



4 year old Owen Kayinga washing his hands with water from a UNICEF donated water tap, in Malawi.

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# Spotlight on the Global Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Thematic Fund 2024



UNICEF works across 12 of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to bring about positive change for children. The Global Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) Thematic Fund makes vital contributions to SDG 6: Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.

## 1. UNICEF's Global WASH Thematic Fund: Ensuring safe water and good hygiene to keep children alive

Clean water, sanitation and hygiene: Foundations for health and prosperity

Clean water, safe sanitation and good hygiene are essential to every child's health, dignity and opportunity. Yet for millions of children, these basic rights remain out of reach, especially in fragile, underfunded or climate-vulnerable settings.

When water flows, so does progress. Reliable access to water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services keeps children healthy and in school, empowers women and girls, reduces the risk of conflict, and strengthens entire health systems. It also drives economic growth.

That is why UNICEF's WASH work is not just about delivering services; it is about building resilient communities and systems that last. The Global WASH Thematic Fund is UNICEF's most strategic vehicle for delivering impact at scale and powering long-term, inclusive and climate-resilient WASH solutions wherever they are needed most.

Flexible funding is what makes this possible. While short-term or restricted financing can limit progress, thematic funding allows UNICEF to respond to country needs, support innovation and build the systems that sustain results.

As 2030 approaches, the Global WASH Thematic Fund remains central to UNICEF's ambition: a world where every child grows up safe, healthy and hydrated, and where no community is left behind.

**"Water and sanitation are more than basic needs. They are the foundation of dignity, health and opportunity. Thanks to your continued partnership, UNICEF is delivering life-changing services for children today and helping build stronger systems for the future."**

Kitty van der Heijden, Deputy Executive Director, Partnerships, UNICEF

## 2. Financial results

### Investment catalysing progress for generations

Across decades of work, governments, households and long-term partner commitments have driven some of the greatest gains in global WASH – helping countries deliver inclusive, resilient and sustainable solutions that reach every child, everywhere.

In 2024, the Global WASH Thematic Fund mobilized US\$7.1 million in contributions from committed public and private partners. UNICEF extends sincere thanks to all partners the governments of Sweden and Luxembourg, and private

sector partners Gardena and others, who contributed to the Fund, including through National Committees. These flexible, catalytic investments are helping meet urgent needs today while building public systems that will safeguard children's health, safety and dignity for generations to come.

The path to universal WASH access is long, but thanks to UNICEF's partners, real progress is being made. Together, we are helping governments move further, build stronger and achieve more – one community, one system and one child at a time.

Top Global WASH Thematic Fund partners by contributions received, 2024<sup>1</sup>

Sector	Donor	Amount (US\$)
Public	Sweden	4,371,054
	Luxembourg	770,697
	Canadian UNICEF Committee	722,710
	Portuguese Committee for UNICEF	576,206
	Belgian Committee for UNICEF	185,604
	Dutch Committee for UNICEF	160,927
Private	United States Fund for UNICEF	111,729
	Slovenian Foundation for UNICEF	49,421
	United Kingdom Committee for UNICEF	43,570
	Hong Kong Committee for UNICEF	33,799
	Danish Foundation for UNICEF	23,274
	Korean Committee for UNICEF	20,261
	Spanish Committee for UNICEF	12,329
	International online donations	974
Grand total		7,082,555

Note: Numbers may not add up due to rounding

<sup>1</sup> The thematic funding contributions relate to the Strategic Plan 2022–2025.





8 year old Karen, Vilma and Rosita stand outside the bathroom doors in the Quebrada Nacimiento Caroja Rural Mixed School in Guatemala. Through fun and educational activities, they learned about the importance of hygiene, handwashing, and staying healthy.

