



# AGENDA FOR CHANGE

*Strengthening water, sanitation, and hygiene systems together.*



# GLOBAL STRATEGY 2023-2026



Agenda for Change members from Africa and Asia gathered for a Regional Learning Event in June 2022 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

# LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Our priorities for the next four years provide us with an exciting and timely opportunity to embed the transition to being a fully country-led collective while also enabling us to capitalise on the skills, capacities, and knowledge of all our members at all levels. Through the generation of robust evidence and practical guidance on which practices work to deliver nationally led water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) system strengthening, we will proactively demonstrate and communicate the unique contribution that collaborative action can make in delivering achievements towards SDG 6.

## THE CHALLENGE

Although global access to water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) services has increased globally in recent years, progress has been uneven within and across countries and at a slower rate than required to meet the targets of Sustainable Development Goal 6 (SDG 6), which demands universal and sustainable water and sanitation for all by 2030. According to the WHO and UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme (JMP), achieving universal coverage by 2030 will require a quadrupling of current rates of progress in safely managed drinking water services, safely managed sanitation services, and basic hygiene services. People with the lowest levels of access and services live in low-income countries, with the poorest, hardest to reach populations at risk of being left behind (ibid.).

Over the coming years, expected changes to the climate and water resource needs will continue to impact on the resilience of existing WASH services as well as complicate the extension and financing of new facilities. In many countries, the impacts of climate change are already being acutely felt, with events such as severe droughts and floods already compromising the functionality of WASH facilities<sup>1</sup>. Water shortages and demand for supplies coupled with poor environmental assessment practices and a lack

<sup>1</sup>WaterAid Study Report: climate change, water security and WASH in Cambodia, 2021

of appropriate regulations and management further weaken the likelihood of achieving SDG 6.

Given the complexities that the WASH sector is facing, systemic and sustained change can only happen when people and organisations work together through collective action. In turn, bringing about impact to enhance WASH systems strengthening can act as a driver for change in related sectors and contributes to the achievement of other SDGs. Catalysing a ripple effect across different sectors also enables the WASH sector to harness opportunities, such as climate finance, and to foster further partnerships for wider impact.

## ADDRESSING THE CHALLENGE

The WASH sector has long faced challenges in terms of the sustainability of investments and services, and SDG 6 requires WASH service improvements to be happening at scale. In response, many organisations have adapted their approaches to focus explicitly on building and strengthening systems rather than direct service provision and infrastructure development. Agenda for Change is a collaboration of such organisations that are also focused on the importance of collaboration and collective action for systems strengthening.

Agenda for Change believes that by working together to understand and address systemic gaps and to challenge the politics and norms that maintain the status quo, we can achieve a greater impact. Our member organisations promote harmonized district-level work to ensure everyone in the districts, municipalities, or cities where they work has adequate WASH services. They also ensure that robust national-level systems are in place to enable all districts to reach everyone, forever.



## SYSTEM STRENGTHENING

System strengthening involves taking actions and supporting interventions that are considered likely to strengthen one or more elements of a whole system. This includes strengthening both the factors (technology, financing, regulation, coordination, service delivery, etc.), as well as the capacity of actors and their inter-relationships, to improve the quality and sustainability of WASH services and ensure that all populations are served.

WASH systems are made up of complex, interconnected components that help the system to function; we refer to these components as building blocks. Governments, development partners, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are addressing service delivery issues by strengthening the institutions and central building blocks of WASH systems. Over time, as more building blocks are strengthened, we begin to see a strong and resilient WASH sector emerge.

Figure 1: Agenda for Change Systems Strengthening Building Blocks



Agenda for Change members from Honduras, Guatemala, and USA gathered for a Latin America Regional Meeting in Comayagua, Honduras in November 2022.

# AGENDA FOR CHANGE

## OUR VISION

We want to see strong water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) systems in place everywhere so that everyone has access to WASH services forever.

## OUR MISSION

Agenda for Change members take collective action to make nationally led WASH system strengthening the principal approach to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 6.

