AGENDA FOR CHANGE

Strengthening Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene Systems: Concepts, Examples, and Experiences

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Photo on cover page: Local authorities in Nepal making a plan for monitoring WASH services (Photo: Will Tillett/Aguaconsult)

Department of Rural Development core team for MIS development discussing what indicators and data visualisation are needed at national and sub-national level (Photo: WaterAid Myanmar)

Executive Summary

The water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) sector has long faced challenges in terms of the sustainability of investments and services, and Sustainable Development Goal 6 requires WASH service improvements to be happening at scale. There is a growing consensus in the sector that achieving sustainable WASH services at scale is only possible with strong WASH systems to underpin them.

Agenda for Change is a collaboration of like-minded organisations that have adopted a set of common principles to advocate for and support national and local governments and other key stakeholders in strengthening WASH systems, so that everyone, everywhere, has WASH services that will last forever. Agenda for Change members ('Members') are strengthening WASH systems in more than 25 countries using diverse approaches and accumulating valuable learning in the process.

This paper has the following broad objectives:

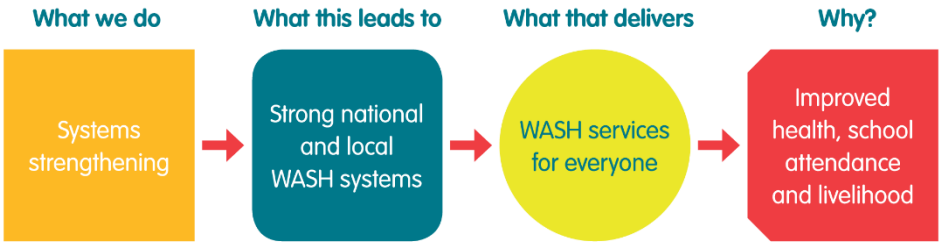
- Describing the concepts and framework that Members use for analysing systems and expanding on how they use these tools in specific contexts to identify potential entry points to influence and strengthen systems;
- Providing practical examples of systems strengthening efforts in different contexts; and
- Discussing the journeys that Members have gone through in progressively embracing systems strengthening approaches.

The aim of this paper is *not* to prescribe a single way to assess or strengthen WASH systems. It documents the approaches and experiences of Members, most of which are international non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Thus, most of the examples in this paper are written from the perspective of NGOs engaging with and strengthening host government systems. The authors recognise that many other organisations are applying systems approaches.

This report is organised as follows:

Chapter 1 describes the Agenda for Change collaboration and provides background information.

Chapter 2 provides a rationale for systems strengthening and presents the broad conceptual framework for systems used by Agenda for Change collaboration.



Example of a high-level theory of change for the WASH sector (Source: IRC)

Chapter 3 outlines approaches used by Members to analyse and understand the state of a WASH system and how it works, how this analysis process helps to build a common vision among stakeholders, and how it helps to define potential entry points for strengthening the system.

Chapter 4 provides concrete examples of actions that have been undertaken by various Members to strengthen the eight 'building blocks' of the WASH system and includes links to further resources on these topics.

Chapter 5 provides examples and reflections on the organisational journeys that Members have taken as they progressively shift their ways of working, programming, and organisational focus towards systems approaches. It also includes some commonly mentioned challenges they have faced in this shift and provides examples of how they have been able to overcome them.

Chapter 6 concludes by looking forward and calling on sector actors to continue to apply and share experiences in WASH systems strengthening.

An incredible amount of progress has been made in the five years since Agenda for Change was founded. Much has been gained in terms of the conceptual understanding of WASH systems, the awareness of the tools, approaches, and evidence from different countries, and in the strength of the partnerships and collective action Members have achieved. In the coming year, Agenda for Change will build on the case studies and examples presented in this paper to provide further evidence of the value of these approaches and to accelerate collective learning and action to more effectively drive this change within and beyond the Agenda for Change collaboration.

Maria Lopez negotiates a sanitation loan from a representative of Fundacion Horizontes, a local Microfinance Institution in her community of Nueva Esperanza, in the in San Antonio municipality of Honduras (Photo: Water For People)

Chapter 1: Background

Water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services are increasingly understood to be public services that should be delivered by national and local systems. The WASH sector has long faced challenges to achieving service sustainability and quality. Governments, development partners, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are addressing service delivery issues by strengthening the institutions and central building blocks of WASH systems. Many organisations have adapted their approaches to focus explicitly on building and strengthening national systems rather than direct service provision and infrastructure development. Agenda for Change is a collaboration of such organisations[1] that are also focused on the importance of collaboration and collective action for systems strengthening[2]. The Agenda for Change members (referred to throughout as 'Members') have adopted a set of common principles that complement the Collaborative Behaviours developed by Sanitation and Water for All. Members commit to advocate for and support national and local governments and other key actors within the WASH system so that everyone, everywhere, has WASH services that will last forever.

Agenda for Change was founded to help drive collective action, a process that brings actors together to agree on a common goal and approach, to develop shared metrics for measuring progress, and to plan joint activities which reinforce progress toward that goal.[3] Members remain fully independent but collaborate actively due to their appreciation of collective action and their desire to continue learning from one another.

Members contribute to WASH systems strengthening in more than 25 countries[4] (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Countries where Members are conducting systems strengthening activities, as of August 2019 (Source: Agenda for Change)

[1] As of August 2019, Members included Aguaconsult, CARE, IRC, Osprey Foundation, Splash, WaterAid, Water for Good, Water For People, and Welthungerhilfe.
[2] For definitions of key terms see Huston & Moriarty 2018.
[3] Lockwood 2019, Reflections on the 'Beyond Collaboration: Learning from the National and District-Level. Collective Action Efforts in WASH' session held during the IRC All Systems Go Symposium.
[4] Based on information collected as of August 2019.

Members work in low- and lower-middle-income contexts, where government spending for WASH is generally low, and new infrastructure is often a priority of such spending. Most Members are NGOs, not institutional funders or development partners with large loans or grants to strengthen or fund systemic reforms. Because they are not government entities, they have no direct mandate for reform. As such, Members have a unique potential to act as change agents, because rather than wielding power or authority, they can add value by supporting leading actors or governments, by demonstrating localised system improvements, or stimulating change at scale through advocacy and communication. The Member perspectives presented in this paper are drawn from NGOs that are engaging with and strengthening host government systems. This paper shares examples of Members strengthening WASH systems in different contexts, using different approaches and working at different levels to help guide and inspire others, particularly NGOs, to contribute to strengthening WASH systems.

This paper has three main objectives:

- Describing the concepts and framework that Members broadly use for analysing systems and expanding on how Members use these analyses to define entry points to influence and strengthen systems;
- Presenting practical examples of systems strengthening efforts in a range of different contexts; and
- Discussing the journeys that different Members have gone through in progressively applying the Agenda for Change principles and embracing a systems strengthening approach.

The paper documents approaches and experiences of Members, but the authors of this report are not prescribing a single way to assess or strengthen WASH systems. The authors recognise that many other organisations are applying systems approaches.

Representatives from the District WASH Office discussing design plans during construction of the first water system in the Villa Imperial community of the Arbieto municipality in Bolivia (Photo: Water For People)

Chapter 2: The rationale for strengthening WASH systems

This section provides a broad overview of what WASH systems are, and the rationale for strengthening them. It also presents the broad conceptual framework used by Agenda for Change.

2.1 The rationale for WASH systems strengthening

Members view a WASH-systems mind-set as one that embraces the understanding that complex networks of different people, institutions, incentives, and dynamics interact to produce water-, sanitation-, and hygiene-related outcomes. For a long time, the WASH sector had focused on infrastructure – which usually consisted of latrines, handwashing stations, various types of water points, and more rarely, piped water networks. Often infrastructure of this kind was heavily subsidised and built by external organisations, then handed over to a community or school committee that received a one-time training. The community or committee was then expected to maintain the infrastructure with no clear arrangements or financing in place to keep their services going.

Over time, it became clear that this infrastructure-focused approach was not leading to the sustained delivery and use of services, nor were one-off infrastructure development projects likely to reach the scale needed to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. Service delivery requires a concerted and continuous effort with inputs from many *actors,* such as policy makers, authorities responsible and accountable for services, and service providers who can manage operations and maintenance. It also depends on multiple *factors,* such as the availability of reliable information for decision making, the ability of the population to pay for services, and the capacity of the regulatory agencies in the country to influence service delivery. The interaction of all these components, including the influences of the political economy, determines the quality and reliability of the services that are produced.

A WASH system consists of a complex web of actors and factors and the interactions between them. Members choose ways of working that can lead to transformative change in the functioning of WASH systems rather than those that simply result in incremental progress in different aspects of the system. NGOs and other external actors can contribute to systems strengthening in different ways, for example, through improving national sector planning and strategy, international advocacy and information sharing, or building the capacity of local actors; but, any approach must include periodic reflection on the broader WASH system and consideration of how one change could lead to others. No one organisation needs to perform all these activities; however, these activities must be undertaken with a common vision of how to achieve lasting transformation of the system. NGOs can have a key role in encouraging collaboration and building partnerships that will facilitate more efficient and coordinated performance of the system and can have a role in helping others to see the entire system. Figure 2 provides an example of a theory of change that incorporates the rationale behind systems strengthening.

People are at the centre of WASH systems, representing national and local governments, service providers, service authorities[5], the private sector, NGOs, and users of these services. All these stakeholders have influence at different levels. Thus, there can be no one approach for overcoming challenges because the WASH system is continuously evolving.

