

A young woman with short dark hair, wearing a teal tank top, is the central focus. She is holding a whole pineapple in front of her. The background shows a green-painted wooden structure, possibly a door or wall, and a glimpse of a rural setting with brick buildings and trees. A bright yellow vertical bar is on the right side of the image.

IRC

WASH systems that transform lives

IRC's strategy 2017-30

Supporting water sanitation
and hygiene services for life

Who we are and what we do

Who we are

We're an international think-and-do-tank working with governments, NGOs, entrepreneurs and people around the world. Together we find and implement long-term solutions to make access to safe water and sanitation available for everyone, for good.

Our experience has taught us that this can be achieved by building resilient water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) systems – at district and national level. Systems are the networks of people, institutions, hardware and resources necessary to deliver services.

Our strategy framework 2017-30 explains how we do this, and is guided by our theory of change.

What we do

Between now and 2030, we are committed to maintaining long-term partnerships with selected districts in our focus countries. The aim is to ensure that at least one million people will have access to sustainable, safe and adequate WASH services by 2030. And by doing this to catalyse change at national and global scale.

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This document presents a summary of IRC's strategy and theory of change for the years 2017 to 2030. For a more complete picture of the overarching strategic framework together with a set of priority actions and objectives for the period 2017-21, please read - IRC Strategy Framework 2017-30. Building WASH systems to deliver the Sustainable Development Goals. Available at <https://www.ircwash.org/resources/irc-strategy-framework-2017-30-building-wash-systems-deliver-sustainable-development-goals>

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Systems change starts at district level

In districts, we catalyse change by acting as a 'change hub', bringing together all those involved, to find solutions that work. We do this by:

- committing to and working with pilot districts to get sustainable WASH services to everyone in every household and every institution by 2030
- pioneering new tools and systemic approaches – transforming planning, developing and delivering resilient WASH systems

Nationally: we support governments and WASH organisations to transform the way they work by:

- **bringing together all those involved** – to pool resources, identify challenges and solutions, and work together rather than competing, to make money and resources go further and have greater impact
- **using structured approaches (from policy to practice) to build people's capacity** to plan, manage and maintain services
- **sharing the evidence and lessons learned from our district work**

Globally: we influence, advocate and share what works by:

- **working with international organisations and global decision makers** – to change the focus in WASH from aid to strategic investment
- **documenting research and sharing knowledge** - through working groups, learning programmes, conferences and publishing that contribute to local, national and global knowledge



Why we do it – a once in a lifetime opportunity

We have a once in a lifetime opportunity to make access to safe water and sanitation available for everyone, for good. The UN has set a target to achieve this by 2030 – known as ‘Sustainable Development Goal 6’ (SDG 6).

Resilient systems: the only way

We know that the only way to achieve this goal is through resilient water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) systems that transform lives. We know how to build and strengthen these systems - but we need to do it now.

It will take everyone, in all parts of the system, changing the way they think and work.

Peter Magara, WASH consultant

“Everybody wanted to be on the team to write the Kabarole District master plan. The willingness to participate showed once again how eager everyone is to see change.”

A. Hema, Mayor of Banfora

“The Banfora master plan transcends the terms of office of municipal councils. It must remain the parchment that leads to the achievement of our goals for drinking water and sanitation by 2030 and beyond.”

Everyone, together

Each part of a country’s WASH system must work effectively: from people using pumps, to monitoring tools, to finance systems. This can only be achieved if everyone in the system knows and plays their part.

Achieving universal access calls for effective collective action by a broad movement of government, civil society, private sector service providers, financiers, academia and others.

Our unique position

As a change hub, we’re in a unique position to unite people to drive and champion change from the ground up through collective action. We need to convince district, country and global decision makers that it is possible to achieve SDG 6.

Now is the time

We need to act now. We need everyone to commit to large-scale change – and as you’re reading this, that also means you.

Case 01

Asutifi North district in Ghana launches united effort to achieve WASH for all by 2030

March 2018 saw the launch of Asutifi North Ahonidie Mpontuo (ANAM) - a unique partnership in Ghana which aims to deliver WASH services to 84,000 people in the district via resilient WASH systems by 2030.

At the launch, the Asutifi North District Chief Executive, Hon. Anthony Mensah pledged that the district would engage with chiefs and opinion leaders in the communities, strengthen their own decentralised structure through training and capacity building, and continue to prioritise WASH in district budgets.

“I will also demand hard work”, he added, “from the management and staff of the various departments which have responsibilities for WASH delivery.”

IRC will work closely with the district assembly, communities and partners including Safe Water Network, World Vision, Netcentric Campaigns, Aquaya Institute and the National Foundation for the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC).

ANAM’s ambition is not only to achieve SDG 6 by 2030 but to act as an example to be followed across Ghana and even across Africa.