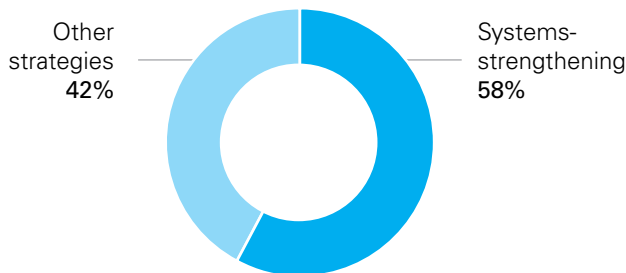
© UNICEF/UNI783689/Lopez

### Why flexible funding matters

What sets the Global WASH Thematic Fund apart is not just where the money goes, but how it works. With flexible, multi-year funding invested over the four-year period of UNICEF’s Strategic Plan (2022–2025), UNICEF can adapt to country needs, scale effective interventions and invest in the systems that make WASH access sustainable and equitable. This flexibility is vital. It enables UNICEF to go beyond project-based delivery and help build national systems that last.

In 2024, UNICEF incurred US\$7.5 million in flexible thematic funding expense from the WASH Thematic Fund. Every flexible dollar helps bring the world closer to universal, sustainable WASH access and protects the health, dignity and futures of children and their communities for generations to come.

UNICEF expense by programme strategy, 2024



In 2024, **58 per cent** of WASH thematic funding was spent on strengthening WASH systems.

Note: The category ‘other’ consists of strategies that enable systems-strengthening, including advocacy and communications; social and behaviour change; data and research; digital transformation; innovation; partnerships and engagement; and support to programme delivery.

### A call to scale what works

Achieving SDG 6 – universal access to clean water and sanitation – is not a distant aspiration. It is an urgent, achievable imperative. But it will not be accomplished through infrastructure alone. True, lasting progress requires a shift towards strengthening the systems that deliver safe WASH every day, in every context.

The Global WASH Thematic Fund is UNICEF’s most strategic vehicle for making this shift. It fuels climate-resilient solutions, advances equity and helps governments build inclusive, shock-resistant WASH systems that reach the most vulnerable and endure over time.

These are not short-term projects. They are transformative investments that improve health, uphold dignity and unlock opportunity for generations to come.

**We invite more partners to join us.** With flexible, long-term support, we can scale what works, close the access gap and build a future where every child grows up safe, healthy and hydrated.



### Transparency with Thematic Funding

UNICEF has strong financial transparency record including thematic funding. We encourage UNICEF partners to the Global WASH Thematic Fund to visit the Transparency Portal and access real-time information on spending in the countries receiving funds.

