

# GWOPA

## STRATEGY

2019-2023



**GWOPA Strategy 2019-2023**

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(GWOPA) / United Nations Human Settlement Programme (UN-Habitat)

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## Foreword

The world is experiencing an unprecedented tide of urbanization that is bringing with it tremendous challenges and opportunities. Another 2.5 billion people will join cities and towns before 2050. How these human settlements are built and managed will determine much about the quality of life on this planet.

To build *inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable cities* – the kind aspired to in Sustainable Development Goal 11 – universal access to clean water and safe sanitation services are indispensable. Indeed, with water and sanitation as prerequisites for achieving virtually every SDG at the local level, ensuring strong local capacity to deliver these services is a top priority.

When former United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan requested UN-Habitat to establish GWOPA, he drew on three simple observations of his Advisory Board on Water and Sanitation (UNSGAB): i) public water and sanitation operators are enormously important, ii) they are struggling to meet global development targets, and iii) there is huge untapped potential for them to help one another.

Ten years on, Water Operators' Partnerships (WOPs) are widespread and working well. Hundreds of utilities, across all continents, are marking improvements thanks to these not-for-profit peer partnerships. New water associations, governments, United Nations agencies and NGOs continue to adopt the approach, establishing new WOP programmes and platforms, often backed by development banks and donors who recognize that WOPs not only build capacity to improve performance, but facilitate much-needed investments. Guided by experience, WOPs today are more effective, leading to greater impact and rising credibility. What's more, as utilities in developing regions get stronger, more of them are sharing their knowledge in turn, perpetuating this virtuous cycle of learning, improving and sharing.

As global challenges like climate change negatively affect water infrastructure and services, WOPs stand out more than ever as a high-value approach, worthy of continued scale up. Strong utilities hold the capacity and innovations their peers need – from introducing circular approaches that optimize resource efficiency and minimize pollution, to bridging sustainable finances and inclusive access for all, to building resilience and ensuring good and safe jobs for local people – and many are eager to share them on a solidarity basis. WOPs offer an opportunity to accelerate the adoption of sustainable solutions for local water services providers and the billions of people they serve worldwide.

GWOPA's new 2019-2023 strategy has been drawn from the inputs of its wide network of member organizations, evaluations of its previous strategy, the concurrent UN-Habitat strategy development process, and its many years of experience. It situates WOPs squarely as a tool for localizing the SDGs, and positions UN-Habitat's GWOPA Secretariat as the global convener, catalyzer, advocate and knowledge broker for WOPs within its growing global alliance.

It's my pleasure to encourage all partners to join forces in supporting the implementation of this strategy.

**Ms. Maimunah Mohd Sharif**  
**Executive Director of UN-Habitat**



## Executive Summary

While there has been progress in extending access to water and sanitation services in recent decades, 2.1 billion people still cannot count on contamination-free water, available on premises whenever they need it, and 4.5 billion still lack sanitation systems that protect them from disease.

Water quality is declining, and water scarcity now affects 40% of the global population. The freshwater ecosystems that sustain water services are under threat, and consumption patterns are aggravating disparities and the potential for conflict around water. From peace to prosperity, the “world we want,” will only be possible if we achieve Sustainable Development Goal 6, the SDG Water Goal. Local water and sanitation service providers have a tremendous role to play in reaching these essential global water and sanitation targets yet many face enormous challenges to supply existing and fast-growing future populations and to meet national and

enhancing their performance and enabling them to provide a better service to more people. WOPs have a proven track-record and can be highly cost-effective.

Formally founded by UN-Habitat in January 2009, upon the request of the former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, the Global Water Operators’ Partnerships Alliance (GWOPA) is an international network created to support water operators through WOPs. GWOPA has documented case studies, analysed success factors, developed guidance material, and developed a strong alliance of water operators, water associations, development partners, labour

An evaluation of the past strategy 2013-2017 confirmed that WOPs are effective and GWOPA is instrumental in pushing their agenda. The experience of implementing GWOPA’s 2013-2017 strategy offered rich lessons for the upcoming strategy period that have been fully integrated in this new Strategy.

### Vision and Mission

GWOPA’s vision is that water and sanitation service providers, connected in a solidarity-based network, are sharing and helping one another improve services for all, to achieve local

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