Population: 62,816 people
50% of water coverage¹
15.6% sanitation coverage²

¹ at least basic = improved source within 30 minutes round trip collection time
² at least basic = use improved facilities which are not shared with other households

Case 02

Working with local government in Uganda’s Kabarole District to reach everyone

We are working with Kabarole district local government in Uganda to create resilient WASH systems to deliver sustainable water and sanitation services. We’re also addressing key issues like scaling-up services, engaging the elected representatives and securing finance.

As part of the WASH Agenda For Change alliance, we’re working with WaterAid, Water For People and a growing network of other partners. We’re using our knowledge and expertise to create improvements in systems and services in three districts initially, before proposing improvements across the whole country.

Pius Mugabi, the Kabarole district water officer, said: “The coming of IRC as a [change] hub has created a linkage between the central government policies and the needs of the communities in Kabarole. IRC has helped us to kick-start the hand pump mechanics associations in the region.”

Change doesn’t happen overnight, so we’re committed to staying in the district and working with local government for as long as it takes to deliver sustainable WASH services to everyone.



Population: 250,632 people
80-83% water coverage³
84% sanitation coverage⁴

³ at least basic = improved source within 30 minutes round trip collection time
⁴ at least basic = use improved facilities which are not shared with other households



Diana Antwi from Yawbrefo,
also Assembly member of the Asukese Electoral Area

“Selling of the water has helped us. Now we have saved money that we can use for repairs any time the water system breaks down. Selling of the water (pay as you fetch) has been more helpful than when we asked for an annual contribution of 2 cedis per person.”

The challenge

Achieving SDG 6 will be profoundly challenging, but building and strengthening resilient WASH systems gives us the best – in fact, the only – opportunity to achieve the goal.

Far too often, once WASH infrastructure has been built, its operation, management and eventual replacement happens fitfully, or not at all. Clean, safe drinking water remains the exception rather than the rule.

This is not acceptable. We have to make sure that there are strong and resilient national and local systems in place; and the political leadership and public finance necessary to maintain them over time.

Patrick Moriarty, CEO of IRC

“Our new strategy gives us a crystal clear baseline metric for success: that all the people living in our partner districts (at least a million people in total) have access to safe and sustainable water and sanitation in 2030. This is what we will measure, and this is how we will judge our progress.”



How we make a difference

Our long-term theory of change tells us what we have to do and why in order to achieve our goal of ensuring that everyone has access to sustainable, safe and adequate WASH services by 2030.

It works on three levels: district, national and global, and builds on the lessons we learned during work under our last business plan (2012-16).

We know that the only way to achieve access to safe water and sanitation for everyone, for good, is for strong and resilient WASH systems, in districts and nationally, to be in place.

This is why our key contribution to the SDGs will be building and strengthening WASH systems, starting with the districts. We will make sure that our work to strengthen district and national WASH systems brings services to the most disadvantaged and remote communities within a district: by 2030 at least one million people in our districts will have access to sustainable, safe and adequate WASH services.

We will build on our traditional areas of competence in knowledge management, capacity building, innovation and research, advocacy and policy. And we will also use our skills in supporting change processes: as a convener, networker, documenter and sharer of knowledge 'as a change hub'.

Combined, these skills place us in a unique position to be able to act as a 'change hub' in support of district and national level partnerships.



District level

Experimenting to get to universal access

Our experience tells us that the most effective way to move towards universal access is from within districts. It's the best level at which to model behaviour, test approaches and identify solutions.

We've been building stronger and longer-term relationships with partner districts in our focus countries.

We've made a long-term commitment to working with them until they achieve universal access and indefinite sustainability. We will hold ourselves accountable for ensuring that at least one million people have access to sustainable, safe and adequate WASH services by 2030.

We act as a change hub in our partner districts, and work with them to map assets, monitor services, develop realistic budgets and clear, comprehensive plans, and then help to identify funding sources for those plans.

We will take the lessons learned from these districts to the national level and into the global development forum to share solutions and gain political support. This will ensure that high-level interventions in policy and learning are leading to real improvements in services.

Supporting local government in Burkina Faso

In Burkina Faso, we train municipality staff on the job. We ask them to come with data, analyse it together and discuss what is needed. We make technical choices, and look at the budget together. Authorities have the end responsibility. They hire the implementing private or public operators, so they need to know what they are doing. Making local authorities aware is the main effort. Providing reliable WASH services is their mandate. I want them to understand the bigger picture so they understand the day-to-day decisions that they need to make. The strategic plan is not my plan, or IRC's plan. The municipalities are leading it.



Juste Nansi
Country Director IRC Burkina Faso

National level

Supporting strong national systems and government leadership

Just as in our partner districts, we also act as a change hub in our focus countries. This means we drive change by supporting collective action by a wide-ranging partnership of sector players – resulting in strong and resilient national systems.

Our increasing experience in acting as a change hub in Honduras, Ghana, Burkina Faso, Uganda, Ethiopia and India means that we know that this approach works.

We also work directly to strengthen the building blocks that create a strong national system. We seek to apply the systems that are in place. If the national systems are lacking or not good enough, we will use our work in districts to inform their development and strengthening.

