

# Aqua for All

Making Water Count

Application Guidance 2026



Aqua for All

## Strengthening Water and Sanitation SMEs

Aqua for All partners with growth-stage small and medium enterprises (SMEs) that are ready to scale their proven water and sanitation solutions. Building on more than 20 years of experience and the dual approach developed through Making Water Count, we use smart grant instruments, technical assistance, and catalytic finance to remove barriers to growth, strengthen commercial and operational maturity, and unlock additional public and private investment.

By supporting enterprises with strong potential to reach underserved communities at scale, we help build resilient local markets that can deliver inclusive, affordable, and sustainable water and sanitation services over the long term.

If you are a water and sanitation enterprise seeking support to scale your impact, this document will guide you through the application process.

## About Aqua for All

Aqua for All is an international foundation committed to ensuring universal access to safe drinking water and sanitation services that are inclusive, affordable and sustainable. Our mission is to mobilise private capital for enterprises to transform the water and sanitation sector in low- and middle-income countries.

We support local water and sanitation service providers in scaling their market-based solutions and attracting private capital. By catalysing private capital for market development and increasing access to finance, we accelerate access to climate-resilient water and sanitation services, especially in Africa and Asia.

We believe that market-based solutions, combined with public and private capital are essential to bridge the service and financial gaps to achieve Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 6 – clean water and sanitation for all.

More information: <https://aquaforall.org/>

## Our Offering

**Aqua for All is seeking impact-focused enterprises which can deliver climate-resilient water and sanitation services at scale.**

We offer tailor-made support to small and medium enterprises (SMEs) to become technically, financially and operationally sustainable. Our vision is a thriving water and sanitation sector in which access can be expanded and maintained through local actors.

## Eligibility

If you are interested in applying for support, please check that your initiative fits our programme:

1. Your initiative is responding to one of our active **calls for proposals**. Please check our [website](#) to see the current open calls. Each regional call may have additional criteria and/or focus themes.
2. The activities are led by a (social) enterprise or commercial entity which meets the following **minimum criteria**:
  - a. Registered entity with a minimum of 2 years of operations
  - b. Have a clear impact mission and contribute to the achievement of SDG 6 (*see point 3*)
  - c. Have activities in one of our focus countries or regions (*see point 4*)
  - d. Have achieved (at least) proof-of-concept with the core products and services of the business

- e. Provide water and sanitation products or services in a commercial and/or market-based approach
- f. Be financially sustainable, or have well-defined plans for reaching financial sustainability

3. Focused on one of our **priority topics**:

Aqua for All supports enterprises that create impact towards SDG 6, primarily focusing on access to safely managed drinking water and safe sanitation. Thematic focuses will additionally be set per region or country and indicated in the call for proposals.

**Drinking Water**

- ✓ Safe water enterprises
- ✓ Household water treatment and safe storage solutions
- ✓ Operation and maintenance services
- ✓ Smart water technology providers (metering, billing, IOT, etc.)
- ✓ Hardware and infrastructure providers (e.g. drilling services, pumping, materials production and distribution)
- ✓ Other distribution (water trucking)

**Sanitation**

- ✓ Toilet economy service providers
- ✓ Faecal sludge management (collection, transportation, treatment)
- ✓ Circular economy and human waste reuse services

We are especially interested in enterprises which address our cross-cutting themes such as climate-resilience and gender.

While Aqua for All takes a primary focus on market transformation by building resilient enterprises, catalytic initiatives that can have wider impact on the ecosystem are also welcome to apply.

4. Active in one of our **focus geographies**

**East Africa** (especially Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda)

**West Africa** (especially Senegal and Ghana)

**South Asia** (especially Cambodia, Indonesia and Vietnam)

**Middle East and North Africa** (especially Jordan and Egypt)

Aqua for All may launch calls for proposals for countries not listed above. If your enterprise is not currently active in one of these geographies, please keep an eye on our website or LinkedIn for future calls.

- 5. Includes a clear plan for continuing the initiative in the local context in the long-term. There must be a strong focus on how to sustain the solution and attract other finance during the Aqua for All project or after this support has ended.

## Our Instruments

We offer a suite of grant instruments to be deployed depending on the maturity level and needs of each enterprise. These instruments are designed to provide an enterprise with tailored and relevant support. As such, each instrument has different requirements, ticket sizes and structuring.

Below is an overview of our grant instruments. You can review each instrument in detail to better understand what would best suit your enterprise needs and plans.