### 3. The footprint of the Global WASH Thematic Fund

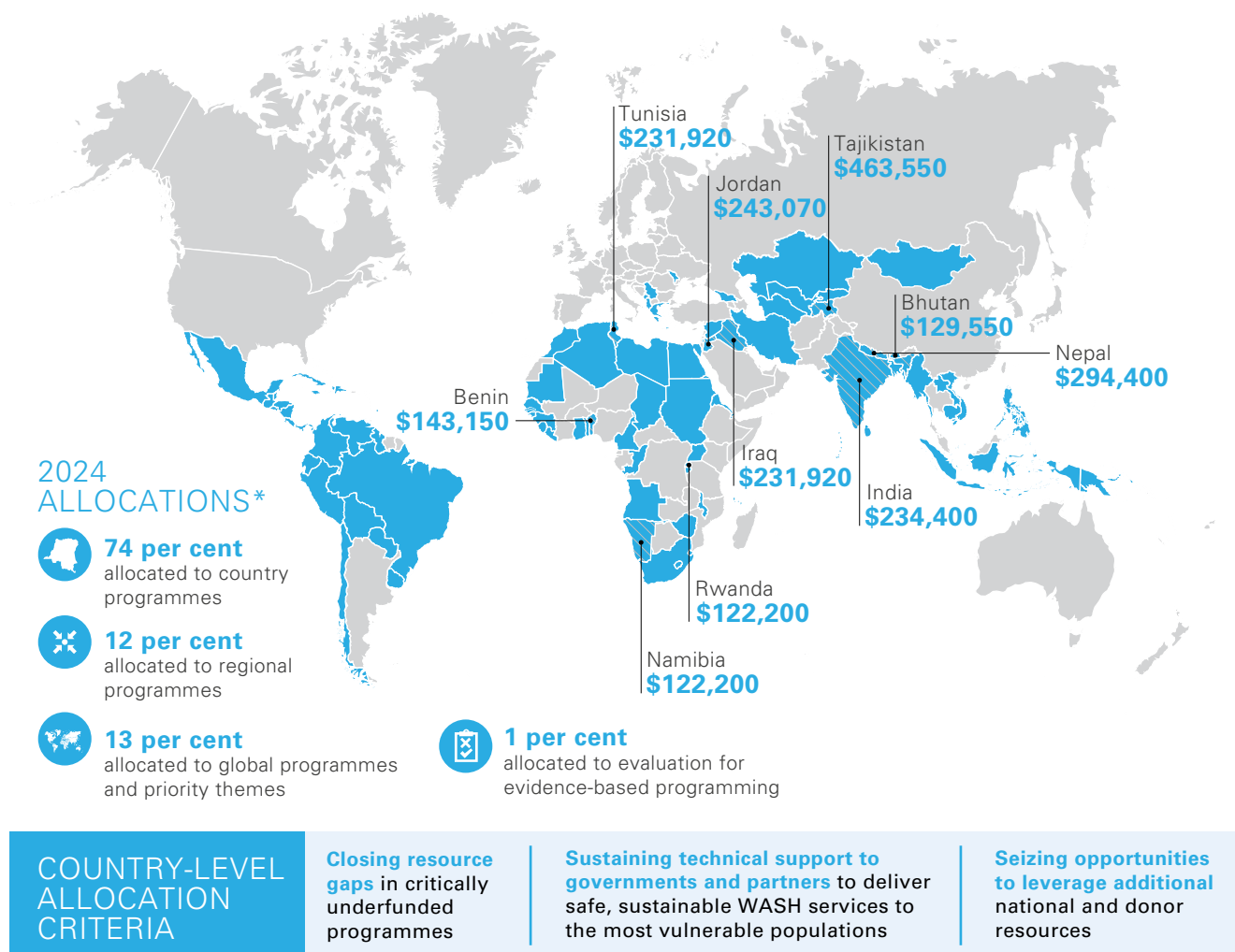
The reach of the Global WASH Thematic Fund spans all seven UNICEF regions, delivering impact across three interconnected levels:

- At the **country level**: Investments support governments to expand services and national service delivery platforms for WASH.
- At the **regional level**: Investments support technical guidance, quality assurance and coordination for cross-country learning and adoption of promising practices.

- At the **global level**: Investments support UNICEF's technical leadership in generating evidence, tools and guidance that drive impact across the entire WASH portfolio and benefit children worldwide.

Each level reinforces the others, enabling UNICEF to drive sustainable, system-wide improvements in access to WASH services.

Global WASH Thematic Fund allocations around the world<sup>2</sup>



Note: The map is stylized and not to scale. It does not reflect a position by UNICEF on the legal status of any country or area or the delimitation of any frontiers

<sup>2</sup> The map shows all countries that received allocations from the Global WASH Thematic Fund between 2022 and 2024. The 10 highest allocations in 2024 are shown with full amounts.

## 4. From programmes to policies: A systems shift in WASH

The scale of unmet need in WASH is vast, but so is UNICEF's ambition. Across every region, the Global WASH Thematic Fund is helping drive a paradigm shift: from fragmented service delivery to strong, integrated systems that place WASH at the heart of child survival, health and development.

UNICEF's systems-strengthening model is anchored in workforce development, policy and legislative reform, social and behaviour change, data and evidence, infrastructure for service delivery and sustainable financing – and proven in delivering measurable and holistic results.

In 2024, flexible thematic funding played a catalytic role across UNICEF's global WASH portfolio, empowering UNICEF to scale what works, support national priorities and deliver high-quality WASH services where they are needed most, from schools and health centres to the most remote and crisis-affected communities.

Below are some headline sector results for which Global WASH thematic funding, as part of a broader portfolio of funding, was a key contributor.

