



African Population and
Health Research Center

POLICY BRIEF



ADVANCING ACTION ON GENDER, SANITATION AND QUALITY OF LIFE NEXUS IN KENYA'S WASH SECTOR

Executive Summary

Adequate sanitation and hygiene are critical determinants of health, social participation and dignity. In many Kenyan households, women and girls carry the main responsibility of sanitation and hygiene management. Yet, they are often missing in the decision-making platforms on sanitation investments, leaving their sanitation and hygiene needs largely unaddressed (Wendland et al., 2019). The responsibility of sanitation and hygiene management is time-intensive and physically demanding, limiting opportunities for education and income generation (Kayser et al., 2019). Inadequate access to safe, private, and hygienic sanitation facilities further undermines girls and women's mental health and overall quality of life (Caruso et al., 2017).

The 2024 Gender, Sanitation, and Quality of Life (SanQoL) study, conducted by the African Population and Health Research Center and the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, assessed sanitation-related experiences using the validated [SanQoL-5 tool](#)¹. While no significant gender gap was found in overall scores, women reported notably higher perceptions of **disgust and disease risk**

than men within the same households. These results reveal gender disparities in sanitation go beyond infrastructure access, to include disparities in sanitation experience. Bridging this gap requires gender-responsive policies, inclusive decision-making, and consistent monitoring of sanitation quality and safety to ensure all Kenyans can access dignified and health-protective sanitation.

The Government of Kenya (GoK) has made efforts in addressing gender in sanitation through various policy guidelines as highlighted in **Table 1** next page. However, important Quality of Life (QoL) aspects such as specific guidelines for designing and maintaining gender-responsive sanitation facilities remain largely unaddressed. This policy gap could hinder progress toward equitable, safe and high-quality sanitation experiences for women, men, girls, and boys.



¹ The SanQoL-5 tool measures people's multi-dimensional experiences of sanitation across five attributes: privacy, disgust, safety, shame, and disease (Ross, Greco, et al., 2021)

Context



Role and Responsibilities - In [7 out of 10 households](#), women and girls have the primary responsibility in sanitation and hygiene management which can be strenuous limiting their participation in education and economic opportunities.



Experiences - Inadequate access to safe and private sanitation facilities can have wide-ranging implications for women's mental health and quality of life (Caruso et al., 2017).



Agency - Often, men are in charge of the planning and decision-making for water and sanitation investments, and women's opinions are often not well-represented. This means that women's practical and strategic needs are often ignored (Wendland et al., 2019).

Quality of Life (QoL)

Quality of life (QoL) refers to an individual's **ability** to live the kind of life that they value and not just having the **freedom** to do so. Sanitation-related quality of life (SanQoL) extends beyond access to sanitation facilities to cover subjective sanitation-related experiences i.e. privacy, shame, disgust, disease, and safety and indicated in Figure 1 below.

The **Conceptual model for sanitation-related quality of life** model (Figure 1) shows that sanitation access and quality has a direct impact on five key domains: privacy (feeling secure and undisturbed during sanitation activities), shame (absence of embarrassment or stigma), disgust (comfort with sanitation facilities and practices), disease perception (level of health risk posed by use of sanitation facilities), and safety (absence of a physical threat/harm). In Kenya, where the level of sanitation is measured in terms of number of users and physical attributes, this conceptual framework helps measure sanitation related issues that go beyond physical access, to ensure gender responsiveness.