## WHO WE ARE

Established in May 2015, Agenda for Change is a collaboration of like-minded organizations (referred to as members<sup>2</sup>) that have adopted a set of common principles (see Annex 1). Our members commit to collectively advocate for, and support governments and other key WASH actors in, strengthening the WASH systems required to deliver universal, sustained access as outlined under SDG 6. Members contribute to WASH systems strengthening in more than 40+ countries.

Since its inception, Agenda for Change has evolved through stages of establishment, repositioning, and a re-visioning process which resulted in a reorganisation of the collective centred on enhancing country collaboration. We are a voluntary and unique collaboration with diverse members that have come together based on a collective recognition and mind-set that systems approaches are the best way to reach SDG 6.

Agenda for Change is not a registered or independent entity. We do not aspire to have Agenda for Change-branded efforts in every country. Rather, we

<sup>2</sup>Current members include: Aguaconsult, CARE, Center for Water Security and Cooperation, Concern Worldwide, CRS, Helvetas, IRC, Osprey Foundation, Splash, WaterAid, Water for Good, Water For People, and Welthungerhilfe.

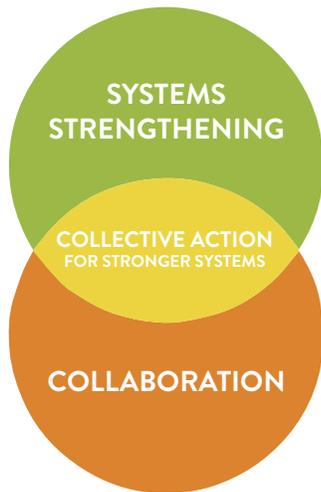
see the collaboration and its members as catalysts of collaborative system change and supporters of existing local and global networks, platforms, and priorities.

Agenda for Change is governed by a Global Hub comprising the General Assembly, Executive Committee, Membership Committee, and Secretariat. Currently there are nine country collaborations active in Cambodia, Ethiopia, Honduras, Ghana, Guatemala, Malawi, Nepal, Rwanda, and Uganda. Each has a designated lead member or hub which helps coordinate activities at the national level.



Figure 2: Agenda for Change Global Hub Structure

## HOW WE WILL ACHIEVE OUR GOALS



We take collective action, a process that brings actors together to agree on a common goal and approach, to develop shared metrics for measuring progress, and to plan joint activities which reinforce progress towards that goal.<sup>3</sup> Members remain fully independent but collaborate actively due to their appreciation of collective action and their desire to continue learning from one another.

Our members are systems practitioners and advocates of systems thinking with operational presence at the global, national, and district level. Members have a unique potential to act as change agents, because rather than wielding power or authority, they can add value by supporting leading actors or governments, by demonstrating localised system improvements, or stimulating change at scale through advocacy, learning, and communication.

Members are strengthening systems in different countries, using context-specific solutions, and working at different levels to help guide and inspire others, particularly NGOs but also public and private service providers, funders, academia, national multi-stakeholder platforms and others, to adopt systems thinking as the principal approach in the WASH sector.

NGOs can have a key role in encouraging collaboration and building partnerships that will facilitate more effective and coordinated performance of the system and can have a role in helping others to see the entire system.

<sup>3</sup>Lockwood 2019, Reflections on the 'Beyond Collaboration: Learning from the National and District-Level. Collective Action Efforts in WASH' session held during the IRC All Systems Go Symposium.

## WHAT MAKES US DISTINCT?

Country collaborations are at the centre of everything we do. This demonstrates our commitment to local leadership and being led by national priorities as well as embodying an anti-discrimination and inclusive agenda.

### Agenda for Change is:

- The only voluntary platform, in many countries, focused on how to practically achieve SDG 6 by applying a WASH systems strengthening approach.
- A catalytic, nimble, and flexible structure for collaboration, where members seek to understand and measure the impact of collective action at all levels.
- Building on resources (expertise, finance, knowledge, voice, time) of its like-minded, diverse members to leverage learning, sharing, and influencing opportunities.
- An effective communications and exchange channel within and across countries, taking national experiences to a global audience.

# STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Over the next four years, we will embed and operationalise the transition to being a country-driven global collective, whereby country collaborations inform and lead our priorities, thinking, and governance. As we embark on this strategic shift, we will also strengthen ways to capitalise and build on the contributions of members that do not have country level operations to enhance our knowledge, reach, and influence.

From 2023–2026, Agenda for Change will focus on three complementary and synergistic priorities.

We will:

**ENSURE COUNTRY COLLABORATIONS ARE EFFECTIVE, EFFICIENT, AND STRONG**

**INFLUENCE OTHERS TO ADOPT A COLLECTIVE ACTION APPROACH TO SYSTEMS STRENGTHENING**

**BUILD EVIDENCE AND KNOWLEDGE FOR SHARING AND INFLUENCING**

**And expanding our global footprint, through strategic partnerships and a renewed approach to membership, will act as an enabler to support the achievement of the three priorities.**

These shorter-term, four-year priorities will contribute to our longer-term Theory of Change<sup>4</sup> up to 2030 and will also strengthen Agenda for Change's internal systems and processes as a collective. Having a four-year time horizon, with specific milestones, also allows us the opportunity to make any

<sup>4</sup>Our revised Theory of Change up to 2030 is outlined in Annex 3 of this document.

course corrections in 2026/2027 as well as the agility and dynamism to remain relevant in a global and national context that is ever-changing.

The priorities have been agreed at the collective level through an iterative consultation process with all Agenda for Change constituencies. They are based on priorities identified by country collaboration leads and other members and remain flexible enough to be conceptualised as each county context requires. In addition, each country collaboration develops their own annual specific priorities and targets that contribute to these collective strategic priorities.

**Each priority area is split into sub-goals to aid operational planning and delivery, income generation, and to simplify how each can be measured.**

Collectively, the results<sup>5</sup> measured for each priority area will help us demonstrate how collective action for WASH systems strengthening is an effective approach to deliver achievements towards SDG 6.