Strong national systems rely on strong national leadership – both political and financial. This national leadership must own, believe in, and support the vision of universal access by 2030.

National systems strengthening in Ghana

IRC has supported the reorganisation of Community Water and Sanitation Agency (CWSA) operations. It reviewed all the sector's operational documents and their dissemination.

IRC has always brought to the fore the fact that the Government should lead the rural sub-sector activities. IRC also brought in a new direction for the delivery of water services and that is the service delivery approach. That is how come now you get to the communities and you hear them talking about CapManEx!



Theodora Adomako-Adjei
Extension Services Coordinator, Community Water and Sanitation Agency, Ghana

Global level

Influencing, advocating and sharing what works

We influence, advocate and share information with international organisations on what works to deliver strong and resilient national and local WASH systems and services. Our activities involve:

- Taking what we have learned from districts in our focus countries into the global development forum and supporting and encouraging the global dissemination of our own and others' learning. Crucially, we then bring global innovations to our focus countries and districts
- Creating a global hub to drive and champion change from the ground up. We work with global decision makers to help them understand what works – and what doesn't
- Advocating for national systems building, increased finance and appropriate financial models for the WASH sector: engaging at the highest levels of the global WASH discourse to achieve political buy-in

Championing systems change with our donors

Donors talk about sustainability and the enabling environment but often fail to pay attention to institutional capacity building. In many donor organisations success is measured largely in outputs – the numbers of wells and other infrastructure installed.

International NGOs found it easy to bypass the Assemblies and work through smaller local partners directly with communities. The result was a pattern of service provision without clear priorities and a lack of accountability for managing and sustaining services. A massive amount of investment was wasted. In IRC I met an organisation that is really trying to figure out what systems change and strengthening sustainability are all about.



Chris Dunston
Senior Program Officer, International Programs, Conrad N. Hilton Foundation



Strong national and local systems

Our theory of change is based on the evidence that reliable and sustainable WASH services must be delivered by strong and resilient national and local WASH systems.

Systems are the networks of people, institutions, hardware and resources necessary to deliver services. At IRC we group them into nine key sub-systems, that we refer to as ‘building blocks’.

The nine building blocks

Many of the building blocks both overlap and interact; each one’s relative importance can and will change according to time or context. But one thing is constant: for any service to be delivered, ALL the building blocks must be present and working, at least to a minimum level.

Institutions

This building block considers which organisations are responsible for each function in the WASH system, the separation and/or overlap between them, their ability to fulfil their roles and the rules that bind them.

Policy and legislation

This is the way a government sets out its vision for the WASH sector (policy) and provides a legal framework for that vision to be realised (legislation). It forms the legal basis for WASH services and outlines the State and other’s responsibility to providing the services, what the service user is entitled to, and what charges they have to pay.

WASH System



Nine essential building blocks of the WASH system, as defined by IRC

Planning

Effective planning means clearly defining roles, responsibilities and resources for different activities so that policies work to achieve SDG 6. Realistic and strategic budgeting is key for effective planning. When plans are linked to known or anticipated sources of finance and project-cycles it means that a consecutive series of projects can help realise a long-term vision.

Finance

We won't achieve SDG 6 without more money. Effective mechanisms need to be in place for securing long-term finance into the sector, as well as channels for getting the money to where it is needed.

Regulation and accountability

Effective regulations and enforcement processes are needed to hold decision makers and service providers to account for their policies and practice, and hold service users to account to pay for the services they receive.

Monitoring

Monitoring keeps track of how well key elements of the WASH system are working and the quality of WASH services being delivered. Collecting timely and up-to-date information is essential for managing day-to-day service delivery, as it is for longer term policy or investment decision-making.

Infrastructure

Infrastructure is the physical component of the WASH system - the pump or the tap or the drain. Focusing on infrastructure alone is not enough. We also have to consider the systems and processes for developing new infrastructure and maintaining existing facilities.

Water resources management

Natural water resources underpin the entire sector's existence - and in order for WASH services to be available to everyone, for good, these must be controlled, managed, monitored and enforced.

Learning and adaptation

The key to adapting to change lies in learning and sharing knowledge and information. Having platforms where this can take place means that everyone can adapt and change their policies and practices to make sure we achieve SDG 6.

All these building blocks must be present and working, at least to a minimum level, and everyone in the system must know and play their part.

The people and organisations who work with us

We work with everyone from ordinary citizens to government policy makers, global investors to individual donors and aid agencies. Together, we find ways to create and develop sustainable systems at district, national, and global levels to achieve SDG 6 by 2030.



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How you can support building and strengthening systems that transform lives

We know what works to achieve SDG 6 by 2030 – but the clock's ticking, and we need your help.

While sustainable WASH services are transforming lives, district by district across the world, this needs to happen faster. And on a much broader, global scale. Everyone involved needs to change the way they think and work. There is no other way, and there is no other time. We need to act now.

Help us to create a world where no child or adult dies of water or sanitation-related disease, and make access to safe water and sanitation available for everyone, for good by 2030.