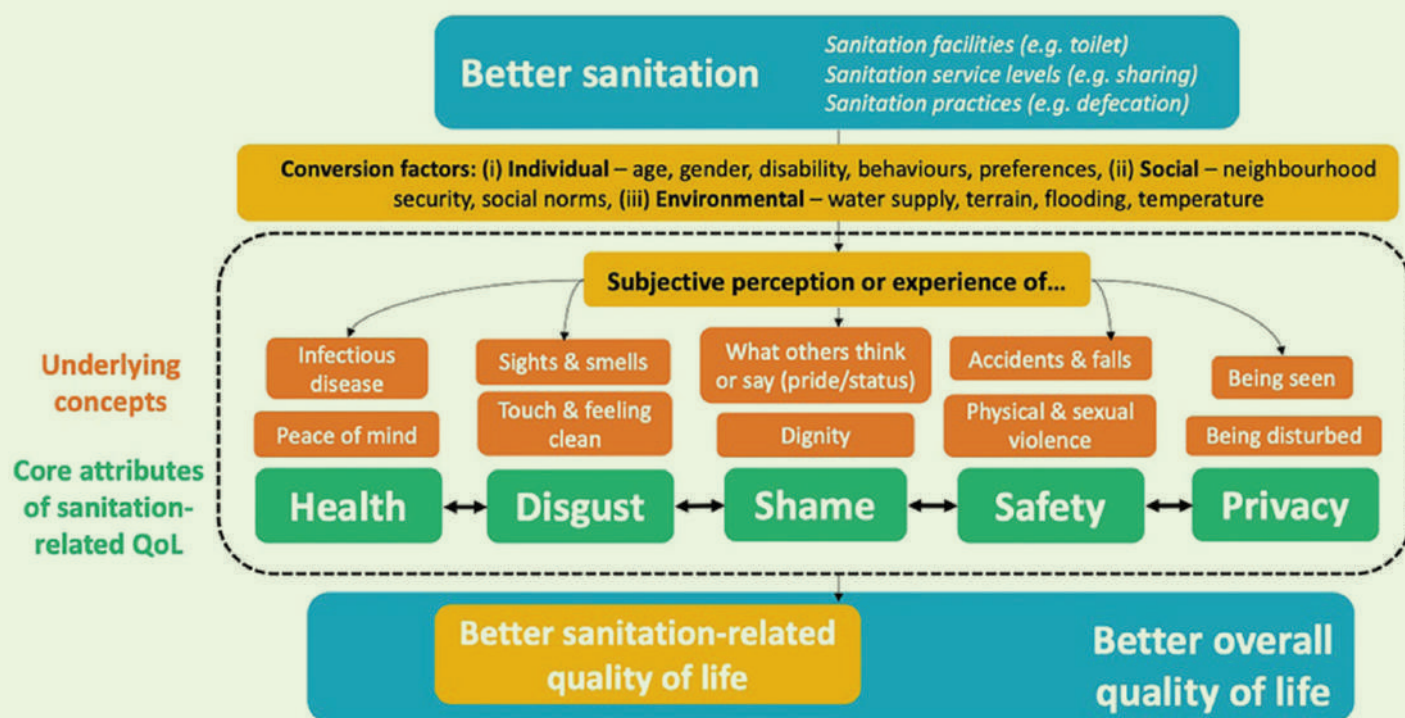


Fig.1 Conceptual model for sanitation-related quality of life (Ross et al., 2022)

The Gender, Sanitation & Quality of Life Study (SanQoL) in Kenya

The African Population and Health Research Center (APHRC) in partnership with the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM) conducted a study in 2024, aimed at estimating the gap in sanitation-related Quality of Life (QoL) outcomes between women and men (Marphatia et al., 2025). Data was collected through surveys from a representative sample of 600 households across the country. Sanitation related quality of life outcomes were measured using a validated tool ([SanQoL-5](#)) which measures subjective perception or experience of privacy, shame, disgust, disease and safety in sanitation services. This policy brief draws on evidence from this study and highlights some of the findings and policy recommendations.

Key Findings

- While overall scores were similar across genders, women consistently reported higher levels of disgust and perceived disease risk
- Individual SanQoL-5 attributes i.e. perceptions of disgust and disease risk were found to be significantly worse for women than men within the same household.

Current Policy Landscape on Gender, Sanitation and Quality of Life in Kenya

Policy	Policy Approach on Gender, Sanitation & Quality of Life	SanQoL Aspects Addressed
Kenya Environmental Sanitation and Hygiene Policy 2016 - 2030²	<p>Gender Responsiveness and Social Inclusion: Sanitation planning must address needs of women, girls, elderly, disabled, men, and boys.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sanitation facilities in schools, workplaces, public places and institutions are required to ensure the security, privacy, and hygiene of girls and female teachers and workers, especially during their menstrual periods. <p>Sanitation Rights Protection: Responsible agencies are required to promote, protect, monitor, and investigate sanitation rights. E.g the right of women to participate in sanitation programs.</p> <p>Gender Allocation on Sanitation Facilities: This policy enforces the required number of gender-sensitive toilet facilities in various institutions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Relevant stakeholders are required to provide safe, adequate, and private sanitary facilities with water and cleaning materials for hygienic menstrual management, ensuring dignity at home, schools, workplaces, public spaces, institutions, and in emergencies. <p>Sanitation Guidelines: This policy advocates for the development of guidelines for gender, age, and disability inclusion in public & private institutions, and healthcare facilities</p>	<p>SanQoL Aspects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Privacy ✓ Safety ✓ Shame <p>Other SanQoL Aspects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Political Voice
National Policy on Gender and Development - 2019³	<p>Sanitary Towels Program Coordination: Distribution of sanitary towel to ensure girls in school do not miss out on education due to their menstruation</p> <p>Gender Responsive Budgeting: Mainstreaming gender in budgeting and economic planning in all ministries including the Ministry of Sanitation.</p> <p>Sector-Specific Gender Integration: Implementing gender-inclusive policies in budgets, plans, and programs in various ministries, counties, departments and agencies.</p> <p>County Implementation: This policy requires development and implementation of gender policies and action plans at the county level.</p> <p>Data Collection and Advocacy: This policy supports collection of gender disaggregated data, and advocates for gender mainstreaming and planning.</p> <p>Research and Awareness: The policy supports generation of evidence for policymaking and creation of awareness.</p>	<p>SanQoL Aspects:</p> <p>None</p> <p>Other QoL Aspects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Agency
Menstrual Hygiene Management Policy – 2019⁴	<p>Creating Awareness: This policy supports sensitization programs targeted at addressing myths and stigma by providing menstruation information to the public.</p> <p>Access to Products and Facilities: This policy promotes access to safe and hygienic menstrual products and facilities.</p> <p>Waste Disposal: Promotes appropriate technology for menstrual waste management and pollution control.</p> <p>Monitoring and Accountability: Advocates for the establishment of a monitoring, evaluation, research, and learning framework for gender and sanitation.</p>	<p>SanQoL Aspects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Safety ✓ Disgust ✓ Disease <p>Other QoL Aspects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Agency ✓ Environment