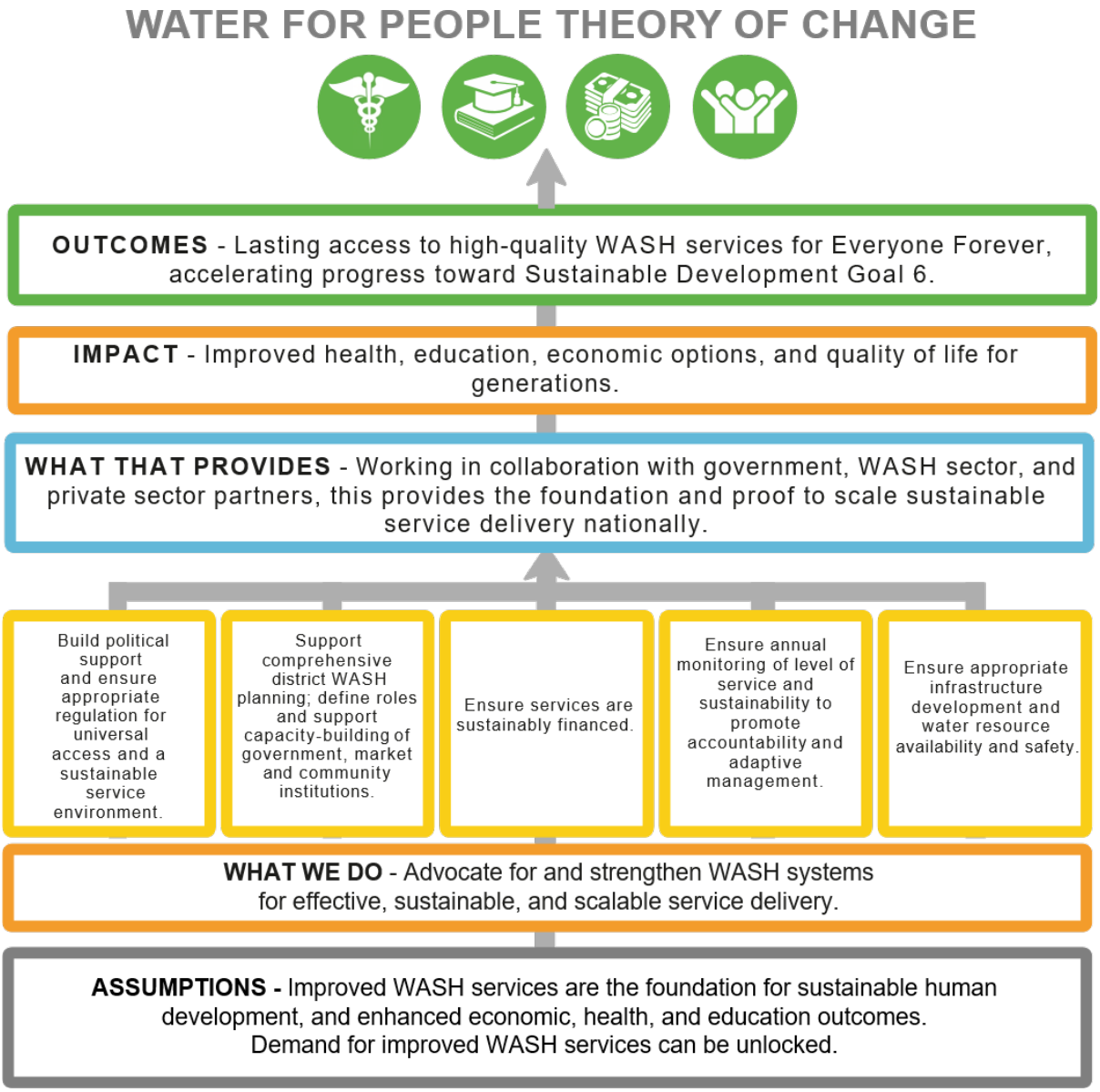


Figure 2 Water For People's theory of change incorporates a rationale for systems strengthening

[5] The service authority refers to the body responsible for delivering services, which is often situated at the local government level. Services may be provided directly or through delegation and oversight of an independent service provider, in which case the service authority has both regulatory and backstopping responsibilities.

2.2 A framework to understand WASH systems

At the outset of a systems strengthening initiative, it can be overwhelming to understand the many actors and factors at play. Members have individually developed various conceptual frameworks and tools to help unpack this complexity to make it manageable. While many in the sector use their own frameworks, the Agenda for Change collaboration has reached broad consensus on what are considered the core building blocks for WASH systems, based on experience from around the world, including insights from countries with a high level of WASH services (Figure 3). The building block framework can be adapted and interpreted (see Box 1).

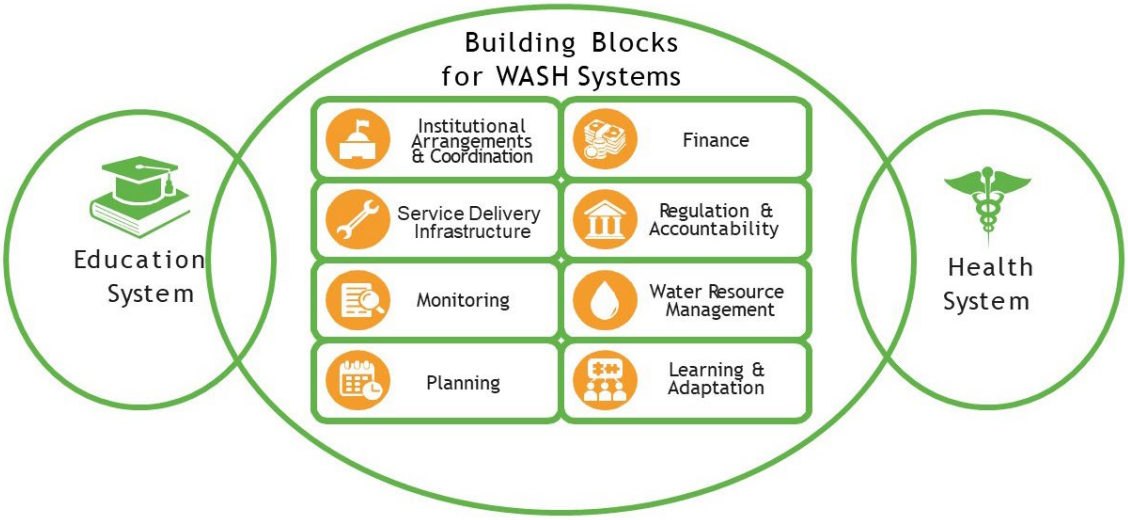


Figure 3 Building blocks for WASH systems (Source: Agenda for Change) [6]

WASH systems do not exist in isolation; the actors and factors within these systems are affected by the political economy, demographic pressures, decisions and processes in other sectors, and national leadership. There are overlaps between the building blocks of the WASH system and those of the health and education systems, among others, that affect who is invited to participate in WASH systems strengthening, which policies and resources are made available for WASH, and which opportunities and approaches for improving WASH services exist. The building blocks serve as a mental model for organising and analysing different parts of a WASH system, but care must be taken that the framework does not lead to an oversimplified view of the interactions and dynamics that ultimately drive the system.

[6] Huston & Moriarty 2018 and Gensch & Tillett 2019 provide more detailed descriptions and references concerning the functions of each of the building blocks. IRC's WASH Systems Academy provides online introductory courses.

Box 1: Ongoing work of Members to adapt a building block framework

Through the Sustainable Services Initiative, ***Welthungerhilfe, Aguaconsult*** *and the German Toilet Organisation have described how the building block framework could be adapted to better emphasise aspects of the sanitation and hygiene sub-sectors. WaterAid has also outlined ways in which hygiene can be better represented in systems thinking.*

WaterAid *looks beyond what is typically considered part of the WASH sector. They use 'WASH system' to refer to all of the people, processes, and institutions (e.g., Ministries of Water, Finance, Health, and Energy) involved in delivery of inclusive, lasting WASH.*

Members continue to refine thinking around the building blocks. ***WaterAid Cambodia*** *has unpacked what each of the blocks should look like in their national context, and* ***WaterAid Timor-Leste*** *has rearticulated the framework through a gender equality and disability inclusion lens.*

IRC *has begun referring to the building blocks as 'windows' to better communicate their role in seeing the system from different perspectives.*

Chapter 3: Approaches to analysing WASH systems, identifying entry points, and monitoring change over time

Mapping the system shows the way. (IRC 2019)

Developing a WASH-systems mind-set and conceptual framework is more about developing tools to guide understanding of how to think about a WASH system than charting a clearly defined course on how to accomplish WASH systems strengthening. This chapter and the next provide examples from Members of analysing WASH systems, strengthening them to improve outcomes, and measuring progress. See Annex A for case studies from CARE, IRC, Splash, WaterAid, Water for Good, Water For People, and Welthungerhilfe/Aguaconsult.

3.1 Analysing a WASH system

Developing an understanding of the system – its actors, factors, strengths, gaps and the political economy surrounding it – is an essential starting point for trying to change a WASH system or improve its performance. This type of analysis can help to identify entry points and priority areas for systems strengthening efforts. NGOs and other potential change-makers must understand their place in the WASH system and consider how their activities, financial resources, and programme strategies fit into the wider system and how these can best be leveraged to improve outcomes. Not all systems strengthening efforts have started out with a systems analysis-based entry point, but Members have found it valuable, even at later stages of implementation, to take time to map the system as a key component of framing and reframing the issues.

3.1.1 Analysing the status of the system using building blocks

One method of system-level diagnosis is to analyse the status of each of the building blocks of a WASH system, conducting a political economy analysis, analysing the performance of the system in terms of service levels or sector outcomes, and conducting a root-cause analysis (See Box 2). Systems analysis with local actors is vital at the outset of WASH systems strengthening activities; however, this should not be a one-off exercise. Systems are dynamic, and these types of analyses should be periodically undertaken to adapt approaches and to maintain a focus on systems strengthening.

Several Members have developed building block assessment tools, which often include indicators or benchmarks of what the minimum and/or optimum functions of a WASH system are and determine the extent to which these aspects are in place and

Box 2: An example of systems analysis

WaterAid Ethiopia *works at the district and national levels and employs tools which include bottleneck assessments, power mapping and systems and process analysis to further their understanding of the challenges that limit the effectiveness of the WASH system (which includes WASH, health, and education sectors) to ensure inclusive, lasting WASH services. The tools are used as a starting point to discuss stakeholder roles and responsibilities, as well as systems, processes, and incentives/drivers of different actors to bring about systems change. After the assessments, all partners work collaboratively through a consultative process to develop a costed district WASH plan that aligns with the ONE WASH National Program.*

functioning effectively within the system. Generally, the assessment tools are (and should be) scored in a participatory way, in collaboration with relevant authorities, community associations, and NGOs in a workshop setting or over a series of meetings. Members have found these tools to be a valuable mechanism for stimulating critical dialogue among stakeholders about gaps and areas of improvement. They can be re-scored periodically as a means of tracking changes in the WASH system through time but may be best complemented with additional approaches and tools if they are to be used for long-term monitoring. The limitations of using checklists are explored in a WaterAid report.

Box 3: Using a Building Blocks Checklist

In Nepal, the initial scoring of a building block checklist supported by ***Welthungerhilfe*** *helped programme staff and government partners to understand what was missing in the sector. Subsequent re-scoring helped to maintain the momentum of systems strengthening efforts. Service authorities were motivated to beat their past scores and to achieve better scores than their neighbouring districts. An example of scoring in Chitwan District is provided below.*

Date of Scoring exercise	Institutional Arrangements & Coordination	Service Delivery Infrastructure	Regulation & Accountability	Inclusive Planning	Finance	Monitoring	Water Resources & Environment	Learning & Adaptation	Total Score
Feb-18	4	4	2	2	2	1	3	1	19
Oct-18	5	6	4	3	2	1	5	1	27
Sep-19	5	6	5	3	3	1	5	1	29
	out of 18	out of 12	out of 10	out of 8	out of 10	out of 12	out of 10	out of 6	out of 86

The Sustainable Services Initiative[7] has developed a checklist with about 40 indicators that provide colour-coded dashboard summary scores (see Box 3). These are re-scored periodically to identify progress in systems strengthening as well as new opportunities for change. IRC has similar tools that can be used individually or in combination with other tools to conduct a systems analysis. Water For People has a monitoring framework that includes annual service level monitoring and a sustainability monitoring checklist. Once all milestones are achieved, they work with district governments to set and achieve exit criteria.

In WaterAid's programmes, the status of the building blocks is defined in terms of their maturity and support needs, with categories ranging from 'weak' (in a very poor state) to 'moderate', 'strengthening' and 'desired'. WaterAid's 'sector strengthening programme design toolkit' includes participatory exercises whereby workshop participants identify risks to sustainable WASH services and behaviours, then categorise these within the building block headings.

Going forward, these building block assessment approaches will need to capture not only the status of building blocks, but also the interrelations and links between blocks. Reviewing these assessments helps facilitators ensure the scoring is done in a way that maximises critical dialogue and identifies a common way forward.