### Infrastructure for service delivery

**Robust WASH infrastructure is essential for protecting child health, advancing gender equity and enabling sustainable development.** From schools and hospitals to remote villages and informal settlements, UNICEF helps ensure reliable access to safe water, dignified sanitation and basic hygiene – even in the most challenging contexts. Where possible, UNICEF also supports the installation of solar-powered systems to improve sustainability, and works to ensure that WASH facilities are inclusive, climate-resilient and gender-transformative.

In 2024, UNICEF helped almost 9,000 schools and nearly 4,000 health facilities reach basic WASH service levels across both humanitarian and development settings.

Direct support from UNICEF contributed to 6.7 million people accessing climate-resilient water systems, 3 million people using improved climate-resilient sanitation, and nearly 2,118 solar-powered systems being installed.

Flexible thematic funding has been instrumental in these results at the country level:

- In **Guinea-Bissau**, investments in WASH infrastructure improved access to education and health services. UNICEF constructed solar-powered water systems in 7 schools, built inclusive, gender-transformative latrines in 11 schools, and rehabilitated facilities in 13 more — reaching nearly **23,900 students**. Administrative data showed a **25 per cent increase in girls' school attendance**, highlighting the transformative impact of safe, private, menstrual hygiene-friendly WASH facilities.
- In **Nepal**, UNICEF significantly scaled up access to safe water and sanitation in hard-to-reach areas. In 2024, nearly **166,500 people** were reached with safe water – a 76 per cent increase from 2023 – while more than **55,000 people** gained access to basic sanitation, a 39-fold increase since 2023. UNICEF also supported WASH facilities in 21 schools and 17 health facilities, contributing to a sharp drop in under-five diarrhoea rates, by a third over three years.
- In the **Republic of Moldova**, UNICEF scaled up sustainable WASH facilities and services in **125 schools**, ensuring long-term, uninterrupted access for thousands of schoolchildren.

These are not just infrastructure upgrades; they are investments in dignity, health, learning and opportunity. With sustained flexible funding, UNICEF can continue to deliver climate-smart, scalable and inclusive WASH infrastructure where it is needed most.



10-year-old Ayesha, from Paktia province is washing her hands and face using water tap provided by UNICEF at Torkham Zero Point, Afghanistan.

© UNICEF/UNI823682/Azizi





Terabovo Primary Public School, Commune of Sihanamaro, Ambovombe District, Androy Region, Madagascar : group photo of smiling schoolgirls coming to collect water from the school's standpipe.

© UNICEF/UNI675235/Ramasomanana

## Workforce development

**Behind every functioning water point, every hygienic school and every safe toilet is a trained professional making it happen.** From community hygiene promoters to engineers, teachers and sanitation workers, WASH personnel are the backbone of resilient WASH systems.

UNICEF's Global WASH Thematic Fund plays a vital role in strengthening this workforce, building the technical expertise, community trust and local capacity that make WASH services sustainable. Through targeted investments in training, supervision and tools, UNICEF ensures that WASH workers can deliver safe, climate-resilient services in the places children need them most.

In 2024, UNICEF supported 91 countries to integrate climate action, disaster risk reduction and environmental management into national education systems and curricula, helping to build the next generation of climate-resilient leaders and educators.

Country-level thematic investments brought this vision to life:

- In **Malawi**, the installation of solar-powered water systems brought safe water to **197,000 people**. To ensure sustainability, UNICEF trained **700 water point committee members** to manage, maintain and monitor these systems effectively, reinforcing local ownership and long-term impact.
- In **Viet Nam**, more than **3,350 WASH professionals** – including school teachers and health officers – were trained in climate-resilient WASH, social and behaviour change, renewable energy, and water safety planning. These efforts led to the adoption of local water safety plans and new strategies to drive sustainable improvements in sanitation and hygiene practices.

WASH systems cannot function without skilled people. By investing in those on the front lines, UNICEF helps communities take ownership of their WASH services – improving resilience, reducing waterborne disease, and ensuring that safe water and sanitation are delivered with dignity, quality and care.