² <https://repository.kippira.or.ke/items/a8a54ff0-3bb3-4889-930b-6f4a3cde0389>

³ <https://gender.go.ke/sites/default/files/publications/NATIONAL-POLICY-ON-GENDER-AND-DEVELOPMENT.pdf>

⁴ <https://wesnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/MHM-Policy-Kenya.pdf>

Policy	Policy Approach on Gender, Sanitation & Quality of Life	SanQoL Aspects Addressed
WASREB Guidelines for Inclusive Urban Sanitation Service Provision – 2020⁵	Gender in Leadership: This guideline supports increasing the percentage of women in sanitation-related decision-making positions.	SanqoL Aspects: None Other QoL Aspects ✓ Agency

As indicated in Table 1 above, multiple policies that provide guidance on Gender, Sanitation and Quality of Life in Kenya exist, however, as highlighted, many are fragmented and lack coherence and connection between them.

Policy Recommendations

We recommend the Ministry of Water, Sanitation and Irrigation in close collaboration with the Ministry of Public Service, Gender and Affirmative action implement the following measures, to advance gender-responsive sanitation and improve quality of life.

Integrated Planning at National and Institutional Levels

- Integrated planning across government ministries i.e Ministry of Health, Ministry of Water, Sanitation & Irrigation, Finance Ministry, and the Ministry of Gender is essential to ensure gender and quality of life are central to sanitation policy and service delivery.
- All stakeholders working in the WASH sector should use stakeholder mapping and engagement frameworks to work with communities in identifying and addressing priorities related to gender, sanitation, and quality of life. The Ministry of Water, Sanitation & Irrigation should establish policy tracking mechanisms from national to the local levels, including minimum standards for gender-responsive sanitation.
- The Ministry of Water, Sanitation & Irrigation, should develop and enforce standards, regulations and Standard Operating Procedure (SOPs) that integrate gender and QoL in sanitation provision.

Financing and Accountability

- The Ministry of Finance should track gender budgeting flows from the national government to county and grass root level
- The Ministry of Water, Sanitation & Irrigation should collaborate with donors, local and national NGOs and other stakeholders to develop sustainable financial plans for gender inclusive sanitation.
- The Ministry of Water, Sanitation & Irrigation, and the Ministry of Gender should jointly develop and adopt indicators that measure and report on gender & QoL across all stages of the policy cycle ensuring alignment of all reporting structures on gender.
- The Ministry of Water, Sanitation & Irrigation, and the Ministry of Gender should monitor women's participation in the WASH workforce to ensure gender equality in employment.
- The Ministry of Water, Sanitation & Irrigation, and the Ministry of Gender should jointly identify mechanisms to track women participation and representation in sanitation decision-making.
- The Ministry of Water, Sanitation & Irrigation should use monitoring mechanisms to promote accountability in sanitation utilities including ranking them according to QoL indicators.
- All WASH partners should ensure equity in gender representation in sanitation committees, programs and projects.

Capacity Strengthening and Representation

- The Ministry of Water, Sanitation & Irrigation should provide education and training programs to support women into leadership roles in the sanitation sector
- The Ministry of Water, Sanitation & Irrigation, and the Ministry of Gender should jointly build institutional capacity at the national and local levels to integrate gender and QoL considerations in both policy and practice

⁵ <https://wasreb.go.ke/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Guidelines-for-Inclusive-Urban-Sanitation-Service-Provision.pdf>

Conclusion

The success of the proposed strategies above depends on effective multi-sectoral collaboration in planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. We urge all stakeholders (government, NGOs, private partners and communities) to work together to ensure meaningful progress in improving gender equity and sanitation-related quality of life.

Fragmented efforts lead to gaps and inefficiencies. Coordinated, multi-sectoral action is essential to ensure equitable sanitation and improved quality of life for all.

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