If you are interested in a specific instrument, please note the application tips below. Aqua for All will determine the most appropriate instrument together with the enterprise during the application process (See page 10 for more details).

<i>Instrument</i>	<i>Milestone-Based Grant</i>	<i>Results-Based Grant</i>	<i>Social Impact Incentive (SIINC)</i>	<i>Technical Assistance</i>
<b>Definition</b>	A grant in which payments are made upon the <b>completion of specific milestones or activities</b> for which financial and activity planning are agreed upon prior to contracting.	A grant in which payments are made upon the <b>achievement of pre-defined results</b> . Results are aligned to the scaling or business goals of the enterprise and verified by a 3 <sup>rd</sup> party prior to unlocking payment.	A grant in which payments are made upon the <b>achievement and of additional social impact</b> . Impact metrics are pre-agreed and the achieved impact outcomes are verified by a 3 <sup>rd</sup> party prior to unlocking premium payments.	Resources allocated for capacity development, knowledge transfer and/or consulting on specific needs.
<b>Timeframe*</b>	18-36 months	18-36 months	24-36 months	3-12 months
<b>Ticket-size*</b>	EUR 50,000 – 250,000	EUR 150,000 – 300,000	EUR 150,000-400,000	EUR 20,000 – 100,000
<b>Project Example</b>	<p>A faecal sludge treatment plant has piloted waste-to-value products to support profitability of the plant. Upon the successful completion of the pilot, the enterprise explores grant funding to expand the production and sales capacity of the product.</p> <p>The project also includes capacity building for staff, and coordination with the local authorities on waste collection and treatment.</p>	<p>An enterprise operates a network of water kiosks which offer both delivery and collection services. To reach profitability and secure scaling capital, the enterprise must increase total kiosk sales through a range of strategic interventions.</p> <p>A results-based grant is structured to disburse payments against successfully reaching sales targets. The enterprise is not restricted to a set of activities to achieve these results.</p>	<p>A safe water enterprise provides access to safe and reliable on premises piped water in rural areas. Harder-to-reach and often lower-income households are frequently underserved due to high investment costs.</p> <p>A SIINC is structured to reward the enterprise on increasing the number of low-income customers connected. This approach allows the enterprise to bridge the high-investment cost for these areas and expand their customer base.</p>	<p>A container-based sanitation enterprise would like to improve their data collection and management tools to inform decision making and communicate impact. Aqua for All provides support for a 3<sup>rd</sup> party to analyse their current approach and tailor a new system to their needs and operations.</p>

**\*Timeframe and ticket-size are given as rough estimates, to be determined together with Aqua for All based on enterprise needs and proposed intervention.**

## Milestone-Based Grants

### Definition:

Milestone-based grants are an instrument with payments made upon the achievement of milestones or deliverables focused on improving the enterprises' commercial, financial and operational performance. Contrary to results- or outcome-based funding, activities and financial planning is agreed prior to contracting and reported on to Aqua for All at activity level.

### How does it work?

Aqua for All determines suitability for a milestone-based grant together with the enterprise. The enterprise defines the specific activities, intervention logic and financial budget for the initiative prior to contracting. Based on this planning, the enterprise will receive an upfront payment to start the activities. The rest of the payments are disbursed upon achievement of agreed milestones or deliverables (typically every 6 months).

### Who is a milestone-based grant for?

Milestone-based grants (MBGs) are suitable for enterprises which have funding needs for specific, pre-defined activities which can support their scaling trajectory. This might include activities for which the results could vary (and therefore would not be appropriate for a results-based grant or SIINC). MBGs could also apply to enterprises who have higher up-front financing needs.

### What are the requirements?

- ✓ Justification of upfront funding needs (where applicable)
- ✓ Clear need for process / operational optimisation (where applicable)
- ✓ Financial management and reporting systems in place

### Application tips

Your application should focus on the activities and goals that you aim to achieve within the timeline of the initiative while highlighting how they align with your scaling plans.

## Results-Based Grants

### Definition:

Results-based grants are a grant instrument in which payments are made upon delivery and verification of mutually agreed pre-defined results or outcomes. These grants are intended to allow flexibility in attaining these outcomes, and link financing to verified success rather than activities.

### How does it work?

Aqua for All would identify suitability for a results-based grant together with the enterprise. If selected for a result-based grant, the enterprise and Aqua for All would define 2-4 metrics against which result payments would be made. These metrics should be well aligned to the enterprises' own scaling and impact goals (for example: number of new customers).