## Legal and policy change

**Strong water and sanitation systems require more than pipes and pumps; they need policies, budgets and legal frameworks that guarantee every child's right to clean water and hygiene.** UNICEF works closely with governments to embed WASH in national development strategies, climate policies and public budgets, turning best practice into lasting policy.

In 2024, UNICEF supported 40 countries to integrate climate-resilient WASH into national climate frameworks, including National Adaptation Plans, Nationally Determined Contributions and operational programmes. These efforts are helping governments align WASH with climate commitments, access climate finance and strengthen resilience at scale.

Across regions, UNICEF's policy and advocacy efforts with thematic funding helped unlock domestic financing and elevate WASH on national agendas:

- In **Tajikistan**, UNICEF worked with the government to embed sanitation and hygiene into the National Water Sector Strategy and the Water and Sanitation Programme. These strategies now align with global standards, incorporating WHO–UNICEF Joint Monitoring indicators to improve tracking and accountability.

- In **Tunisia**, health centres were facing challenges related to the availability of safe water, placing children at heightened risk. UNICEF supported the Ministry of Health to establish a multisectoral committee to address systemic WASH challenges, leading to the development of a national plan to improve WASH services in health care, in the context of water scarcity.

By shaping policies from within, UNICEF is helping governments create the legal and financial conditions for universal, climate-smart WASH access, securing results not just today but for generations to come.

## Social and behaviour change for lasting impact

**Infrastructure alone does not guarantee sustained safe WASH; changed behaviour does.** Empowering families and communities to make informed choices is central to UNICEF's WASH approach. By combining local knowledge with scientific insight, UNICEF works to break down barriers, shift social norms and foster environments where healthy WASH behaviours can flourish and endure.

In 2024, UNICEF supported eight government-led workshops on safely managed sanitation in Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad, Kenya, Madagascar, Mozambique, Nigeria and the Republic of the Congo. These efforts strengthened national capacities, clarified institutional responsibilities and advanced systems-strengthening strategies to accelerate progress on sanitation.

Flexible thematic funding helped bring social and behaviour change strategies to life across diverse contexts:

- In **Myanmar**, UNICEF and partners combined Community-Led Total Sanitation (CLTS) with interpersonal communication strategies to reduce open defecation. The approach helped more than **20,800 people** in 63 communities achieve Open Defecation Free (ODF) status – an increase from 48 to 96 per cent in targeted areas.
- In **Jordan**, despite declining groundwater reserves, UNICEF ensured continued access to safe WASH services for **128,000 refugees**. Community-led hygiene promotion helped instil a culture of conservation and personal responsibility, ensuring sustainable use of water and sanitation services in constrained environments.
- In **Senegal**, with UNICEF support, 40 villages in the Louga region have achieved ODF status. This has improved sanitation conditions for over **15,000 people** and enhanced safety and dignity, especially for adolescent girls and young women. Additionally, 500 households with severely malnourished children received hygiene kits, and 40 water points were inspected to ensure the quality of drinking water.

By placing communities at the centre of change, UNICEF is helping to build habits that protect health, conserve resources and promote dignity, making WASH improvements truly transformative and long-lasting.

## Data, research and evidence for WASH solutions

**Reliable data, rigorous research and sound evidence are essential for strengthening WASH systems and delivering long-term results.** UNICEF's commitment to evidence-based programming is helping governments and partners turn information into impact – guiding decisions, shaping policy and unlocking solutions that are tailored to real needs and risks.

In 2024, UNICEF completed multisectoral studies in 67 countries exploring the intersection of climate, environment, disaster risk and child vulnerability – a 49 per cent increase from 2023. These studies are shaping risk-informed planning, budgeting and advocacy in collaboration with national governments and development partners.

In 2024, 45 country offices reported that key national climate documents were being developed or updated and reflecting climate-resilient WASH. For example, in Uganda, UNICEF supported the government to draft the world's first WASH National Adaptation Plan, which is now being completed.

