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Bina (above) works on the Gulni Tea Estate in Sylhet, Bangladesh and earns approximately 70 pence a day. In 2010 WaterAid and local partner IDEA started a project in collaboration with tea estate owner to improve access to water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) facilities in the tea gardens and surrounding areas.

Prior to the project Bina had to walk for hours each day to collect water from a well. She used to miss days at work due to illness, and therefore wasn't paid. Further work days were missed when she had to stay home to care for her children, who suffered from diarrhoea and dysentery. Since gaining access to pumps and latrines in the gardens, Bina's quality of life has greatly improved. What's more, the garden authorities have now learnt that their companies working in the estates will benefit too if their workers have access to WASH.

WASH is fundamental to the human rights, health and dignity of workers, and there are a growing number of [case studies](#) that show access to WASH is an important factor affecting a company's ability to prosper.

"Waterborne diseases have reduced so we pay less sickdays. Efficiency is increased, definitely." Tea Garden Manager

The global challenge and the role of business

The UN [High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development \(HLPF\)](#) in July 2018 played host to "in-depth reviews" of global progress against selected Sustainable Development Goals. Goal 6 (clean water and sanitation for all) was one of the goals under review, and it was made abundantly clear that "the world is not on track" to achieving this goal by 2030 (with increasing global freshwater pollution and water stress set to further disrupt progress).

The importance of good governance and partnerships were highlighted by HLPF delegates as being key components for progress against SDG 6. [The WBCSD WASH pledge impact report](#) highlights the importance of water as both a risk and an opportunity for businesses. The report commends the 47 companies that have already committed to the WASH pledge, but calls on more companies to sign the pledge and drive greater reach and impact.

Some companies are starting to recognise that there are business benefits and a case for investing in WASH which go beyond the moral commitments of companies to invest and contribute to the human rights, health and safety of workers like Bina in the tea gardens.

WaterAid and CDP data analysis, which was conducted in 2018 and analysed 3-years' worth of CDP water data, highlights the potential business benefits from investment in WASH. The analysis reveals some of the drivers for corporate action which include WASH-related risks in both direct operations and supply chains; WASH related opportunities; direct linkages between WASH interventions and attainment of SDG 6. The analysis also highlight the need for a greater volume of clear data demonstrating the business case.

Businesses can contribute to the WASH business case

The 2017 joint [report](#) by WBCSD, WaterAid and the CEO Water Mandate clearly highlights that insufficient data exists to build a compelling case for business action. The social, moral and macro-economic case for investment in WASH is obvious but at company level, the evidence remains largely anecdotal and unquantified. To drive action at the speed

required to reach the 2030 target, we need more robust evidence demonstrating the financial value to companies of investing in WASH.

In response, a new practical guide launched 23 August 2018, which has been championed by WaterAid's business partners Diageo, Gap Inc. and Unilever, and endorsed by WASH4Work, has been developed. The guide will help companies provide evidence of the benefits and financial value, or return on investment (ROI), of their WASH interventions, and make the case for greater investment in WASH within the company and beyond. This guide provides an opportunity for progressive companies to lead and showcase the incentives for business investment on WASH whilst catalysing action.

The new guide launched at World Water Week in Stockholm calls for WASH implementers and companies to use the guide – **test it, learn from it and share your results with us.** We will be developing a community of learning via [WASH4Work](#) and we will plan to compile the data and share a consolidated business case in due course.

“This guide is an essential tool to strengthen the business case for investment in clean water and sanitation in our supply chains –so that we can all step up and play our part.” Michael Alexander, Head of Water, Environment and Agriculture Sustainability at Diageo.

“We are proud of our work with other private sector leaders to strengthen the business case for WASH investment in the workplace... we hope we can mobilize more businesses.”
Melissa Fifield, Senior Director of Global Sustainability at Gap Inc.

“We encourage businesses to use this guide and share their learnings so that, together, we can advance the business case – and create another lever to drive action on WASH.” Eric Ostern, Director of Global Partnerships & Advocacy at Unilever.

Some companies have already committed to trialling and testing the guide – HSBC will test the business case with WaterAid in apparel supply chains in India and Bangladesh over the next three years and Diageo will test the business case with WaterAid in agricultural supply chains in Ethiopia. Gap Inc. and Unilever are also currently exploring options to test the guide.

For real change to be made, more companies need to contribute to the trial and scale up their WASH investments in the workplace, communities and in supply chains.

If you're interested in trialling the guide or just want to learn more, please join us for the launch event at World Water Week: 'Mobilising Business Action with tools and guidance to scale up action', Thursday 30 August, 9-10:30am, Pillar Hall, Stockholm, Sweden.