At periodic increments throughout the project cycle (typically yearly), an independent external verifier will evaluate the progress on these metrics. If the minimum thresholds for each metric have been achieved, a results payment will be made.

### Who is a result-based grant for?

Results-based grants are a tool ideal for more mature (growth-stage) enterprises who already have established operations. Results-based grants can be aligned with the enterprise's own targets (or other projects) to amplify success and support expansion of proven approaches. Results-based grants can also demonstrate to investors and financiers an enterprises' maturity and capacity to absorb investment.

### What are the requirements?

- ✓ Business track record of 3+ years
- ✓ Data collection system for tracking and reporting on result metrics

Please Note:

- ✓ Results-based grants require that the enterprise has sufficient finance available to implement the necessary activities. These grants are therefore not suitable for enterprises who would require up-front grant support to implement activities.
- ✓ Not all goals align well to this grant structure. For example: those with a higher level of uncertainty around the exact achievement or timeline (i.e. piloting a new product, research & development, government advocacy) or goals with a binary measurement of success (i.e. signing of a partnership agreement, achieving carbon credit certification).

**Application tips**

You can give both a targeted project proposal, as well as an indication on the general scaling goals of the enterprise.

## Social Impact Incentives (SIINC)s

**Definition:**

SIINC rewards impact enterprises with time-limited payments for achieving pre-defined and independently verified outcomes. Enterprises can earn additional revenue and improve their profitability, which in turn helps them attract additional investment to scale. To be eligible for receiving SIINC, impact enterprises need to raise repayable investment in parallel. The nature of the investment round can vary (e.g. equity, debt, mezzanine).

**How does it work?**

Aqua for All and the enterprise agree on specific social impact metrics that will trigger incentive payments. These metrics are aligned with the enterprise's core goals and business model but focus on creating additional impact that otherwise would not have been possible.

Once the agreement is in place, the enterprise implements its activities as usual. At predefined intervals (typically yearly), an independent verifier assesses the achievement of the agreed impact metrics. For reaching the pre-agreed verified outcome, Aqua for All pays an incentive to the enterprise.

These incentives are paid in addition to regular revenues, improving the enterprise's profitability and making it more attractive to investors.

**Who is SIINC for?**

SIINCs are ideal for commercially viable, impact-driven enterprises that are ready to scale and can deliver measurable social impact. They work best for businesses with:

- ✓ A proven business model and clear growth trajectory.
- ✓ Impact metrics that can be reliably measured and verified.
- ✓ Strong end-customer data

**What are the requirements?**

- ✓ Business track record of 3+ years
- ✓ Raising at least EUR 500,000 of repayable investment (equity/debt)
- ✓ Break-even/ profitability or have a clear plan to do so in the short-term
- ✓ Impact track record and established impact measurement system

Please Note:

- ✓ SIINCs are not suitable for enterprises that require upfront funding to operate.
- ✓ They work less well for goals with high uncertainty (e.g., piloting new products, advocacy) or binary outcomes (e.g., signing a partnership agreement).

**Application tips**

Instead of submitting a detailed project proposal, we encourage enterprises to focus on:

- ✓ Your impact ambition – what additional social outcomes you aim to achieve.
- ✓ A description of your Impact Measurement and Management (IMM) system – how impact is currently tracked and verified.
- ✓ Areas where there is a financial tension in creating additional impact – for example, situations where delivering greater impact reduces profitability or requires extra resources.

This approach allows for an open discussion to align SIINC incentives with the enterprise's existing goals and challenges.

## What's the difference between a results-based grant and SIINC?

Results-based grants and SIINCs share many similarities as they are both outcome-based grant - meaning that Aqua for All does not prescribe a set of activities or financial obligations from the enterprise but rather makes payments against verified successes. However, there are a few key differences:

- ✓ SIINCs focus exclusively on impact-related outcomes. In contrast, results-based grants can encompass a wider range of results depending on the growth goals of an enterprise. *Although results-based grants are not exclusively focused on impact, enterprises should still be aligned with the impact standards of Aqua for All and SDG 6.*
- ✓ SIINCs and result-based grants have different selection criteria, including the requirements to raise repayable finance and have an existing IMM system.
- ✓ SIINCs look only at long-term impact outcomes. Results-based grants can provide payments against both short-term outputs and long(er) term outcomes.

## Technical Assistance (TA)

### Definition:

Technical Assistance (TA) refers to resources allocated for capacity development, knowledge transfer and/or consulting on specific needs, often through a third-party, to support sustainable business growth, increase investor appetite and/or enhance impact.