Country-level thematic investments in WASH data systems have turned knowledge into concrete progress:

- In **Madagascar**, UNICEF enhanced national WASH data platforms, enabling 1,200 users across 70 organizations to better collect, analyse and visualize WASH information for decision-making and service improvement.
- In **Ecuador**, UNICEF co-developed national guidance on rural water services, promoting sustainable, community-led practices that expand access to safe drinking water for the country's most vulnerable populations.
- In **Guinea**, UNICEF collaboration with the government and partners has helped the country integrate climate resilience into WASH services and strengthen sustainable WASH initiatives in vulnerable communities. UNICEF, together with the National Committee on Climate Change, submitted a proposal to the National Development Budget to secure funding for climate-resilient infrastructure.

UNICEF's investments in data systems and evidence generation are strengthening national capacity – helping countries build WASH systems that are accountable, responsive and resilient in the face of climate, economic and demographic pressures.



## Financing the future of WASH

**Building strong WASH systems begins with sustained, strategic financing.** UNICEF works alongside governments to mobilize national budgets, secure international support and ensure effective allocation of resources, making access to clean water, sanitation and hygiene not just an aspiration but a guaranteed public good for every school, health facility and community.

In 2024, momentum grew across regions to elevate WASH as a political and financial priority. Political leadership was reinforced through high-level platforms, including a landmark Finance Ministers meeting on WASH and a Heads of State initiative. These efforts resulted in new government agreements in Ghana, Indonesia and South Sudan, signalling renewed commitment to national WASH goals.

At the global level, advocacy by UNICEF and the World Health Organization helped secure a G20 Call to Action on WASH, officially recognizing the sector's critical role in advancing child health, nutrition and sustainable development, and urging governments to scale up investment.

This advocacy translated into concrete national action:

- In **Iraq**, UNICEF supported the government to develop Water and Wastewater Master Plans across 15 governorates. Associated frameworks have facilitated government financing and allocations, and research is helping update the per capita daily share of potable water – a key input for the master plans.
- In **Cuba**, UNICEF supported the government to develop the Climate Resilient WASH Sector Strategic Plan and Finance Strategy and an associated climate rationale. These key resources and training have helped the government prepare for Green Climate Fund financing. The plan and strategy now serve as the national road map for resilient, future-ready WASH services in Cuba.

These results underscore how catalytic funding, paired with strong technical partnerships and high-level advocacy, can unlock transformative investments, driving systemic improvements and ensuring WASH is sustainably financed for generations to come.

## Results that last

In 2024, UNICEF's strategic WASH investments delivered tangible, life-changing results for millions of children and families, addressing urgent needs while strengthening the systems sustaining progress over time. The Global WASH Thematic Fund contributed to meaningful progress at scale:

- Over **33 million people** gained access to safe water that is available when and where it is needed.
- More than **18 million people** gained access to basic sanitation services, improving health, dignity and safety.
- Over **19 million people** gained access to basic hygiene – a cornerstone of disease prevention and child survival.

These are not just numbers. They represent healthier lives, restored dignity, safer learning environments and stronger communities. Every new connection to clean water or safe sanitation is part of a broader system transformation – one that will continue to deliver results for years to come.



Scan the QR code or click on the image to read UNICEF's Data Companion and Scorecard for more information on progress against SDG and Strategic Plan targets. Thematic Funding as part of UNICEF's overall funding portfolio contributes to this progress.

## 5. Impact story

### From riverbed to resilience: Ending open defecation in Toro, Nigeria

In Toro, Nigeria's largest local government area (LGA), open defecation was once a way of life. "We didn't see anything wrong with it," recalls Yusuf Sambo, a 56-year-old farmer who has spent his life cultivating crops along the Gwolchaski River. "Everyone drank from the river – and defecated beside it."

For decades, that same river was the community's only source of water for drinking, cooking and farming. The health consequences were severe. Across Nigeria, unsafe sanitation contributes to waterborne diseases that kill more than 70,000 children under five every year.