3.1.2 Political economy analysis and other actor and factor assessment tools

Building block checklists are relatively easy to use and are useful for uncovering many of the more formal aspects of the system, such as policies and monitoring processes. However, they tend not to adequately

[7] The Sustainable Services Initiative is a collaboration between Welthungerhilfe, Aguaconsult, and the German Toilet Organisation, which seeks to strengthen the effectiveness and sustainability of Welthungerhilfe's programmes and to generate tools and learning.

capture some of the more abstract features of WASH systems – particularly elements of human behaviour, the influence of the political economy, incentives, and value systems – that have a significant impact on how a system works. Examples of tools that can be used to explicitly focus on these aspects include organisational or social network analysis and Stakeholder-Driven Factor Mapping. WaterAid has developed a Political Economy Analysis toolkit which provides a structured approach to analysing why systems work as they do and how change happens from the national to the local level. By understanding how change happens, an organisation or collaboration can identify how best to influence change and make better decisions about how to support and strengthen the overall system.

3.2 Defining a common vision and building commitment

By using processes to identify both the status of the system (e.g., through the building blocks assessment) and how change happens in the system (e.g., through the political economy analysis), an organisation or collaboration can identify priority action areas and also identify ways of working that may best influence and support systems change (e.g., through partnerships, advocacy, and information sharing). If the analysis has been done in a participatory manner (e.g., together with government and other key stakeholders), it is possible to build consensus around a joint plan of action to begin to address systemic weaknesses.

Learning to understand the current state or behaviour of the system and agreeing on the desired outcome are essential first steps toward transforming it. *(Burns & Worsley, 2015, in Huston & Moriarty 2018)*

Collaborating with other actors - for example, between a supporting organisation like an Agenda for Change member and the host government, and/or between a number of supporting organisations - works best when an agreed upon goal and an endpoint have been established. Arguably, these need to be more specific than the targets of Sustainable Development Goal 6. In some cases, the government may already have a clear strategy that development partners or NGOs need to fit into. If not, a stakeholder 'visioning' process (see roadmap) can be undertaken, whereby stakeholders agree on a joint vision for a WASH system that contains details about how services will be provided and at which levels. Visioning processes of this kind often begin naturally during joint assessment processes when stakeholders begin to discuss how the system currently works and how it should work. WaterAid's sector strengthening programme design toolkit provides examples of how this type of participatory diagnostic process can lead to the co-design of systems strengthening activities.

Strong government commitment and leadership are very important in the initial stages to identify priorities. Involvement of relevant authorities from the beginning of the process can help ensure that there is commitment to address the identified system weaknesses. For example, Water For People sees political will and commitment as essential entry points to the systems strengthening process. Awareness and commitment to sustainable, universal WASH access and to systems strengthening activities can be increased through involvement in analysis and visioning workshops or processes. However, the commitment of local and national government to sustainable, universal services and their readiness to

engage in systems strengthening cannot be assumed, nor is it guaranteed. For example, government entities or officials may lack incentives or accountability regarding service-level improvements. If this is the case, working effectively on systems strengthening may be difficult until commitment has increased. While some Members prefer to collaborate only with authorities who demonstrate commitment, other Members may define actions aimed at influencing this commitment as they proceed, for example, by seeking to empower communities to demand services and by increasing the accountability of service authorities through monitoring and review platforms.

3.3 Entry points and approaches to systems strengthening

In many cases, conducting an initial scan or diagnostic of the WASH system might highlight so many issues that organisations and their local authority partners can be confused about where to start. Collaborative capacity assessments can be used to identify which actors are best placed to strengthen the different components of a WASH system, or government leadership may communicate a clear priority that Members and collaborators need to follow. The choice of entry points may be based on resolving essential bottlenecks or on targeting quick wins to encourage deeper collaboration.

Ideally, the systems analysis process will help identify potential 'leverage points' – areas where a small change or shift will unlock larger systems-level change. Another important aspect of analysis is taking time to consider what is the most appropriate level to direct efforts, for example, at the national sector level, at the district government (or equivalent) or community level, or with specific institutions (e.g., the service authority or service provider). Analysing the appropriate level at which efforts can best be directed helps to identify which of the system's actors (for example, government entities, civil society organisations, private sector actors, or faith-based groups) need to be engaged, partnered with or strengthened.

Box 4: Examples of entry points for systems strengthening

- *Seeking to address widespread challenges in sanitation service delivery in Kampala (Uganda),* ***WaterAid*** *is working to bring together the political and technical wings of the Kampala Capital City Authority to improve local government leadership and oversight of WASH. WaterAid, with support from others, has established the Mayors Forum to leverage political buy-in and understanding of WASH planning and budgeting processes. In this process, WaterAid identified political commitment and accountability as the main leverage point to drive systems change.*
- *In Karamoja (Uganda),* ***Welthungerhilfe*** *used an asset inventory mapping process as an entry point for progressively engaging with the service authority to first strengthen the asset management arrangements, then to progressively work on planning, monitoring and budgeting. In this process, their work on systems strengthening deepened as their relationship with and trust in the service authority improved.*
- *In Kabarole (Uganda),* ***IRC*** *used service level data collection as an entry point. This provided an objective lens though which to view the system and bring stakeholders together to assess why things were the way they were. A robust service-level assessment improved understanding of the system and was used for advocacy and stimulating solutions development by different users of the data.*

Actors can influence and strengthen the system in many ways, and Members have determined where to focus their efforts in a variety of ways (see Box 4). Some Members focus on influencing the behaviours of

actors within the system, working on issues such as stakeholder demand, commitment, collaboration, and joint learning. Others work at the national level to strengthen sector dialogue and accountability structures or to adapt policy and legal frameworks, like the work of the 'WASH Agenda for Change' collaboration in Uganda. Some take an area-wide approach, where they work on strengthening the building blocks at the local level (e.g., service authority and service provider), aiming to establish area-wide service level improvements, while using the district to demonstrate good practice to the wider sector. Others work from within the system as service providers (for example, delivering maintenance services), aiming to strengthen the system in which they operate while acting as a model for others. There are some Members who make use of all these approaches.

Strengthening the system from the 'outside' (e.g., as an advocate/facilitator), from 'within', from bottom-up, and from top-down are other possibilities. An NGO with permission to operate in a given context automatically becomes a stakeholder, and it is important to reflect on an organisation's role within the system it seeks to change. A systems approach might be one that is able to react to emerging opportunities as well as being strategically planned; the approach will almost always evolve through time.

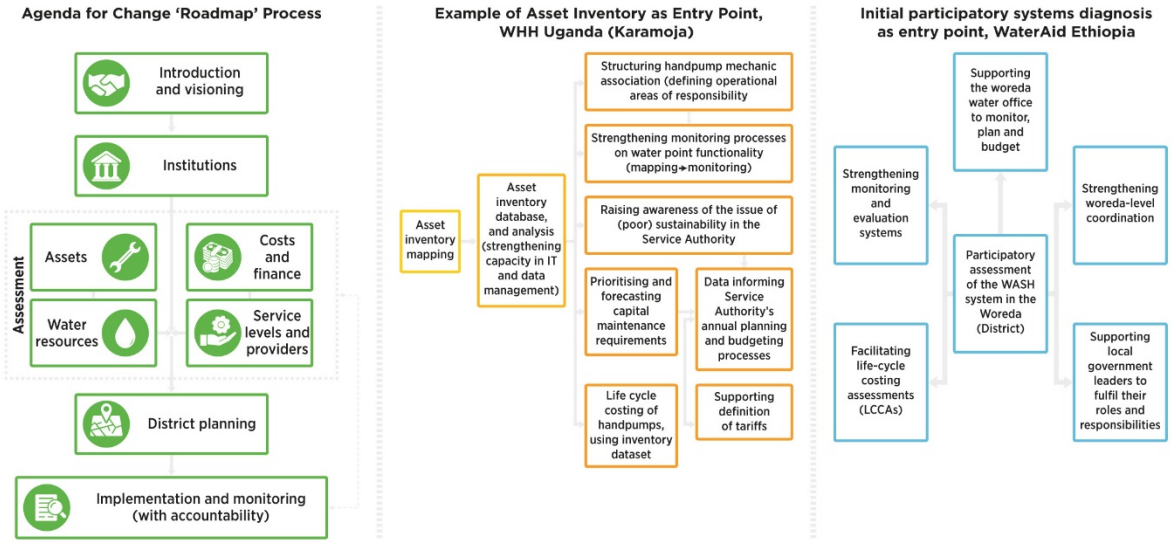


Figure 4: Examples of entry points and processes of systems strengthening. (Sources: Agenda for Change 2017, Welthungerhilfe 2019 and adapted from WaterAid 2019)

Chapter 4: Examples of systems strengthening using building blocks

This section provides examples of Members' efforts to strengthen the building blocks of WASH systems, in addition to influencing leadership, behaviours, and the demands of actors within these systems. The sub-sections are organised according to the building blocks of the WASH systems framework introduced in Section 2.2. Brief examples are presented related to the building block they address, but in reality, systems strengthening efforts often focus on multiple blocks and strengthen the connectivity between various blocks at different levels. These examples are best understood when considering how the noted change influences the larger WASH system and other dynamics, and when considering how action at different levels (e.g., to mobilise resources or advocate for policy change) is required to achieve the change. Annex A provides detailed case studies.

4.1 Building Block: Institutional arrangements and coordination

***This building block is strong when**: The institutions related to sector policy and planning, service provision and service authority exist, have clearly defined mandates and roles, and have sufficient capacity. Coordination mechanisms are in place, leading to coordinated action within the WASH sector and with related sectors.*

Most examples of Members' systems work include strengthening this building block. These efforts may be focused at the level of the service provider or service authority, at the national level, or some combination. Examples include the following:

- **Inspiring government commitment and leadership.** As part of the systems analysis process, some Members analyse the commitment and willingness of government institutions to ensure that people have access to inclusive, lasting WASH and contribute by 'holding up a mirror' to reflect on observed gaps in services. This is done through a participatory exercise conducted with different stakeholders, including government. The results are used to balance the emphasis towards empowerment verses supply-side capacity development and can help to unlock systems change by motivating government action. Many programmes have a mixture of both elements.
- **Strengthening the awareness and commitment of government officials and politicians** on certain issues (e.g., sustainability or sanitation). This is often (but not exclusively) triggered by jointly undertaking assessments on neglected issues to highlight

Box 5: Strengthening political leadership for sanitation

*In Kampala, Uganda, **WaterAid** sought to address disconnects between political and technical leadership as well as an overall lack of commitment to sanitation in the city. Coordination platforms between stakeholders were established, and a Mayors Forum on sanitation was created, through which they collaborated to develop a city-wide sanitation plan and sanitation legislation to govern sanitation services in the city.*

*In Kampong Chhnang, Cambodia, **WaterAid** helped to build the capacity of commune and district councillors who, through recent decentralisation of responsibilities, are mandated to improve WASH in their areas. District committees are now meeting independently and providing technical support to commune councillors. Recent improvements in sanitation coverage have leveraged provincial government level buy-in and support for WASH in the province.*

and quantify the problem (e.g., using Shit Flow Diagrams or asset inventory mapping). In some cases, the motivation and incentives for civil servants, politicians or service providers to act on issues have been increased, for example, by introducing performance-based management into human resources processes or key performance indicator benchmarking of service providers, or by creating competition among service authorities. See Box 5, CARE Peru, WaterAid Uganda, Water For People.

