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Normative and operational activities of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme, including updates on the country programmes in Lao PDR and Kenya, on Global Water Operators' Partnerships Alliance (GWOPA) and on urban crisis prevention and response initiatives

AdHoc Working Group on Programmatic, Budgetary and Administrative Matters
26 October 2026

Update on GWOPA Global Programme



Programme context: Addressing the global housing, water and sanitation crisis

The scale of the crisis demands urgent, coordinated action. Deficits in housing, land and basic services remain tightly intertwined

1B+

people in overcrowded informal settlements with inadequate housing

2.1B

people lacking safely managed drinking water

3.4B

people lacking safely managed sanitation

50–70%

projected increase in urban water demand over the next three decades

285,000

utilities globally face inadequate infrastructure, limited finance, rapid urban growth and rising climate pressures

Strengthening utilities is fundamental to realizing human rights, not only to water and sanitation, but to housing. They act locally to help bridge the gap.

USD 114 Billion/year needed to meet SDG 6 water and sanitation targets

Global Water Operators' Partnerships Alliance (GWOPA)

493

WOPs Established

388+

Utilities supported

70+
countries

63M

People with Better Services

- Established in 2009 upon recommendation of the UN Secretary-General's Advisory Board on Water and Sanitation, the Alliance promotes **not-for-profit, peer-support partnerships to strengthen utilities**.
- **Water Operators' Partnerships (WOPs)** advance Sustainable Development Goal 6 and the New Urban Agenda's commitment to enhancing public water and sanitation utilities to improve and expand service delivery.
- GWOPA has built a global movement for Water Operators' Partnerships through over 300 institutional members, with uptake globally benefiting at least 388 utilities through 493 partnerships. 59 per cent are between operators in the same region.





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Global Mandates and Commitments

"We will work to **equip public water and sanitation utilities with the capacity to implement sustainable water management systems**, including sustainable maintenance of urban infrastructure services, through capacity development, with the goal of progressively eliminating inequalities and promoting both **universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water for all and adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene for all.**"

Article 120 of the NUA addressed by GWOPA



GWOPA's 2023 Water Action Agenda commitment (#SDGAction50781) encourages governments, financiers and utilities worldwide to implement at least 100 new partnerships by 2030, of which 40 were initiated as of August 2026.

Localizing SDG 6- Transforming Access to Water by Strengthened Capacity of Operators Closest to Water Provision



GWOPA contributing to the central role of basic services in UN-Habitat 2026-2029 Strategy.

GWOPA operationalizes UN-Habitat's mandate by fortifying service providers to be agents of sustainable urban development.



2026 UN Water Conference

GWOPA implementation of the UN-Habitat 2026-2030 Strategy: Normative and operational linkages



Research on WOP practice

Global Outlook on Water and Sanitation Service Providers; special issue of the Journal of Water, Sanitation and Hygiene for Development on WOPs



Data platforms and tools

WOPs Observatory; Partnership Management Platform (PMP); Global WOPs Community of Practice (2,300+ members from 850+ utilities in 135 countries)



Advocacy and convening

Six biennial Global WOPs Congresses; the utility voice at World Urban Forums, COPs and UN Water Conferences

Normative to Operational

Research such as the Global Outlook guides WOP practice/design. PMP helps plan and implement WOPs, and the Community of Practice and Global Congresses carry peer lessons to utilities.



Operational to Normative

Impact assessments and lessons from WOPs shape GWOPA's strategy. The WOPs Observatory documents results and trends, and country cases and the utility voice reach global audience.

Peer partnerships

EU-WOP, Citywide Inclusive Sanitation, DA17, UNICEF Ukraine

Stronger utilities

Non-revenue water, water quality, billing, pro-poor connections and sanitation regulation

Catalytic country funds

Leveraged by UN-Habitat in Peru, Nepal and Kosovo* to advocate for WOPs

Linking UN-Habitat's global normative work with country operations, ensuring mutual learning through collaboration in WOPs.



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From capacity to results: the impact of EU-WOPs Phase 1

Impact



368,997

people gained access to an improved drinking water source

28,145

people gained access to improved sanitation

53M

people served by the 35 utilities supported, in 20 countries

7,976

staff trained by operators

Institutional change



94%

of operators improved operational, social or financial performance

79%

strengthened organizational capacity

65%

integrated climate, human rights or gender dimensions

8

operators secured additional infrastructure or operational financing

Capacity gains through WOPs



Network mapping & maintenance

Somalia, Uganda, Kenya, Ethiopia

Non-revenue water reduction

South Africa, Pakistan, Mali, Kenya

Drinking water quality monitoring

Somalia, Uganda

Customer complaints & billing

Somalia, Zambia, Pakistan

Low-income household connections

Ethiopia, Sierra Leone

STAFF CAPACITY BUILT

52% → 84% in 5 utilities (Kakamega, Kiambu, Mombasa, Vihiga, Kajiado, Kenya), mentored by Kisumu to extend services to Low-income Areas

PRO-POOR POLICIES IN USE

Guma (Sierra Leone) : social connection policy approved. **Bahir Dar (Ethiopia):** financing manual builds connections

SANITATION AND REGULATION

Kitwe (Zambia), Mombasa (Kenya), Banjarmasin (Indonesia): stronger regulation and faecal sludge management

EU-WOP PHASE I (USD9.9 MILLION, 2020-2025)

Partnerships

PROGRAMME PORTFOLIO 2026

Government of Germany - BMZ

2023–2028 (USD6.7mn)

EU-WOP Programme – Phase I

2022–2025 • 22 WOPs, 50+ partners (USD9.9mn)

EU-WOP Programme – Phase II

2026–2030 • 30 WOPs, focus on Africa (USD15.4mn)

Citywide Inclusive Sanitation

Jan 2021 – Dec 2026 (USD 4,547,346)

UN Development Account (DA17)

Jan 2025 – Jun 2028 • sanitation, Lao PDR & Nepal (USD \$750,200)

UNICEF Ukraine

Jun 2024 – Dec 2026 • 3 Ukrainian utilities (USD922,736)



Ukraine

Normative: risk-informed utility management, and lessons from utilities in crisis settings shared through the Community of Practice

Operational: WOPs strengthen three water and sanitation utilities, supporting sustainable recovery and building back better



Indonesia

Normative: sanitation regulation strengthened, building the enabling environment for sustained services

Operational: faecal sludge management improved at the Banjarmasin sanitation operator through its EU-WOP

Partnerships, collaborations and lessons learned



Durable change needs to be institutionalized

1

WOPs show lasting change where utility capacity is consolidated in an institutional instrument, such as a social connection policy or a tariff schedule.



Local government is critical

2

Strong engagement of local and regional governments is critical: long-term results depend on supportive governance, planning and financing frameworks.



Scaling South–South partnerships alongside North–South

3

59% of documented WOPs connect operators within the same region, with strong potential for growth. South–South and North–South partnerships complement each other in peer learning.



Sanitation needs a broad set of actors

4

Sanitation WOPs (SWOPs) require more actors, including regulators and small-scale service providers; GWOPA has adapted its approach accordingly.



Scaling up WOPs calls for joint efforts

5

WOPs have proven to be a scalable capacity development modality. Advocacy efforts in lead up to the UN Water Conference invites new partnerships to further strengthen essential service provider's capacities to achieve SDGs 6 and 11.



Thank you!

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