In 2018, Nigeria declared a state of emergency in the WASH sector and launched the national 'Clean Nigeria: Use the Toilet' campaign. That same year, UNICEF and the Bauchi State Government launched a bold action plan to make Toro ODF.

#### The plan was ambitious, but it is working.

With support from the Global WASH Thematic Fund, UNICEF helped drive a full systems transformation in Toro. CLTS mobilized families and leaders to change harmful

norms. Community WASH committees were formed to take local ownership. Advocacy efforts helped pass a new sanitation bylaw, giving legal weight to enforcement. Schoolchildren were trained to raise awareness and hold adults accountable, even performing skits at public events to educate their communities.

The programme also created economic opportunity. A toilet-business-owner initiative made it easier for families to install improved latrines, reducing the ratio from 15 people per toilet to just 5 in many communities.

Today, Toro is one of only 7 LGAs in Bauchi State officially declared ODF – and one of just 93 ODF LGAs in the country. UNICEF has supported 130 of Nigeria's 142 validated ODF LGAs, helping to strengthen national and local sanitation systems, generate demand, expand sanitation markets and unlock access to finance.

Progress is accelerating. Between 2021 and 2024, the number of ODF LGAs in Nigeria nearly doubled. But with 47 million people still practising open defecation, the journey is far from over.

Thanks to flexible thematic funding, UNICEF can continue replicating the success of Toro – scaling sustainable solutions, empowering communities and ensuring every child can grow up in a healthier, safer environment.



Villagers during a sanitation awareness meeting in Tsalibawa village, Sokoto State, Nigeria.

© UNICEF/UNI543843/Boman





Kim Sovantei (left), 6, and Tin Chantha, 6, wash their hands with other students at the newly installed Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) station at Sre Chhouk Primary School in Sre Chhouk Village, Cambodia.

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## 6. Hearing from our donors and partners

### Sida-Sweden and UNICEF: Advancing resilient WASH systems for every child

UNICEF sincerely thanks the Government of Sweden for its steadfast commitment to children's rights as our leading WASH partner. Sweden's extraordinary contribution, accounting for over 60 per cent of all Global WASH Thematic Fund support in 2024, has been transformative, providing catalytic support to strengthen WASH systems, promote climate resilience and deliver sustainable services for children and communities worldwide.

Sida's investment is strategically aligned with UNICEF's progress towards Goal Area 4 of its Strategic Plan and SDG 6 – ensuring access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene for all, particularly in fragile, rural and underserved contexts. Through UNICEF's strategic partnership with Sida, we have supported the adoption of inclusive WASH financing strategies, integrating sustainability into national monitoring systems, and helped countries develop climate resilience plans for lasting change.

Sida's funding has been crucial in scaling climate-resilient WASH programmes, significantly advancing UNICEF's work across the humanitarian, development and peace nexus, and successfully bridging humanitarian and development efforts. UNICEF thanks Sida for partnering to uphold children's dignity and health worldwide.

### GARDENA and UNICEF: Every drop counts for children

Since 2018, GARDENA, a leading brand for those passionate about their gardens, has partnered with UNICEF under the slogan "Every drop counts," supporting global WASH (Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene) initiatives. This collaboration aims to provide over 330,000 children and families access to clean drinking water by 2026.

GARDENA's support has enabled UNICEF to strengthen water and sanitation systems at scale—installing sustainable water infrastructure in schools and communities, deploying resilient solar-powered solutions in refugee camps, and implementing hygiene education programs. This holistic systems-strengthening approach ensures both immediate impact and long-term solutions, while maintaining rapid-response capacity for emergency water needs.

*"Our partnership with UNICEF reflects our commitment to responsible water use and ensuring that every child has access to safe water and sanitation."* - Maha Elkhartbotly, EVP Husqvarna Group and President Gardena Division, Member of Group Management

UNICEF deeply appreciates GARDENA's unwavering partnership in driving progress toward Sustainable Development Goal 6 ensuring access to clean water, sanitation, and hygiene for every child, everywhere.



## Spotlight on the Global WASH Thematic Fund

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