### How does it work?

The enterprise and Aqua for All jointly identify the need and focus of TA. Based on the enterprise's specific needs (e.g., financial management, operational efficiency, business model refinement, or impact measurement), the enterprise prepares a proposal and submits it to Aqua for All.

Aqua for All and the enterprise jointly select a TA provider, typically from Aqua for All's pool of pre-vetted freelance experts and consultancy firms or, in exceptional cases, from outside this pool. Depending on the size of the TA budget, a competitive bidding process may be applied.

The TA proposal can be developed either before or after identifying a suitable TA provider. In some cases, the enterprise creates the proposal independently and the TA provider is selected at a later stage. In other cases, the enterprise collaborates with the TA provider to co-develop the proposal, leveraging the provider's expertise to more clearly define the scope, approach, and expected outcomes of the TA.

Depending on the context and scope of TA, the approved funding is provided either via a TA grant or through direct payment of the TA provider by Aqua for All.

### Who is TA for?

TA is beneficial for enterprises that have specific needs for targeted advisory and/or broader capacity building. This can be applicable for any stage of the enterprise.

### Please Note:

Generally, TA is not an isolated offering, which means that it is typically offered alongside or in preparation for another funding instrument.

### What are the requirements?

- ✓ Ability and willingness to co-fund a small part of the TA implementation costs, see more details in the next section below.

- ✓ TA outputs should be designed in a way that they can be reused, adapted, or built upon for other purposes beyond the individual project.

### Application tips

In the proposal, make sure that:

- ✓ The amount and focus of the TA are proportional to the enterprise's size and financial strength, as well as the readiness and willingness to make use of that support.
- ✓ The TA brings additional value by enabling or complementing capabilities, tools, or expertise that the enterprise would not be able to access or implement without this support.

## Co-Funding and Leverage Requirements

Alongside Aqua for All's financial support, initiatives are required to provide a financial contribution from the applicant or partners. This co-funding can only be used for the implementation of the initiative and not declared for other initiatives.

Co-funding can consist of in-kind contributions, which are non-cash contributions of time invested in the initiative or equipment, for example. Co-funding can also take the form of cash contributions, which includes private capital, subsidies or public funding.

Since our goal is to use grant money to mobilise private and public financing into the water and sanitation sector, initiatives should also take into consideration how they plan to attract additional sources of financing. Such leverage can include grant money from other donors or private capital from private actors, investors or banks, for example.

## Conditions For Support

We ask that all applicants fulfil the following conditions for support before we can work together:

1. You are a registered organisation and not an individual.
2. There is no religion-related or missionary component to the initiative.
3. You will take fitting measures to prevent, combat and refrain from all forms of fraud or corruption, as well as inappropriate behaviour within the initiative.
4. You will take responsibility in ensuring that the initiative works in an ethical manner with consideration for human rights and the social, economic and environmental impact of what you do.
5. You accept an open-source policy and are willing to contribute and share relevant lessons with our team and external partners, as well as participate in knowledge sharing and learning events.
6. You will collect and share data and feedback in line with Aqua for All's monitoring and evaluation framework.

Please also see Aqua for All's [Code of Conduct](#).

## When can you apply?

Please check our [website](#) to see which calls are currently open.

### Note:

If your enterprise is active in one of our focus countries or regions (please see page 3), but there is not an active call open, you may still submit via our intake form to be considered for future calls. You may not hear a response on your application until a relevant call has been opened.



## Who can apply?

Any formally registered entity can apply. However, there is a strong preference for applications with an enterprise as lead applicant.

Aqua for All recognizes the importance of locally embedded initiatives with strong local partnerships. As such, consortia consisting of different types of partners (NGOs, businesses, knowledge institutions, governments, local authorities) are welcome to apply, but initiatives should focus on the growth and strengthening of the private sector. Activities should primarily be implemented by the private sector actor(s)/SMEs.

Each initiative must designate a lead partner to be contractually responsible for Aqua for All support. The lead partner will be the sole recipient of Aqua for All funds, as well as being responsible for contractual obligations. We will perform due diligence on the lead partner prior to contracting.

## Learning

We support initiatives that are committed to evaluating their own success and who learn from their experiences. This requires an openness to sharing relevant lessons with our team and external partners, as well as participating in learning activities, especially if it can help to overcome sector challenges and foster growth.

For this reason, we look for partners who plan to collect data and feedback in line with our monitoring and evaluation framework. Initiatives that are committed to learning and making data-driven decisions are a good fit with our programme.