- **Clarifying ambiguity related to the roles and responsibilities** of various actors in the sector **and strengthening mechanisms that bring different stakeholders together** through dialogue platforms and cross-sectoral coordination platforms. This can include identifying discrepancies in the perceived roles of sector actors when compared with officially mandated ones and earnestly raising them as issues.
- **Encouraging harmonised approaches and collective action** of sector actors. Efforts to align and harmonise the actions and approaches of sector actors, and to create both a more consolidated 'voice' and more effective influence and impact on issues at the local, national and sector levels are linked with bringing stakeholders together. In Uganda, Rwanda, and Honduras, Members have been acting collectively for years. See Case Study 5.
- **Helping to link different levels of government and linking the service authorities with service providers**. For example, helping decentralised service authorities to access technical support from provincial and national ministries and government support entities and increasing the level of ongoing support and oversight that service authorities provide to service providers. See Case Studies 5 and 8.
- **Strengthening the capacities of service authorities** to deliver on their mandate of supporting and overseeing WASH services. In some cases, this involves creating and supporting WASH units within local authority structures, and it often includes tailored capacity strengthening activities, focused on strengthening both technical and operational aspects of the authorities. See Case Study 4 and Water For People Guatemala.
- **Strengthening the capacities of service providers.** Some examples include supporting their formalisation or legal registration, creating or supporting umbrella bodies or associations of service providers, and strengthening capacities across core competencies as well as the enabling environment/governance context in which they operate. See Box 6, Water For People Malawi.
- **Developing global guidance and training materials on WASH systems strengthening** across the building blocks. Members have developed a wide range of resources to orient and inform sector actors about systems strengthening, including the WASH Systems Academy, the Sustainable Services

Box 6: Water utility performance improvement programme

WaterAid Ethiopia's programme has a robust approach to capacity development. It first creates an enabling environment in which the utility can perform, addressing governance issues of the 'board' and introducing performance-based management arrangements. The programme covers technical competencies such as leakage management, water quality, asset management, and water quality management through studies, training, equipping, action planning, and follow-up support. It supports the development of strategic business plans and customer forums, while strengthening core processes such as information technology and human resources systems. It tracks progress between the utilities, rewarding the best performers in annual 'utility forum' learning events.

Initiative Toolbox, the Agenda for Change Technical Assistance Facility, and a series of papers explaining the building blocks and approaches to systems strengthening.

4.2 Building Block: Service delivery infrastructure (and service delivery models)

This building block is strong when: *Clear frameworks, capacity, and roles exist, including procurement, construction, and asset management (which includes development and maintenance). Technologies and service delivery models must be appropriate for the context.*

Many Members have examples of strengthening this building block, particularly in the area of rural water supply. Examples include the following:

- **Asset inventory surveys (**e.g., water point mapping) and supporting their implementation with relevant stakeholders serve as a good entry point for systems strengthening. These surveys often lead to life-cycle cost analyses (see the Finance building block) and strengthening of planning and budgeting for capital maintenance investments by service authorities and service providers. Asset inventories have also been used to structure maintenance service providers and supply chains and to create unique water point identification numbers. Asset inventories can open discussions about the standardisation of technology options and common issues with technologies that are in place (e.g., the widespread use of rusted galvanised iron rods for handpumps, rather than stainless steel options). See Box 7, Case Study 8, CARE Ethiopia, and WaterAid Ethiopia.
- **Strengthening service authorities' capacity for asset management as part of their supervisory role.** Examples include establishing or strengthening maintenance units within local authorities, strengthening their linkage with and oversight of maintenance service providers, and strengthening the capacities of service authorities to plan and budget for capital maintenance, including the development of tools for such purposes. Welthungerhilfe undertook a district-wide inventory mapping of all water sources in Karamoja District. The data were used to advocate for a greater service authority focus on addressing non-functionality. The data helped the service authority budget for capital maintenance, led to discussions on tariff setting, and informed the structuring of the handpump mechanic association's network. See Case Studies 4 and 8.
- **Strengthening service providers' capacity for asset management**. Examples of this include assisting service providers to develop operations and maintenance or asset management plans, strengthening their orientation towards preventative (rather than reactive) maintenance practices, improving their stock management, and legalising service providers or addressing legal ambiguities relating to the ownership of assets. See WaterAid Ethiopia.
- **Demonstrating or strengthening models of maintenance service provision.** One method is to strengthen services in a support role, for example, by supporting accredited training programmes for technicians and introducing and promoting preventative maintenance service contracts. Another method is to strengthen services from the inside through testing and demonstrating alternative models for professionalised maintenance services. In the Central African Republic (CAR), a highly fragile state, Water for Good uses a circuit rider model for preventative maintenance services at over 1,700 rural water points. Water for Good maintains functionality rates greater than

90%. The long-term strategy is to incubate and train highly professionalised water service providers that can deliver services that water users want in coordination with government and NGO partners. Aguaconsult, WaterAid, CARE, and IRC have also been conducting global studies helping to document and categorise different service delivery and maintenance service models and their conditions for success. See Case Studies 2, 3 and CARE Somalia.

- **Strengthening product and spare part supply chains and introducing technologies**. Examples include introducing new technologies for water supply, toilet and faecal sludge management and building supply chains and maintenance services around these; strengthening mechanisms for quality control of spare parts; and assessing and strengthening markets for spare parts and quality products (e.g., toilet pans). See CARE Peru, Water For People Malawi, Water For People India (here and here).
- **Improving the quality of construction.** This may be accomplished in a variety of ways: through training masons and contractors and enabling their access to improved equipment; developing and disseminating infrastructural standards, strengthening the capacity of the service authority (or authorities) to enforce standards; and by addressing issues such as infrastructure procurement and contract management. See CARE Mali (here and here).

4.3 Building Block: Monitoring

This building block is strong when: *National and subnational monitoring frameworks exist and are being used by all parties to measure and report on the quality of services delivered (service level), and such data is used proactively to improve the quality of services on a routine basis.*

Members are strengthening monitoring systems at the national level as well as testing and developing approaches locally (e.g., within a district) to be progressively scaled up nationally. Examples of this include:

- **Strengthening the monitoring capacities of service authorities**. Examples include helping service authorities to calculate the recurrent 'direct support costs' of monitoring WASH services; clarifying stakeholder mandates for ongoing monitoring; providing technical training or equipment provision for service authority monitoring activities; strengthening service authority information management capacities; and strengthening the links between monitoring and planning, and budgeting and decision making. See Box 7, Water For People Nicaragua, and WaterAid.
- **Strengthening and operationalising sector monitoring frameworks**. Examples include helping to develop indicators or strengthen definitions, clarifying data sharing and ownership issues, strengthening protocols and institutional arrangements for monitoring, and strengthening the use

Box 7: Turning one-off assessments into recurrent monitoring processes

Welthungerhilfe Nepal *is supporting five recently created local authorities to develop strategic WASH Plans, following the roadmap. During the 'assessment' phase, discussions are held with the authorities about how the data will be updated in the future. This leads to the development of protocols stating what data is needed and the frequency of collection, the creation of mandates and recurrent cost calculations for collecting the data, analysing it, and making arrangements to feed it into national monitoring databases. For more info, see here.*

of data to inform policy, cross-sectoral planning, learning and adaptation (e.g., through joint sector review processes). Other examples include establishing or strengthening of sector Management Information Systems (MIS), harmonising monitoring systems to a consolidated MIS, and strengthening stakeholder alignment to the MIS and usage of it. In other cases, it has involved assisting the central government in operationalising sector monitoring frameworks at the service authority level and improving data flows between levels in the sector. WaterAid Myanmar supported the government in introducing, testing and progressively upscaling an MIS for rural water supply monitoring. The process included defining data needs at different levels and establishing the indicators to be used. WaterAid introduced the mWater technology and developed a customised MIS platform. As it was upscaled, WaterAid helped define institutional processes and mandates for collecting and analysing the data. Aguaconsult and IRC have also been undertaking global studies on sustainability monitoring and have recommended appropriate metrics for monitoring service sustainability. See Box 8 and Case Studies 6 and 8.

- **Introducing and institutionalising new technologies to improve monitoring efficiency**. Examples include the introduction of mobile-to-web technologies, apps and software such as Akvo and mWater (together with the customisation or progressive refinement of these), and the gradual institutionalisation of these technologies within the mandates and budgets of permanent sector actors. Members have had long-term collaborations with MIS software developers, which have helped serve their own organisational data needs, and also have led co-evolution of the software with the developers. Examples include CARE's use of mWater, WaterAid's partnership with mWater, and IRC, Water For People, and Welthungerhilfe's collaborations with Akvo. See Case Study 6.

Box 8: Monitoring service sustainability

The RANO WASH program in Madagascar takes a comprehensive approach to working with the national government's existing platform by improving and strengthening indicators, data collection and updates, data analysis, self-efficacy and functions, and data management and system maintenance at the commune, regional and national level. This includes 1) streamlining indicators and aligning these to national performance benchmarks; 2) more efficient data flows, customised user interfaces and integrating ICT for development to improve timeliness and accuracy; and 3) updated tools and planning models. Underlying all this is strengthening the leadership and capacity of government to lead sector monitoring functions at all levels.

4.4 Building Block: Planning

This building block is strong when: *clear frameworks exist for the development of plans and budgets at all levels of government and all levels of service providers, as well as when there is clarity about and capacity for their development.*

Supporting service authorities to develop strategic, life-cycle costed plans to achieve and sustain universal access to WASH services is a key objective of the roadmap. This is being operationalised in many countries, together with efforts to strengthen planning at other levels within the WASH system. Examples include:

- **Strengthening wider sector planning processes, including cross-sectoral planning, and inputting into national plans and strategies**. Examples include helping governments to localise Sustainable

Development Goal 6 targets to the country context, strengthening the connectedness of planning and budgeting between different ministries and different levels of government for integrated planning, and supporting central government to develop policies and plans. WaterAid highlights the criticality of cross-sectoral planning, particularly between the WASH and health sectors, to ensure hygiene is properly captured and not duplicated. The CARE-led Rural Access to New Opportunities for Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (RANO WASH) programme is supporting the Malagasy government in its entire sector planning process at the national, regional and commune levels. It also facilitates the involvement of civil society and the private sector in this process. See Box 9, CARE Somalia, and Water For People (here and here).

- **Helping service authorities to develop evidence-based fully costed strategic WASH plans.** Members have helped to operationalise the roadmap process in several countries, using 'pilot' districts to demonstrate the processes and developing tools, as well as guidelines, for scaling-up local WASH planning. The plans are generally developed based on robust assessments and are used to calculate full life-cycle costs and match these with revenue sources from taxes, transfers and tariffs. There are also many examples of Members strengthening the linkages between planning, budgeting and monitoring, and using the roadmap process to get civil society organisations more involved in the service authority planning process. See Box 7, Case Studies 5 and 8, CARE Somalia, WaterAid, and Aguaconsult.

- **Strengthening the capacities of service providers to develop strategic/business plans,** for example, helping utilities to forecast investment and tariff needs through time or helping faecal sludge management operators to develop business plans to help access loans.

