative, lasting solutions. To learn more, visit our [website](#).





# OUR CALL TO ACTION

Photo: Carmen Abd Ali for Action Against Hunger

The WASH Road Map is an unprecedented collaboration among more than 30 of the world’s most active actors in the humanitarian WASH sector, including Action Against Hunger, ICRC, UNICEF, and UNHCR. Our shared goal is to ensure that, by 2025, the WASH sector has the capacity to respond to humanitarian needs at scale, anywhere and anytime.

The UN Water Conference in March 2023 will be the first WASH convening since 1977. Ahead of this landmark meeting, the coalition is urging governments to commit to tangible actions to strengthen the WASH sector in settings.

Endorsed by more than 110 organizations so far, the Call To Action includes five urgent requests for governments to take, with a focus on Fragile, Conflict, and Violent (FCV) settings.

**WE INVITE OTHERS TO JOIN THE CALL TO ACTION AND URGE THE UN, GOVERNMENT DONORS, AND ALL FUNDERS TO ACT ON THE LINKS BETWEEN HUNGER AND WASH AS A CRITICAL STEP TO PROMOTING EQUITY AND SAVING LIVES.**

1. Take action to provide financial support for WASH in FVC settings. The most vulnerable should not be left behind. We must help safeguard their lives and health.
2. Increase financial support and coordination to deliver predictable, effective, timely, and sufficient humanitarian WASH responses.
3. Build sustainable and resilient WASH services that are ‘built back better’ and can withstand crises. This especially applies to countries which are prone to natural disasters, conflicts, or climate crises.
4. Promote obligations under International Humanitarian Law to protect personnel and WASH infrastructure during armed conflict; support data collection on attacks and their knock-on effects; and facilitate access to the necessary equipment, spare parts, and consumables to restore and maintain WASH services.
5. Support the request to the UN Secretary-General to swiftly nominate a UN Special Envoy for Water to establish an ongoing UN-hosted intergovernmental mechanism to discuss global water issues and ensure the achievement of SDG 6 and all water-related SDGs.





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Left: Laurent Theteen for Action Against Hunger