## Funding Principles

We cannot provide funding for:

- × Research projects
- × Isolated studies (e.g. feasibility studies) or isolated capital investments without a clear revenue or scaling model
- × Education sponsorships such as PhD, Masters and Bachelors.
- × General travel, conference visits, or daily subsistence allowance.
- × Salaries and allowances of civil servants from primary government bodies (Ministries, national Government, local government)
- × Purchasing land, buildings, furniture or vehicles.

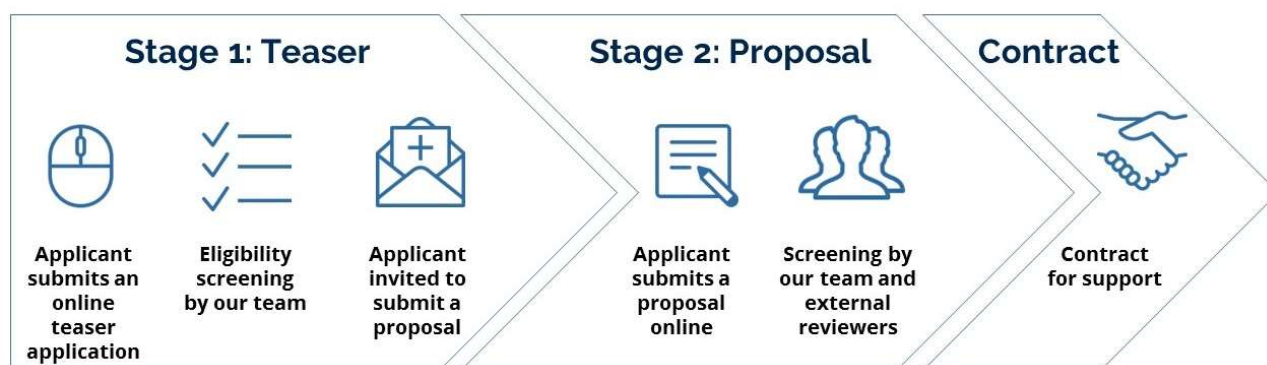
## Confidentiality

We will treat your application confidentially, as well as any related information, data and documents received. This is in line with the EU GDPR legislation. In the case that an external reviewer screens your proposal, they will be bound by confidentiality. You can review our Privacy Policy [here](#).

## Application Process

We have a two-stage application process. The first stage is the submission of an online concept note. Our team will review your concept note to check whether it is a good fit for one of our instruments.

If your application is eligible, you will be invited to the second stage and asked to submit a full proposal for one of our instruments. Your proposal will be reviewed by our team and (in some cases) external reviewers, which can involve online interviews and several rounds of feedback.



### Stage 1: Concept Note

1. Applicant submits online concept note
2. Eligibility screening by our team
3. Applicant invited to Stage 2

### Stage 2: Proposal / Structuring

1. Due diligence on lead applicant
2. Milestone based grants/Technical Assistance – Applicant submits a full proposal
3. SIINC/RBGs – Applicant and Aqua for All co-create a proposal

Internal approval and Contracting (stage 3?)

#### Please Note:

1. All applications must be submitted using our online submission system. We do not accept any applications by email.
2. The official working language of Aqua for All is English. All concept notes and proposals must be submitted in English. If you need assistance in translating your application answers into English, we recommend using online translation tools such as DeepL or Google Translate. To avoid translation errors, French-speaking applicants can also upload an additional French version of their concept note or proposal in the online submission system.

## Stage 1: Teaser Concept Note

Your concept note is meant to provide us with a brief overview of your initiative. It will help us better understand the stage your initiative is in and whether you are eligible for one of our instruments. Our team will be in touch with you if more information is needed.

You should hear back from us within 6 weeks after the submission deadline as to whether you progress to the second stage.

You can download a hard copy version (.docx) of the concept note application from [Airtable](#) in both English and French. This can help you prepare your responses in advance before uploading into the online submission system.

## Using The Online Submission System

### Accessing the Airtable Form

The form can be accessed directly via the link provided on the website. No account creation or login is required. You may begin entering information as soon as the form opens in your browser.

As the form does not support saving drafts, we strongly recommend that you first download the Word document from the website containing all application questions and prepare your responses offline before starting the online form.

Please Note:

If you close the form before submitting, all entered information will be lost. For this reason, ensure you are ready to complete and submit the form in a single session.

### **Completing the Form**

The form is organised into sections and fields that appear as you scroll. Some fields may display additional questions based on your responses. Required fields will be marked and must be completed before submission. Before submitting, review all entries to ensure accuracy and completeness.