- **Undertaking assessments to inform and catalyse action planning** on specific topics, for example, undertaking shit flow diagrams, non-revenue water or functionality assessments, etc. This may be at the level of service providers (e.g., utilities), service authorities, or at the sector level. To increase access to sanitation services in Kitgum, Uganda, Water For People worked with the Municipal Council technical and political staff to create a Town Sanitation Plan. During the process of putting together the plan, data from the consultant who had been contracted by Water For People to establish a shit flow diagram was supplemented by data compiled by Village Health Teams and Kagga and Partners.

Box 9: Supporting local government WASH planning to reach everyone

Many Members support local authorities to develop district (or other local government equivalent) WASH plans. For example:

In Honduras, the collaboration 'Para Todos Para Siempre' (Everyone Forever) has helped 14 municipalities develop strategic, life-cycle costed WASH plans.

*In Rwanda, **Water For People, WaterAid, Aguaconsult** and **IRC** helped to demonstrate the roadmap process and supported national government leadership in their upscaling efforts.*

*In Nepal, **Welthungerhilfe** is applying the roadmap in five municipalities to inform central government efforts in developing national guidance for municipal planning.*

*In Asutifi North district (Ghana), **IRC** has worked collaboratively with local government, local leaders, and NGOs to develop a costed district master plan. IRC's ability to bring together key actors, develop relationships, and facilitate the planning process were essential to the completion and adoption of the plan by the district government and all other local stakeholders.*

4.5 Building Block: Finance

This building block is strong when: *Clear frameworks and sufficient funds exist and are applied for financing service delivery, including full life-cycle costs and clearly identified sources for each component.*

Member activities in this building block range from offering global guidance on how to determine the costs for various aspects of providing water or sanitation services over time (life-cycle costing analysis) to helping service providers and governments find creative ways to fund those life-cycle costs, such as financing mechanisms to setting the price of services (tariffs). Examples include:

- **Undertaking global studies and developing guidance and tools on life-cycle costing**. Global projects like WASH Cost helped to get the sector thinking about and planning for costs beyond infrastructure. Multi-country studies inform Direct Support Cost benchmarking. Tools developed for costing. See Box 10, CARE Kenya, IRC, and Water For People and IRC.
- **Applying a life-cycle costing approach at the service authority level** and influencing budget allocations. Members have helped service authorities calculate the full life-cycle costs of achieving universal WASH access across the service authority's jurisdiction, and they have also projected future capital maintenance and expansion costs. Support has also involved calculating the required costs for the service authority's direct support costs (e.g., monitoring and supporting service providers, coordination, etc.), contrasted these costs against actual allocations, and advocated for the inclusion of such costs within the service authority's annual budgeting. In calculating life-cycle costs, support has been provided to analyse revenue sources and gaps across the 'three T's' (tariffs, taxes and transfers). In some cases, support has been provided for service authorities to access government financing envelopes for WASH. See Case Studies 5, 7, and 8, Water For People Honduras.
- **Applying a life-cycle costing approach at the service provider level** to inform tariff setting and planning. Examples include the development of tools to calculate costs at the service provider level, providing data to inform the setting of tariffs, and strengthening customers' willingness to pay for WASH services. See Water For People Honduras.
- **Providing targeted time-bound subsidies** to service providers and service authorities. In supporting the creation of posts or offices within service authorities, in some cases, Members have provided initial budget support until a time at which the value of such entities has been demonstrated, and the government is ready to fully cover their costs. Targeted subsidies have also been used to provide support to service providers such as faecal sludge management operators or self-supply masons to access equipment or cover initial operating costs. See Case Studies 1 and 4.

Box 10: Global guidance and tools on life-cycle costing approach

IRC*'s 'WASHCost' programme was a key milestone in the global WASH sector with respect to introducing and socialising the concept of life-cycle cost analysis. Multi-country studies helped to develop broad benchmark figures on Direct Support Costs, and tools for life-cycle cost analysis were provided for sector use on IRC's website.* ***Aguaconsult*** *and* ***Water For People*** *and others have supported the development of country-specific financial analysis tools, such as the Capital Maintenance Expenditure (CapManEx) calculator developed for the Government of Uganda and the 'At What Cost' tool used in Malawi and Rwanda, which helps to determine appropriate tariffs for rural water services.*

- **Facilitating access to financing mechanisms for service providers and customers**. Examples include establishing revolving funds for domestic water connections, engaging microfinance institutions to provide loans for sanitation, and providing business development support to improve service providers' creditworthiness. Water For People employs a market-based approach to implement sanitation initiatives in rural and urban areas. They strengthen consumer demand and the capacities of local service providers, and introduce appropriate, affordable technologies. They strengthen the role of local authorities for oversight to ensure quality and engage micro-finance institutions to develop and market financial products for both the customers and the service providers. See CARE Madagascar, Water For People Nicaragua.
- **Undertaking sector financial assessments, budget tracking and related advocacy efforts**. Relevant activities include tracking and publishing overall budget allocations to WASH sub-sectors and per life-cycle cost component, undertaking life-cycle cost analyses in different areas of the country, helping to identify unit cost irregularities and improve value for money in the sector, reviewing financial flows and bottlenecks in sector financing, and advocating for government financial allocations in neglected aspects of the sector. See Case Study 7.

4.6 Building Block: Regulation and accountability

This building block is strong when: *A clear regulatory framework exists; regulatory functions are clearly defined with clear separation in roles between regulators and service providers; regulatory capacity exists and is exercised; and equity and accountability mechanisms are in place*

Examples of Members' strengthening this building block cover both formal and informal regulation, and horizontal and vertical[8] accountability between WASH system actors, at various levels:

- **Strengthening accountability between service providers and users and among users.** Examples include establishing customer forums and other types of platforms and processes to bring users and service providers together and strengthening the customer orientation of service providers. Many Members have worked on improving the financial management and accountability of service providers, in some instances using technologies to assist in enhancing accountability, such as mobile money payments, cashless water kiosks, or apps to improve meter reading and billing accuracy. Inter-user accountability has been raised using examples such as strengthening local bylaws and social norms for user defaulters (e.g., non-payment or theft of water, open defecation, etc.). See Box 11, CARE Ethiopia, and Water For People Malawi.
- **Strengthening the capacities and processes of service authorities to deliver their devolved regulatory mandates**.

Box 11: Strengthening customer and service provider accountability: WaterAid Ethiopia

Poor customer orientation and accountability of the town water utilities led to users' unwillingness to pay water bills, water theft and vandalism of public assets. WaterAid helped the utilities establish customer service units and created 'customer forums' which allowed dialogue between users, the utilities, and the utility oversight 'boards'. Modernisation of meter reading and billing systems led to more accurate and transparent bills, which customers were more willing to pay. For more information, see here.

[8] Horizontal (when one state actor has the authority to demand explanations or impose penalties on another state actor) and vertical (accountability between different level, e.g., upwards from a user to local government).

There are limited examples of strengthening economic regulation; however, there are numerous examples of strengthening service level regulation, for example helping to establish service standards (e.g., for water supply service levels or quality standards for faecal sludge management emptying and treatment activities and developing and strengthening service providers' processes for tracking and benchmarking key performance indicators. Customer protection and complaints systems have also been established in some service authorities. Activities in this area have also included **strengthening accountability and regulatory arrangements within service delivery models**. Some examples are helping to formalise informal service providers (e.g., manual sludge emptiers), establishing umbrella bodies for representation and dialogue with service authorities, and developing internal enforcement of service standards. Other examples include supporting the central government on systems and protocols for government regulation of private sector service provider contracts or clarifying the mandates of oversight boards for water utilities. See Case Study 7.

- **Strengthening the accountability of service authorities to users** through engaging with strengthening the capacities of civil society organisations and journalist networks, increasing public awareness of their rights and undertaking 'citizen score card assessments', and increasing the publicly available evidence base that service authorities use to plan and allocate resources more transparently. See Case Studies 5, 7, and CARE.
- **Strengthening mutual accountability between state and non-state actors** at different levels. For example, bringing stakeholders such as service authorities, service providers and users together to clarify roles and responsibilities and hold each other accountable supporting service authority level coordination and dialogue platforms, and supporting joint sector reviews. The CARE-led RANO WASH programme brings the private sector and civil society to the table, to inform sector planning and decision-making/accountability mechanisms. The programme also strengthens the capacity of private sector and civil society to effectively participate and advocate in these structures and ensure the voice of communities in these as well. See Box 12 and Case Study 5.

Box 12: Strengthening the effectiveness of Joint Sector Reviews

WaterAid *is working with partners in a range of countries to build an understanding of what effective joint sector reviews look like and demonstrate how sector actors can come together to strengthen country-led processes of review and course correction that will drive broader systems change. In particular, WaterAid is working with others to ensure joint sector reviews utilise national planning, coordination and monitoring systems (or build consensus to strengthen these where they do not exist), and that priority actions identified through the joint sector reviews are informed by evidence and feedback into a cyclical process of reform. Case studies of WaterAid's work on joint sector reviews in Nepal, Swaziland (Eswatini), and Malawi can be found here.*

4.7 Building Block: Water resources management

This building block is strong when: *There is a clear framework for the allocation and management of water abstraction and water quality and this framework is being implemented. There are systematic practices of catchment protection, planning for multiple uses of water, dialogue platforms for water resource disputes, and effective arrangements for hydrological monitoring.*

Examples of Members strengthening this building block range from actions at the service provider level up to sector-level integrated planning, and the development of global guidance and tools.

- **Undertaking water resource assessments and strengthening water resource registration and ongoing monitoring processes.** Examples include undertaking assessments to understand the potential and characteristics of the available water resources and calculating and forecasting demand on them through time. Undertaking such district-wide (or equivalent) assessments has helped to develop inventories of sources, which have helped create initial datasets used for source registration or as a baseline for recurrent monitoring. In some cases, Members have helped to clarify source ownership or abstraction license protocols, and there are many examples of Member strengthening capacities and processes of water yield/level monitoring, and the monitoring of water quality, both at the service provider and service authority levels. See Case Study 7, CARE Ecuador, Water For People, Water For People Uganda, Water For People Malawi, and WaterAid.
- **Supporting the development of integrated Water Resources Management plans and strengthening platforms for multi-stakeholder dialogue**. Examples include supporting processes of multi-stakeholder planning and dialogue for water resource management, helping to ensure water resource management allocation factors are considered for multiple uses of water, and helping to ensure different types of water users are adequately represented in forums where water resource allocation and planning is done. Other examples include strengthening the cross-sectoral coordination and collaboration between sectors and government entities (e.g., between WASH, natural resources management and agriculture) and strengthening the connectedness between WASH and water resources planning at different levels within the sector. In other examples, Members have been ensuring that sector policies and plans adequately consider water resource management issues such as water security, resilience, and climate change. See WaterAid, Water For People Rwanda (here, here, and here), and Water For People Guatemala.
- **Strengthening institutional capacities for water resource management at the service authority level** through activities such as supporting units in the service authority for water resource management planning and preservation. CARE Guatemala provided support to create institutional structures at the municipal level, which allowed the collaboration in actions and planning between forestry and water supply sectors. This led to the mapping of water sources and land use to inform water source protection plans. See Water For People Peru and Water For People Uganda.
- **Strengthening service providers' capacity to effectively manage their water resources**. Examples here include supporting service providers to undertake Water Safety Plans, and supporting actions to protect and upgrade catchments, and strengthening service providers' capacities on issues such as leakage management. See Water For People Uganda.
- **Improving faecal sludge management to reduce risks to water resources and the environment.** Examples include undertaking shit flow diagrams to calculate the faecal loads that are entering the environment untreated (and developing action plans to address the findings), supporting the development of standards for emptying services and effluent discharges, and demonstrating

technologies and business models for the safe emptying and treatment of faecal sludge. See Water For People Malawi.