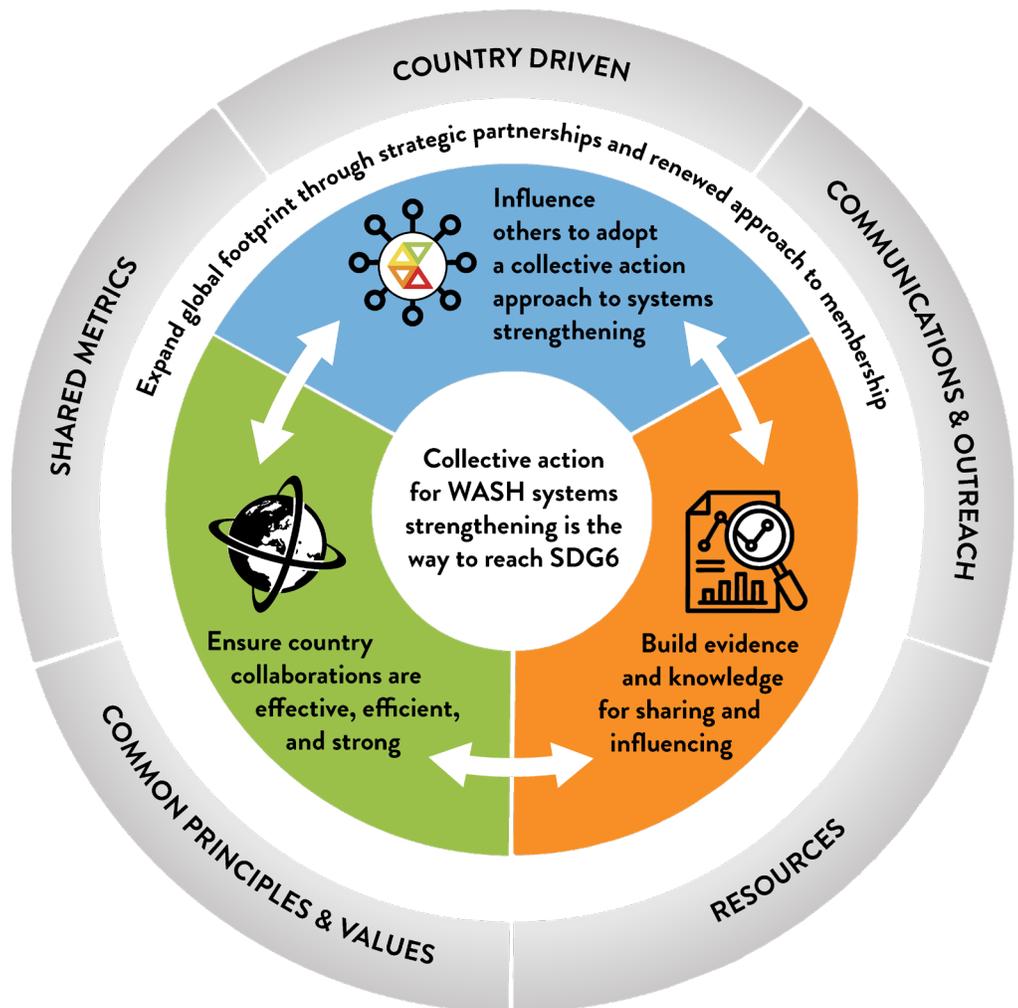


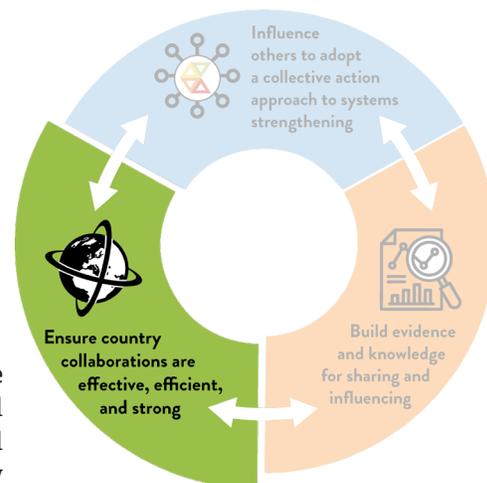
Figure 3: Agenda for Change Strategic Priorities 2023 - 2026

<sup>5</sup>A revised results framework and monitoring, evaluation and learning strategy accompanies this global strategy.

# ENSURE COUNTRY COLLABORATIONS ARE EFFECTIVE, EFFICIENT, AND STRONG

To foster strong country collaborations, we will continue to **catalyse durable collaboration** and **learning** on WASH systems strengthening at the national level. We aim to support each country collaboration on their individual journeys towards more effective collective action and will track their journey along the collaboration continuum to understand and measure progress (see Annex 2).

Country collaborations are made up of two or more members and other local stakeholders practically and proactively working together to be agents of change in driving systems strengthening. Where national WASH platforms or networks already exist, Agenda for Change seeks to collaborate with them and support further collective action on systems strengthening activities. Although there are currently nine country collaborations, we expect the number will vary over time.



## CATALYSING COLLABORATION

At the heart of Agenda for Change is the need for the country collaborations of members and others to drive a common agenda of support for national systems strengthening. Country collaborations have evolved in different countries in different ways, and engagement has not been restricted to members. Country collaborations have evolved where there has been greater enthusiasm and funding specifically for collaboration, from groups of organisations and individuals responsible for managing those country programmes.

Using the collaboration continuum as a self-assessment tool during regional meetings in 2022, the current country collaborations graded themselves at levels two and three along the spectrum. They also identified the changes, actions, and resources they need to move further along the continuum and to foster more 'mutually reinforcing activities' as well as exploring 'coordination mechanisms'. Overall, country collaborations want to strengthen their capacity, presence, recognition, evidence-base, and voice.

## LEARNING AND SHARING

Over time, members have recognised that their active collaboration in Agenda for Change has helped to accelerate mutual learning and peer sharing. Building learning and sharing between country collaborations remains a pivotal role for Agenda for Change. Over recent years, our Systems Learning Exchange, practical tools, and structured sharing opportunities across the collective have been widely appreciated. We will continue to take a demand-led approach to learning that addresses the priorities and interests of our members.

# HOW WILL THIS BE ACHIEVED?

Building on our experience to date and the needs identified by existing country collaborations, Agenda for Change will achieve this strategic priority by enhancing:



## CAPACITY

Providing technical assistance and peer support, through our wider membership. The Secretariat will also play a matchmaking role for technical and financial resources.