### **Validating Your Responses**

If any required field is incomplete or contains an invalid entry, the form will indicate an error when you attempt to submit. Please review those fields, update the information, and then resubmit.

The concept note cannot be submitted until all required information has been provided correctly.

### **Submitting and Saving a Record**

Once the form is completed, click Submit at the bottom of the page. After submission:

- ✓ A confirmation message will appear on screen.
- ✓ A confirmation email with your responses will be sent to the address you provided in the form.
- ✓ You may choose to download or save a copy of your responses using the print-to-PDF function found in the top right corner beside the Share button

Please Note:

Because this is an Airtable form, you cannot return later to edit or continue the same submission. If you need to make changes after submitting, please contact us at [programmes@aquaforall.org](mailto:programmes@aquaforall.org)

## **Stage 2: Proposal**

If your concept note is eligible, you will be personally invited by email to submit a full proposal for one of our instruments - whichever we find is most beneficial to your initiative. Aqua for All will also conduct due diligence on your organisation during this stage.

Since the proposal template and process will be different for each instrument, a specific proposal guideline will be included in your invitation email. This will guide you on the relevant steps to fully develop your initiative. Results-based instruments (such as Results-based Grants and SIINCs) will not require a traditional proposal format but will be built through a co-creation process.

Once submitted, your proposal will be reviewed by our team based on selection criteria. This stage is an opportunity for our team to work closely with you to suggest recommendations and offer guidance to help improve your initiative. In some cases, your proposal will be reviewed by external reviewers before our team is able to decide on the final stage.

The full proposal stage requires a higher level of information gathering and several rounds of feedback between you and our team. To help streamline this process, we will work with you using realistic and flexible deadlines.

## **Any questions?**

Please feel free to email us if you have any questions to [programmes@aquaforall.org](mailto:programmes@aquaforall.org).

## Glossary of Terms

**Climate-Resilient Services:** Water and sanitation solutions designed to withstand climate-related risks and ensure long-term sustainability.

**Co-Funding:** Financial contribution from the applicant or partners, in cash or in-kind, alongside Aqua for All's support.

**Growth-Stage Enterprise:** An enterprise that is focusing on measurable growth in users and revenues and/or market traction. Generally, the enterprise has attracted or is considering attracting significant funding and can/wants to grow.

**Impact:** Measurable positive changes in social, environmental or economic conditions that result from specific interventions or activities, typically assessed through defined indicators and outcomes, e.g. reduction in waterborne diseases in a population due to sustained access to safe water and sanitation.

**Impact Measurement and Management (IMM):** System and process for tracking, verifying, and managing social and environmental impact outcomes.

**Investment Readiness:** Stage at which an enterprise that has reached a level of operational, financial and governance maturity is suitable for receiving external funding from commercial or impact investors.

**Leverage:** Mobilising additional financing (public or private) into the water and sanitation sector using Aqua for All's grant funding.

**Outcome:** The short- to medium-term changes in behaviour, knowledge, skills, or conditions that result from the delivery of products and services in an intervention or project, e.g. increased adoption of household water filters and sanitation products due to improved availability and affordability through SME-led distribution networks.

**Output:** The immediate, tangible products, services, or deliverables produced by a project or intervention, e.g. training 50 WASH entrepreneurs in business management and technical skills.

**Proof-of-Concept:** Stage where an enterprise has demonstrated that its core product or service works and is viable in the market.

**SDG 6:** [Sustainable Development Goal 6](#): Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.

**Safe Drinking Water Services:** The provision of water that is suitable for human consumption and domestic use, delivered in a manner that is reliable, accessible, and affordable. The water should be free from contaminants that could pose a threat to human health. For more information on the SDG 6 service ladder, see here: <https://washdata.org/topics/drinking-water>

**Safe Sanitation Services:** Systems and facilities that hygienically separate human excreta from human contact, and ensure safe disposal or treatment of waste, thereby protecting both individual and public health as well as the environment. For more information on the SDG 6 service ladder, see here: <https://washdata.org/topics/drinking-water>

**Scaling:** The process of efficiently expanding a business model, solution or intervention to serve larger populations or geographic areas while maintaining quality and impact.

**Sustainable:** The ability of services to continue functioning effectively over the long term without depleting resources or causing environmental harm.

**Technical Assistance (TA):** Technical Assistance refers to resources that are used for consulting on specific needs for the purpose of scaling businesses, de-risking investments and/or enhancing impact.