4.8 Building Block: Learning and adaptation

This building block is strong when: *Capacity and frameworks exist to capture lessons learned and to adapt and update service delivery models, approaches, and the wider building blocks in the face of change and lessons learned.*

A key objective of Agenda for Change is to test and demonstrate approaches for progressively strengthening the effectiveness and sustainability of WASH systems to sustainably achieve the Sustainable Development Goal 6 targets. There are examples of Members supporting learning and exchange platforms at different levels, and helping to strengthen the link between monitoring, learning, and the adaptation of approaches and policies. Examples include the following:

- **Supporting and strengthening multi-stakeholder platforms** for reflection and cross-learning at different levels. Some Members have helped to strengthen local and national WASH coordination platforms, which often include a learning and sharing component in their agendas, in addition to supporting networks of WASH NGOs which have cross-member learning as one of their key objectives. At the sector level, support has been provided to strengthen the effectiveness of joint sector review processes. Members have gathered for global and regional learning events, and many Members actively support the convening and/or content of global conferences on WASH systems strengthening issues. At the local level, examples include supporting exchange visits and forums where service providers and local stakeholders share experiences. See Box 13 and Water For People Bolivia.
- **Supporting the flow of information between different 'levels' and strengthening evidence-based decision making and knowledge management processes**. In strengthening access to information across sector actors, Members have supported the creation and updating of online knowledge repositories, helped develop sector newsletters, supported the dissemination of information from national to local levels, and strengthened the linkages and information flow between coordination and learning platforms at different levels. At both the service authority level and the national level, there are examples of strengthening the linkages between monitoring data, learning, and policy/plan development. See Water For Africa Through Leadership And Institutional Support (WALIS).

Box 13: Learning alliances in Ethiopia, Ghana, Uganda, and others

IRC learning alliances are an approach to facilitating social learning and driving collective action. In South Ari, Ethiopia, a diverse group of stakeholders, including local government, were invited to join a platform focused on improving rural water supply sustainability. The group started as a series of meetings to jointly define the problem and set a work plan and objectives for addressing it through action-research. Later, Members became active in developing solutions and documenting learning. IRC acts as the facilitator and brings information to the group for analysis and reflection. Learning alliances are multi-scale, and the facilitator acts as a 'spider in the web' to connect actors from different levels and facilitate information exchange.

- **Engaging in ongoing research to inform sector approaches**. In many cases, Members have engaged in research studies on WASH topics, which help build the evidence base for developing sector approaches, and these studies also often provide opportunities to engage local universities on WASH issues and build 'north-south' linkages between academic and research institutions. See IRC.

Training Water and Sanitation Commissions of communities of the municipality of Tacaná, San Marcos, on the importance of water source protection (Photo: CARE Guatemala)

Chapter 5: Organisational experiences in applying systems strengthening approaches

Preceding chapters have focused on ways in which WASH systems have been strengthened, with examples presented according to the eight different building blocks. Each individual example was part of a larger systems strengthening initiative with engagement at multiple levels (e.g., national and subnational). This chapter focuses on Members themselves and how they have adapted their ways of working to apply the systems mind-set in their work.

5.1 From service delivery to systems strengthening

Some Members were previously focused on direct delivery of infrastructure development projects and programmes. This refers to the NGOs implementing projects directly (rather than through government) whereby they are constructing infrastructure, using their own staff to deliver behaviour change programming, etc. These more conventional NGO ways of working parallel to government systems not only failed to strengthen permanent WASH systems, but they might have inadvertently undermined them. For example, with an NGO project establishing service providers but not linking them with government, by implementing approaches or activities that are not in line with government plans or guidelines, or creating parallel systems for project design, implementation, and monitoring to those of government. The involvement of government in programming may, in some cases, have been more about keeping government officials informed on project delivery, than in aligning to and building the ownership and capacity of government as the responsible authority for WASH, or where government leadership is weak or unaccountable, in empowering citizens to hold their government to account.

Box 14: Adapting ways of working

*In **SPLASH Ethiopia**'s large WASH in schools programme in Addis Ababa, a close working relationship was forged with the local government authorities, allowing the programme to utilise government extension staff to assist in the school outreach work. This was deemed critical to both support sustainability and increase the scale of programming.*

*In **Malawi, Water For People** has established a long-term relationship with the District Water Office of Chikwawa District. Over the years, as trust and systems have grown stronger, it allowed programmes to be co-designed, delivered and monitored with the local authorities, with Water For People providing budget support to the authority based on agreed activity plans.*

A systems mind-set suggests that direct service delivery may be appropriate in the initial stages where there is a need for a proof of concept, or trust building, but this should progressively shift towards co-funding, co-design and delivery of activities with and through government. Or, service delivery may be done by setting up a locally recognised institution or company that becomes a part of the local system and efforts to strengthen it. As the trust and relationships between government and the Members matures, and as the systems and the capacities of the government progressively strengthen, the role of NGOs changes to either exit, or to act more as a civil society organisation or technical advisor rather than an implementer.

Table 1 and Box 14 provide brief examples of how Members have adapted their ways of thinking and working towards a systems strengthening approach. The approaches and mode of programme design and

delivery will be partly dictated by context, so Members have also needed to adapt to meet government needs and requests. For example, the political environment and space allowed for civil society action will set boundaries on the approach, or a request from high-level government may require undertaking specific activities. Urgent or immediate national concerns (such as climate or conflict) may force changes and movement on the spectrum from development toward relief.

Table 1: Examples of how Members' ways of working have been modified to strengthen systems

Design	Implementation	Monitoring
Co-designing programs with government entities and incorporating program activities into their work plans. Supporting local governments to develop strategic WASH plans, then aligning the NGO's activities to contribute to the implementation of these (e.g., WaterAid).	Involving government in the (co-) delivery of activities, to strengthen capacities and systems; utilising extension officers and government-recognised volunteers and community groups; avoiding creating project volunteers or committees (e.g., CARE Guatemala).	Aligning with government monitoring indicators, using system actors to collect and analyse the data, and feeding data into sector monitoring systems (e.g., Welthungerhilfe Nepal). Jointly reviewing programs and disseminating learning widely in the sector (e.g., WaterAid Ethiopia).

5.1.1 Common challenges when taking a systems strengthening approach

Common challenges experienced by Members and examples of how they have been addressed are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Common challenges for undertaking systems approaches and approaches to address these

Commonly mentioned challenges	Examples of how challenges have been addressed
Government continuity • Dealing with the turnover of government personnel and political leadership, as well as institutional reforms. These undermine progress and pose a threat to the continuity of momentum of systems strengthening actions.	• Water For People views the institutionalised district WASH office as a key to preventing/overcoming this challenge. • Some WaterAid country programmes have reported that building trust and strong working relationships with less senior government staff helps to mitigate the risk of government staff turnover. Less senior staff are likely to be in their posts for longer periods, while senior staff / heads of department are often transferred.

Commonly mentioned challenges	Examples of how challenges have been addressed
Capacity gaps • Ensuring requisite skillsets for systems strengthening are available: these may not be common in many people associated with the WASH system. The use of consultants may substitute rather than build capacity. • Ensuring acceptable budget ratios in 'software-focused' programmes where staff costs predominate.	• Strengthening capacities of sector training institutions to undertake capacity building; building internal government support and training processes; strengthening knowledge management systems and developing manuals and guidelines. • Technical assistance and specific 'sustainability projects' to build organisational capacity within the NGO. For example, WaterAid's SusWASH programme and Welthungerhilfe's Sustainable Services Initiative programmes have helped to develop the Members' capacity to deliver systems strengthening actions (see Box 15). • Agenda for Change Technical Assistance Facility
Buy-in and investment in systems strengthening approaches • Gaining political commitment for and getting government budget allocated to non-infrastructural systems strengthening actions (aligning the motives of the project and of stakeholders. • Obtaining funding for NGOs to enable systems strengthening (e.g., longer-term funding in certain districts, that is flexible, not overly focused on beneficiary numbers and more focused on outcomes than outputs). • Convincing the NGO Members' senior management and marketing departments and to support and champion systems approaches. • Measuring systems change, proving its value for money or effectiveness, and attributing results arising from collaborative action.	• Ongoing advocacy and influencing of governments and donors to fund and monitor in ways conducive to systems strengthening. • Where appropriate, Members have undertaken hybrid programmes of systems strengthening and some direct service delivery (e.g., infrastructure development), particularly where service coverage is low, and where the direct delivery can be demonstrative for wider upscaling. • Targeted advocacy around system underperformance and involvement of politicians in WASH systems diagnosis. • Developing communications strategies around systems approaches.

Commonly mentioned challenges	Examples of how challenges have been addressed
Collaborative action and partnerships • Collaborating between NGO and government: sometimes initial mutual distrust, and perceived risks arising from greater collaboration with government in projects, such as rent-seeking behaviours from local stakeholders (e.g., seeking per diems and/or informal ways in which to generate revenue from the project), less direct control of projects, politicisation of activities. • Ensuring genuine commitment to cross-organisational collaboration, particularly in more 'competitive' NGO contexts, and ensuring the momentum of collective action.	• Choosing partners carefully and making the conditions and limitations of support clear at the outset (e.g., transparent communication of funding amounts and restrictions, inability to finance infrastructure directly). • Supporting dedicated coordination hubs and secretariats, such as learning alliance coordinators.
Implementing and upscaling • Scaling up from local examples to wider sector uptake: ensuring pilots are cost-viable for scaling, obtaining the 'ear' of national policy makers. • Understanding and navigating the political dimension of the system.	• Networking with other organisations to form a consolidated voice to influence policy makers. • Support to national-level involvement in the district-wide approach from the outset. • Undertaking political economy analysis.

5.2 Organisational journeys to collaborative systems strengthening

This sub-section provides some examples of the organisational journeys that Members have taken as they progressively adopt a collaborative systems approach. These stories show that change can be a slow and iterative process. Organisations do not come to understand and adopt a systems approach to WASH overnight or in the same ways. Having buy-in from senior leadership allows for a systems strengthening approach to be institutionalised within an organisation; however, it takes time and capacity building for organisations to fully internalise ways to understand the system and how to strengthen it. Some Members have experienced challenges in getting organisational commitment at different levels to shift from direct service provision to working more as a facilitator and technical advisor to government-led efforts. Organisations that have made progress internalising this approach with all their staff have invested in training and communicating the organisational commitment over several years.

Certain Members have experienced challenges in convincing their fundraising and marketing departments to shift from a narrative of 'giving water to communities' to 'supporting sustainable service delivery at scale.' However, more and more organisations working on WASH systems strengthening are receiving flexible and longer-term grants to enable adaptive approaches and Agenda for Change is one of several organisations learning to provide better evidence of the value of systems approaches in WASH.