## LEADERSHIP

Clarifying the role of national, collective leadership and hub functions as well as the ability to mobilise joint resources.



## ACCESS TO FINANCE

Seed funding to further catalyse national collaboration.



## MEMBERSHIP

Reviewing and potentially growing country collaboration membership to align the composition with the priorities of the national context and members' willingness to proactively collaborate.



## PARTNERSHIP

Building or strengthening strategic relationships with key local, national, and regional (i.e., cross-country) organisations and other multi-stakeholder platforms to leverage voice and influence, e.g., national representatives of Sanitation and Water for All and the Global Water Partnership, existing national civil society platforms such as UWASNET Uganda, WESNET Malawi, FEDWASUN Nepal, RASGUA, PTPS Honduras, national/regional bodies, etc.

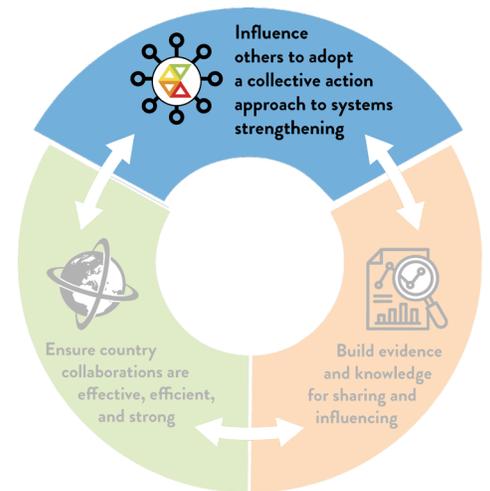


## LEARNING

Identifying key learning and knowledge development needs of national collaborators, supporting assessment and monitoring of the systems building block framework, and promoting cross-country sharing and evidence exchanges. Multi-portfolio NGOs can be valuable allies to leverage learning on aspects such as water resource management, gender equality and social inclusion, climate resilience, food security, etc.

# INFLUENCE OTHERS TO ADOPT A COLLECTIVE ACTION APPROACH TO SYSTEMS STRENGTHENING

We will continue to encourage, challenge, and support WASH systems strengthening **practices, policies, and funding** for members, funders, and other sector stakeholders. We will do this through our learning and sharing agenda, generating, and communicating evidence, and specific influencing activities at different levels (both externally and internally).



## HOW WILL THIS BE ACHIEVED?



### EXTERNALLY

For example, at the national level, country collaborations conduct collective advocacy for WASH systems approaches to be taken up and institutionalised by other NGOs, the private sector, and government-level stakeholders. Some country collaborations also influence, or are hoping to have more influence, at the regional level, for example with the Foro Centroamericano y de República Dominicana de Agua Potable y Saneamiento (FOCARD-APS) in Central America.

At the global level, members will continue to use the evidence generated at the country level to share lessons learned and experiences on what works to promote WASH systems strengthening. The overarching approach will be to strengthen our learning and documentation in the immediate term for current country collaborations and plan to broaden our influence/engagement in later years of the strategy.



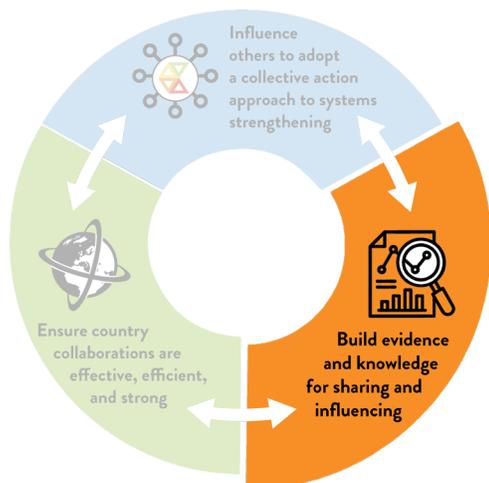
### INTERNALLY

Engagement in Agenda for Change supports members to adopt systems strengthening approaches at an organisational level. Learning exchanges with peers enable frank and practical discussion on ways to contextualise and internalise such approaches.