Beyond the more technical aspects of adopting systems approaches, Members have taken different journeys towards collaborating at country and global levels, moving farther along on some of the aspects of the collaboration continuum (Figure 5) than others. Because of the nature of NGOs, which require external funding, some Members have experienced challenges in balancing organisational interests in branding, reputation, and profile with the extra effort and time required for true collaborative action. Over time, Members have recognised that their active collaboration in Agenda for Change has helped to accelerate learning and sharing amongst themselves.

At the heart of Agenda for Change is the need for the country collaborations of Members and others to drive a common agenda of support for national systems strengthening. However, there has been no consistent approach to the way in which the Agenda for Change Global Hub (Committees, Working Groups and Secretariat) supports those country collaborations. Certain Members have provided support to specific country collaborations, generating limited collective action. Country collaborations have evolved in different countries in different ways, and engagement has not been restricted to Members.

Box 15: Using sustainability-oriented projects to build wider organisational capacity in systems strengthening

Welthungerhilfe *and* ***WaterAid*** *have used donor-funded programmes such as the Sustainable Services Initiative and SusWASH to help pilot approaches to systems strengthening in various contexts.* ***Aguaconsult*** *has provided technical support to such initiatives. The process of implementing these programmes helped to further develop capacities and tools within the organisations to apply systems strengthening in their global programming. However, there can be challenges to making the shift from actions in a project, to wider institutionalisation within the core business of the organisation.*

Figure 5 Agenda for Change collaboration continuum (Source: Governance Framework 2019)

Country collaborations have evolved where there has been greater enthusiasm and funding specifically for collaboration, from groups of organisations and individuals responsible for managing those country programmes. Stories of some Members' journeys towards systems strengthening follow.

IRC's Triple-S (Sustainable Services at Scale) and WASHCost programmes from 2008 to 2015 (funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation) were foundational in developing this organisation's systems philosophy. Both projects focused on improving the sustainability of rural water supplies: Triple-S through establishing multi-level learning alliances for collective action and WASHCost by identifying the actual costs of service delivery. Both programmes took a learning-centred approach which focused on bringing stakeholders together to define, study, and develop solutions to sustainability challenges. It became clear that there was value piloting and testing solutions at the district level where service delivery takes place, but that success at scale required national-level engagement which was best achieved through establishing relationships and participating in working groups and learning platforms. It also became clear that systems-level change required continued investment and support for national processes, which led to establishment of IRC's Ghana and Uganda country offices. In the Triple-S programme, IRC first developed a set of building blocks for sustainable services, which later evolved into IRC's conceptual understanding of the WASH system.

Even before joining Agenda for Change, the **CARE** Water+ team conducted a 'grading' of 10 of their 50 country programmes against the four Sanitation and Water for All collaborative behaviours, along with each country's level of gender equality and overall equity. In general, countries that are stronger on these assessments have worked at the local government level, in addition to advocating and influencing policy at the national level. In 2019, nine country programmes initiated these discussions internally, in order to promote not only assessments of progress towards collaborative behaviours but also brainstorming activities to improve the programme. Many of these programmes have had consistent WASH funding, most for more than a decade, which allows them to establish long-term goals and retain staff who have built relationships with government officials and an understanding of the system.

In 2019, **Splash** received a large grant and matching funds from city governments which enabled the organisation to design and oversee a city-wide approach to ensure WASH services for all public schools in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, and Kolkata, India over the next five years. This work will allow them to prove their model. They are in the process of exiting their programmes in China, Cambodia, and Nepal with plans in place for local ongoing support.

WaterAid has been supporting different aspects of systems strengthening in different forms for many years. They recently finished a global evaluation of their sector strengthening efforts. While this report commended the progress that has been made, it also highlighted the challenge of incorporating mainstream systems strengthening into other pillars of WaterAid's work, and the human resource requirements of undertaking systems strengthening activities.

For **Water For People**, the journey to a systems approach started with the vision of reaching Everyone Forever in a single district, but with no specific plan about how to get there. True changes were achieved

in phases as stakeholders realised that a commitment to reaching everyone in the district and ensuring these services were sustained forever would require different ways of thinking and working. A commitment to monitoring services across a district over the long term – including not just their own projects but all water points – was a key step on the journey. This monitoring effort was not implemented for any one grant, project or funder. It came at a time when data-driven decision making was becoming more prevalent in development processes. Having the means to transparently share the data, in addition to being able collect it consistently over time in the same places, made the realities of sustaining services hard for any stakeholder to ignore. This enabled a shift in the conversations on how to effect lasting, long-term change, which required changing the focus from direct implementation of infrastructure projects to considering how to keep services going over time. Not having expatriates running country programmes was critical to influencing local actors. Country programme staff could talk honestly to mayors about reaching everyone and ensuring that Water For People (or another NGO) would not have to come back over and over again to fix things. Water For People now has more staff who are focused on facilitation roles. To encourage funders to join them on the journey, they explained that it was great to invest in pipes and pumps but if they did not invest in other things, the pipes and pumps were a worthless investment. (See case studies in Honduras and India).

Water for Good is in the process of adopting a major organisational shift in its approaches. Historically, the organisation served as a local service provider after its initial inheritance of a for-profit drilling company. When conflict struck the Central African Republic (CAR) in 2011, the organisation assessed the broader system and their role, then committed to changing their approach. An operational plan for working at scale in a single prefecture was developed based on the theory of change initiated through a building block analysis. Organisational leadership has committed to this theory of change and the operational plan that results from it, and the organisation references this for decision-making. All staff are familiar with the theory of change, which facilitates a common vision for moving forward.

Welthungerhilfe is a multi-sector organisation, and it has included water supply efforts to support their work on eradication of hunger and poverty. Evaluations in 2009-2010 showed that the water points they had supported were failing. In 2011-2012 they focused on sustainability but realised through multi-stakeholder discussions that they needed to broaden to systems thinking. In 2015, their Sustainable Services Initiative was developed, with three output levels: technical assistance to country programmes in Ethiopia, Uganda, Nepal, Malawi (interim) and Kenya (interim), capacity development at the practitioner level, and promoting discussions on systems strengthening. They were enabled to do this with significant flexible funding from a foundation called Viva con Agua, together with considerable internal unrestricted funding.

Chapter 6: Looking forward

This paper has presented some examples and experiences of Members as they work toward strengthening the systems that deliver WASH services around the world. With leadership and commitment from national governments and a nudge from collaborations such as Sanitation and Water for All, a growing number of organisations are becoming part of the paradigm shift away from externally dictated development agendas toward local and national systems that drive progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals.

Agenda for Change will continue to share examples, evidence, and tools as a part of the coalition's commitment to learning and improving as organisations and as a sector. The scope of influence of NGOs within national systems is necessarily limited, but communication of evidence of best practices and systems-level insights can be a significant contribution alongside specific systems building and strengthening activities. NGOs invited to participate in local and national government processes must acknowledge it as a privilege and remain committed to accepting and adhering to the leadership and direction set by government. An organisation's own objectives for systems strengthening must be continually balanced with a commitment to respect government priorities. Ultimately, strong systems are those that do not rely on NGOs. NGOs attempting systems strengthening should pay special attention to avoiding dependencies; instead, they should progressively build local ownership and capacity for systems change.

Government representatives and other stakeholders in Mozambique assess the strength of the WASH system building blocks using a version of WaterAid's participatory assessment tool (Photo: Charles Scott/WaterAid)

While the organisational journeys, processes, and tools vary somewhat among Members and country collaborations, there is an emerging consensus on the steps that are needed for systems strengthening to succeed. Typically, the process starts by diagnosing the system and identifying key areas for improvement. Next steps include determining the core building blocks of a functioning WASH system and finding ways to support those, in addition to assessing the types of relationships and incentives among the key actors and factors in the system that will support systems strengthening.

The conceptual framework and building blocks for WASH will continue to evolve. Members are still learning and documenting their experiences of applying systems strengthening approaches in different contexts, including navigating the complexity of fragile and humanitarian contexts[9] and the unique systems challenges posed by hygiene service delivery[10], WASH in schools, in self-supply contexts and through market-based approaches with a stronger private sector role. Readers are encouraged to use and adapt the concepts presented here and are asked to help foster a culture of learning by sharing challenges, successes, and insights from different contexts.

An incredible amount of progress has been made in the five years since Agenda for Change was founded, both in terms of the deepening the collaboration's conceptual understanding of WASH systems and the tools, approaches, and evidence that have been applied in different countries, and in terms of strengthening the partnerships and collective action of Members. In the coming year, Agenda for Change will build on the case studies and examples presented in this paper to provide further evidence and accelerate collective learning and action to more effectively drive this change within and beyond the Agenda for Change collaboration.

[9] The application of systems strengthening in fragile contexts is the subject of an upcoming paper co-authored by Aguaconsult, Water for Good and several other organisations.
[10] See Tillett and Gensch, 2019.

Annex A

Case studies of systems strengthening by Agenda for Change members

Training Water and Sanitation Commissions of communities of the municipality of Tacaná, San Marcos, on the importance of water source protection (Photo: CARE Guatemala)

1. Reaching Everyone Forever in San Pedro, Bolivia. Water For People

Background

Water For People and the *Instituto de Capacitación para el Desarrollo* (INCADE), a Bolivian development organisation, began working on water supply projects in the municipality of San Pedro in 2006. In 2008, the municipality established a framework for an entity to manage all WASH work, and by 2011, the Municipal WASH Office was fully functional and funded from the municipal budget. In 2012, Water For People began implementing the Everyone Forever model, and by 2018, the Municipal WASH Office was positioned to fully manage, maintain, and monitor access to comprehensive WASH services throughout San Pedro.

In 2013, the first year of baseline service-level data, 82% of communities and 66% of schools in the municipality had access to water services. By 2017, San Pedro had reached all communities, schools, clinics, and families with access to high-quality, sustainable water services, which it has maintained through 2019 (Figure 6). Today, Water For People is preparing to exit San Pedro, having established that a high level of sustainability exists in the entire service delivery system (Figure 7).

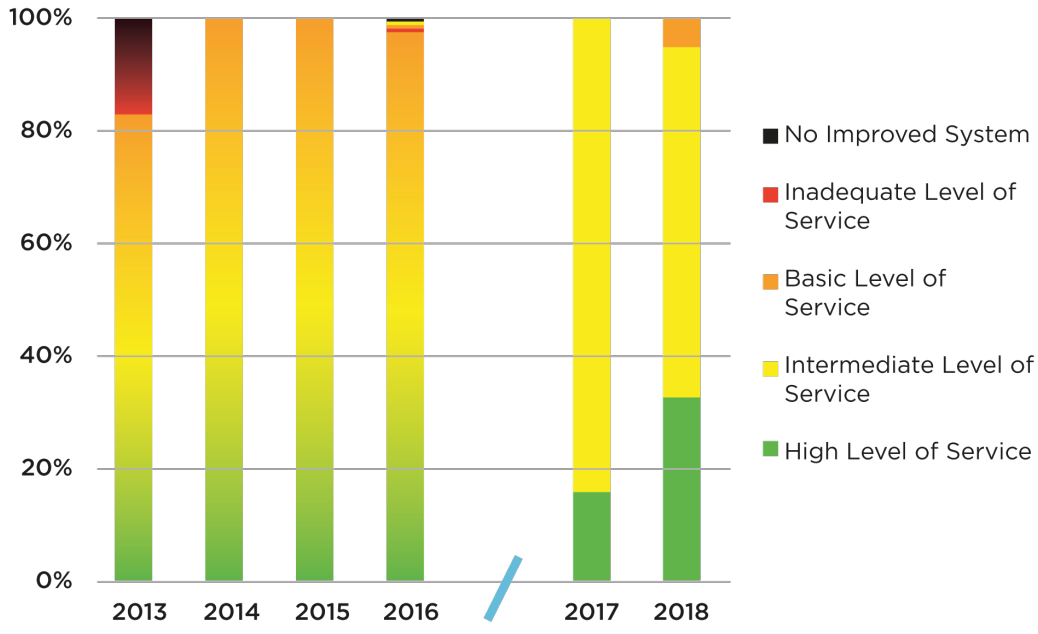


Figure 6 Community Water Point Levels of Service over time (Source: Water For People Bolivia). Note: Water For People's methodology for measuring certain metrics for Water Point Level of Service changed between 2016 and 2017. For 2013 to 2016, level of service scores for basic/intermediate/high and no/inadequate system were combined.