Global members play multiple roles in influencing others – as resource providers and supporters for country collaborations, as connectors and promoters, and as communicators able to reach diverse audiences.

During the next strategic period, we will develop simple ways for members to measure their internal changes towards institutionalising systems strengthening approaches. For example, by capturing information on how they have attracted financing for systems strengthening programs, on any internal mechanisms they may have put in place to measure their progress (such as program support or systems strengthening units), and on the types of partnerships they develop for systems approaches.

We will also use communications and outreach metrics to gauge our external influence, for example through dissemination tracking, network analysis, documenting the types and interest levels of stakeholders that are interested in becoming members or partners, and that attend our events.



# BUILD EVIDENCE AND KNOWLEDGE FOR SHARING AND INFLUENCING

We will continue to make the case that collective action for WASH systems strengthening enables and catalyses achievements towards SDG 6. **Evidence generation** at the national level on successful collective action approaches helps ground and inform our **learning, sharing, and influencing** on WASH systems strengthening at all levels.

## HOW WILL THIS BE ACHIEVED?



### KNOWLEDGE SHARING

Providing a platform for learning and knowledge development is a key component of Agenda for Change’s support to country collaborations and beyond. Together, our members develop tools, share resources, and practices of what approaches work for influencing, informing, and monitoring the building blocks of WASH systems strengthening implementation. Fostering peer exchange and knowledge sharing helps us to influence each other as well as other WASH sector stakeholders working at national, regional, and global levels. The resources and evidence we generate collectively aim to be practical and usable by others.



### EVIDENCE GENERATION

By facilitating this collaborative approach to evidence generation, we can collectively address the roadblocks to system strengthening. Learning priorities are initially identified by country collaborations – on both collaborative action processes and WASH systems strengthening implementation practices. Global members amplify the learning and evidence for internal and external influencing as well as enhancing our visibility and reach. We will measure our progress on this strategic priority by using existing outreach and communications trackers as well as through new outreach metrics for members.



Agenda for Change members stand and clap after a successful series of presentations during the Africa and Asia Regional Meeting in Addis Ababa in June 2022.

# EXPAND OUR GLOBAL FOOTPRINT – STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS AND MEMBERSHIP

To accelerate and widen the adoption of collective action for WASH systems strengthening, Agenda for Change seeks to purposefully engage with and influence other sector actors (and beyond). This intentional relationship building with strategic partners and a renewed approach to membership will contribute to each of the three strategic priorities listed above. Expanding our global footprint starts at the country level and where there is a commitment to collaborative action.

GROWTH PLAN				
LEVEL	COUNTRY COLLABORATION	WIDER/GLOBAL MEMBERSHIP	EXPANSION INTO NEW COUNTRIES	STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS
PURPOSE	Country collaborations lead process for national and 'global' membership.	Capitalise on interest/value add of potential new members.	Build on members' presence and capacities in other countries.	Increase the uptake of systems strengthening approaches.
APPROACH/ CRITERIA	Review composition to ensure it is aligned with specific goals, needs and criteria. Review list of potential new members.	Country collaborations recommend members for global level engagement (when present in two or more countries). General Assembly plays decision-making role.	Requires existing commitment to collaborative action. Existing members jointly identify potential new countries (1-2 per region). Not rapid growth – but based on our capacity to support, member willingness, readiness, etc.	Foster relationships and collaborate with other influential actors in the sector, such as Sanitation and Water for All.

Agenda for Change is developing and rolling out a renewed membership structure with further details on categories of members, their respective membership benefits, and their expected roles and responsibilities as a key part of the collective.



# TOGETHER

## ANNEX 1 JOINT PRINCIPLES

The agreement of a Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target of universal access to water, sanitation, and hygiene by 2030 requires a fundamental change in the way we in the sector work.

Delivering positive change in sector performance necessitates a system-wide approach that tackles all dimensions—policy, financing, institutions, and other key building blocks—of the water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) sector as whole. This will require a reformed agenda, based on a sound understanding of the political economy, at three levels of decision-making: city or district, national and global.

Recognizing that we will achieve more by working together, we have agreed that the principles below will guide our approach to ensure permanent water and sanitation services for all.

### GLOBAL LEVEL

We, as sector stakeholders, are committed to achieving the goal of universal access to WASH by 2030. Our mission is driven by evidence of the fundamental role of WASH in all development outcomes and in the broader poverty-eradication agenda. This target date is non-negotiable if we are to deliver on the internationally agreed SDGs.

Access to sustainable WASH services, as recognized by the United Nations (UN), is a fundamental human right. To achieve universal access to sustainable WASH services by 2030, all agencies must redouble their efforts and fundamentally change their practices.

We are convinced the sector can achieve lasting universal access by 2030 but understand that this will require new partnerships, better use of existing finances coupled with new funding sources, and a serious commitment to monitoring for improvement.

We know that governments must lead efforts and that external agencies must work in a way that supports and builds government capacity to lead and to succeed. We commit to work collectively and adhere to key behaviors that strengthen countries' capabilities to deliver permanent and accountable access to WASH services.

We know that work needs to be financed more creatively and effectively and must address all stages of the service delivery cycle. We know that financing must come from individuals, communities, and district and national governments, and be combined with and supported by traditional aid and/or philanthropy and crucial funding vehicles like loans, social impact investments, and bonds. No robust country plan aiming to achieve universal access by 2030 should fail because of a lack of finance.

We understand that achieving universal access to permanent WASH services requires improvement in integration and alliance-building with other sectors, including health, education, finance, and the environment.

We commit to building on and supporting country-led institutions, processes, and networks aiming to achieve universal access by 2030, and will find creative ways to support countries' participation and leadership in broader sector initiatives like Sanitation and Water for All.

# NATIONAL LEVEL

Achieving universal access to WASH services that last is only possible with government leadership and political commitment, and when policy makers and service providers are held to account for responsive services that reach all communities.

Strong institutions that are accountable, responsive, and well-coordinated are necessary to deliver and sustain services. All members will work together to strengthen key sector building blocks, including:

- Sector policy/strategy
- Sector coordination
- Sector finance
- Institutional arrangements—which include frameworks for regulation and accountability
- Performance monitoring—which can lead to regulation of service providers and services, and ensures inevitable challenges are understood and addressed in a timely way

We commit to investing and participating in a continuous process of planning, monitoring, assessment, and corrective action. The ability of a sector to continuously learn and adapt, both for policy and operational practice, should be a core requirement and not viewed as an optional extra.

To deliver universal services, we must tackle inequalities by targeting resources at the most marginalized and excluded people and ensure the articulation of their rights to WASH services is met with responsive and accountable service provision—in short, including everyone.

National policymaking and monitoring systems should enable—and be informed by—implementation processes at the district level, especially where there are significant gaps between stated policy and actual practices.

# CITY AND DISTRICT LEVEL

Success will mean every household and public institution (e.g., schools and clinics) has access to water and sanitation services that last. Although hard to achieve, this is measurable and is the cornerstone of our efforts, with a focus on nobody being left behind.

Success at district and city levels will require new alliances and working relationships between local government, local communities, and the local private sector, with governments taking the lead. External agencies should work with all these players to ensure success—and we commit to doing this in our work.

We are not ideological about who provides WASH services. The outcome we seek is simply that water flows and sanitation and hygiene services are guaranteed for all, permanently. Different management arrangements can be constructed to achieve this result: public, private, community or combined.

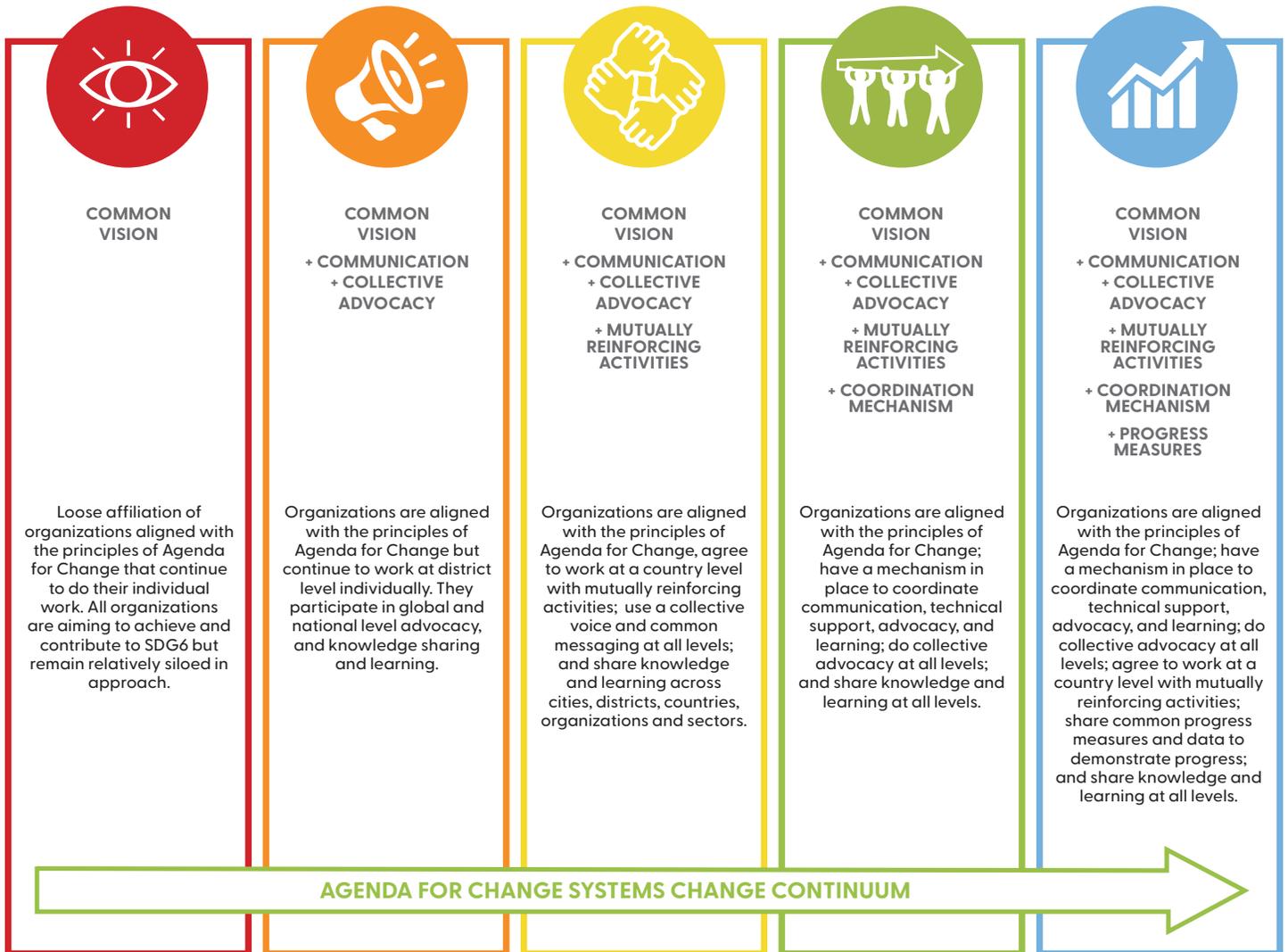
Achievement of district-wide or city-wide access requires planning, including comprehensive investment plans. We will support district-level and city-level agencies to coordinate around the development and delivery of these plans. As external agents we and others must respect the primacy of district and city-level planning, coordinated, and led by local government.

District-based or city-based models of universal service provision should inform national (and global) policy, programming, finance, systems, and practice priorities. We commit to investing in documentation and learning from our own and others' work at the local level, and to dissemination of this to higher levels through learning mechanisms.

The monitoring systems used by all WASH agencies should aim to strengthen local and national monitoring systems, and, where these systems are available and sufficiently robust, to use them for their own monitoring. We commit to jointly ensuring community empowerment and engagement is recognized as a fundamental part of ensuring the rights of all to WASH services are realized and ensuring that governments and service providers are held to account.

# ANNEX 2

## CONTINUUM



# ANNEX 3

## THEORY OF CHANGE AND ACTION