What has been done and the journey so far

The entry point to systems strengthening was through the establishment of the Municipal WASH Office. This represented a shift from the status quo in that Water For People used to directly contract with

municipalities for service delivery; through the establishment of the municipal WASH office, the focus evolved to ensure government leadership from the beginning. Throughout this transition, Water For People provided guidance and support to government officials in the planning processes needed to run a strong, sustainable Municipal WASH Office. This included financing (capital and recurring costs and funding sources), technical assistance (infrastructure design and execution), monitoring (levels of service, quality, sustainability, and water resources), and capacity building (planning, budgeting, and policy expertise).

Evaluation Parameters		Level of Sustainable Services		
		2017	2018	2019
Service authority	Structure	High	High	High
	Finances	Basic	High	High
	Management	High	High	High
	Monitoring	High	High	High
Service provider	Structure	High	High	High
	Finances	Basic	Intermediate	Intermediate
	O&M	Intermediate	High	High
WRM	WRM	Intermediate	High	High

Figure 7 Sustainable services checklist for San Pedro (Source: Water For People). Note that O&M = operations and maintenance; WRM = water resources management.

Over time, the municipal WASH office transitioned full responsibility to local government, and Water For People continues to provide support in a technical assistance role. In 2011, Bolivia's national government issued a national programme for potable water projects called *Mi Agua*, which supports the establishment of Municipal WASH Offices in every municipality in the country. Under this programme, Water For People is providing technical support to develop and scale Municipal WASH Offices in over 40 municipalities of the 340 nationally. Additionally, Water For People is providing technical support at the department (state) level to two additional departments and is working directly with the national government on national policies to promote a system-strengthening approach.

Successes and challenges

In 2018, Water For People showed Everyone Forever is possible by reaching all Everyone and Forever milestones, for the first time ever, in San Pedro, Bolivia. They are now monitoring and preparing to exit. Water For People is partnering with local governments in eight additional municipalities to jointly deliver

the Everyone Forever model. At the invitation of the government, they are also acting as technical advisors to scale the model in the departments of Tarija and Oruro.

An ongoing challenge is maintaining the vision and political will of municipal authorities. Elections and personnel changes can also destabilise the financial resources and technical strength of the WASH office.

Lessons learned

Committing to systems strengthening required Water For People to make several adjustments as an organisation. It required a continued transition away from project-based funding, increased focus on outcomes (district-wide service levels) versus outputs (people reached with the new infrastructure), and adjustments to their planning processes to better align with the planning cycles of the local government. Working at pace and in alignment with local government priorities required patience and flexibility. Water For People also recognised the need to set expectations around exit as a way to clarify the extent of their commitment based on results, not time.

Shifting from project-focused approaches to creating a comprehensive service environment and ensuring a clear understanding of all stakeholder roles in the service environment are critical lessons. Other lessons include:

- Recognizing that, ultimately, the government must lead monitoring efforts and external actors, like Water For People, must accept the government data.
- Creating an effective service delivery environment versus a time bound infrastructure project where services may disappear when a grant is finished.
- Establishing trust, leading from behind, and centring the work on local leadership.
- Leveraging longer-term resources through the local government to ensure ongoing services. Co-financing agreements between Water For People, the municipal government, and communities to multiply funds and accelerate process, with the municipal government committing at least 50% of infrastructure work for the past seven years.
- Establishing the Municipal WASH Office with external financial support that decreased each year until the office was completely funded by the municipal budget after 2 years.
- Providing technical assistance to the Municipal WASH Office to transfer tools and methodologies that they now own relating to planning, budgeting, financing (with life-cycle costing), monitoring, and water resources management.
- Ensuring annual monitoring to evaluate progress, next steps, and priorities throughout model implementation.
- Holding annual workshops for water service providers held by the Municipal WASH Office to ensure support of technical capacities.
- Municipal labs to monitor water quality periodically at an affordable cost.

- Providing adequate short-term support after achieving Everyone and Forever milestones and prior to exit (during the Oversight Only phase).

In 2018, Water For People proved that Everyone Forever is possible by achieving all Everyone and Forever milestones, for the first time ever, in San Pedro, Bolivia. Water For People is confident that the Municipal WASH Office has the capacity to sustain high-quality WASH services and is working with the national government of Bolivia to scale this systems strengthening model nationally.

2. Building Alliances with School Stakeholders in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Splash

Background

Splash is a non-profit organisation that designs and implements child-focused water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) and menstrual health solutions with governments in some of the world's largest low-resource cities. Splash is unique in that they directly implement all their software programming. They act as a general contractor for all initial hardware programming (bringing on contractors as needed) and are responsible for all hardware operations and maintenance.

Over the next five years, Splash is focused on reaching 100% of the government schools in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia and Kolkata, India through a $45-million initiative called Project WISE (WASH in Schools for Everyone). With Project WISE, Splash aims to demonstrate a scalable, durable, and cost-effective model that can be adopted by governments and replicated beyond the initial cities and countries. By the end of Project WISE, all government schools in Addis Ababa and Kolkata will have clean drinking water, handwashing stations, and child-friendly toilets. This project will demonstrate the feasibility of a citywide approach, provide a sustainable, cost-effective model for WASH in Schools, and encourage investment and replication across other major cities. As part of Project WISE, the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine will conduct a multi-year evaluation to assess the impact of Splash's intervention at schools with a primary focus on better health and increased school attendance. Results are expected for publication in 2024.

This case study examines the initial steps that Splash has taken to strengthen existing partnerships, establish strong working relationships, promote local ownership, and create clear expectations of all stakeholders from the beginning of project implementation.

What has been done and the journey so far

Prior to 2019, Splash was working at a small scale in Addis schools; with the addition of Project WISE, there has been a significant ramp-up in the number of schools that will be served (they plan to reach close to 400 schools over the next four years). In addition, Project WISE secured city-level commitments and co-funding, including $8 million from the Addis Ababa Education Bureau to support sanitation activities. The success and sustainability of this initiative required a new level of coordination and engagement from Splash, across schools, the education bureau, and local government staff.

Prior to the launch of Project WISE, Splash signed a project agreement with the relevant Ethiopian government agencies that outlined responsibilities and ensured clear alignment of stakeholder efforts. This planning process made it possible to partner with existing sub-city and woreda (district) education bureau staff from the beginning. Education bureau staff members partnered with Splash by compiling and sharing school lists and contact information, as well as helping secure buy-in from school leadership. Previously, Splash visited each school individually at programme launch to conduct initial site engagement activities. Due to the scale of Project WISE, Splash shifted from a school-by-school site engagement model to a centralised approach that utilises existing institutional staff members and processes.

Once the initial outreach to schools was complete, education bureau and Splash staff held several group orientation meetings at woreda offices for school officials. The purpose of these meetings was to orient school leaders to Project WISE, inform them of partnership requirements (including ongoing operational and financial responsibilities), and have each school leader sign a partnership agreement. During the meeting, school leaders were given time to read partnership agreements and ask clarifying questions before signing.

To date, Splash has been responsible for operation and maintenance of WASH infrastructure at their sites in Addis Ababa. They intend to have third-party service provider and spare parts options identified in 2020 so that they can begin testing them and linking Project WISE schools with them for long-term support.

Successes and challenges

The group setting encouraged thoughtful discussion of the Project WISE model and ongoing support requirements, with questions asked about the inclusion of janitors in trainings and the availability of spare parts and service provision for infrastructure. During these meetings, Splash staff were able to give schools an understanding of what commitments would be required from them and on what timeline.

While this process was more efficient than carrying out multiple visits to each site, a significant amount of time was required to bring so many stakeholders together and ensure availability of both education bureau staff and local government partners.

Lessons learned

In Addis Ababa, Splash observed that the group orientations encouraged a level of informed excitement and endorsement that Splash hopes will translate to smoother implementation and improved project sustainability. Through thoughtful structuring of a centralised site engagement process, in partnership with local stakeholders, they were successful in developing alliances upfront, creating clear working relationships, and establishing ownership across multiple stakeholders. By partnering with the same government staff who work in Addis Ababa schools daily, Splash aims to enable staff to conduct their work more efficiently while ensuring that they understood Project WISE, how it fit into their existing responsibilities, and their role in its successful implementation.

Next steps

Splash plans to build on the institutional stakeholder partnerships developed during site engagement as they implement Project WISE in Addis Ababa and, eventually, fully transition it to local owners.

3. Evidence of a systems approach in a fragile context, Central African Republic. Water for Good

Background

The Central African Republic (CAR) is one of the poorest countries in the world, ranking 188th out of 189 countries in the Human Development Index (HDI 2017). Nearly half of the country's population needs humanitarian assistance (UNOCHA 2019). In the last 20 years, WASH investments in CAR have been largely short-term, project-based, and focused on addressing people's urgent and basic needs. As a result, the building-blocks that make up the sector are weak. Lack of data and a lack of institutional memory have inhibited planning and budgeting processes. Government institutions have not had the capacity to capture and analyse data in a way that can inform policy and legal frameworks despite the need for reform and innovation.

Within this context, Water for Good operates as a proxy-private water services provider, aiming to strengthen the systems for professionalised borehole drilling and preventative maintenance services at scale. The long-term strategy is to incubate and train highly professionalised water service providers that can deliver services that water users want in coordination with government and NGO partners.

While their primary expertise is in service delivery and monitoring, Water for Good recognises their interconnectedness with all aspects of the system and has increasingly focused on how to strengthen the system beyond the service-delivery model. Thus, starting in 2016, Water for Good initiated a process to collaboratively develop a district-wide approach to water services planning with the regional and national government and civil society WASH actors in the prefecture of Mambéré-Kadéï.

What has been done and the journey so far

Innovative Service Delivery and Monitoring:
Water for Good's preventative maintenance model was established in 2004 to provide a solution to the challenge of low hand-pump functionality. Four maintenance teams, each composed of two technicians and one data collector, carry out bi-annual preventative maintenance and repair services along pre-determined routes across 7 of the 16 prefectures. They service approximately 1,800 hand pumps used by 500,000 to 600,000 people. Two individual technicians are presently servicing hand pumps in Bangui, CAR's capital, and Berberati, the country's second largest city.

In 2011 the service integrated electronic monitoring. Regular maintenance visits and monitoring data have served as an important entry point to systems strengthening, providing critical and routine updates on water points across the country.

By 2019, this service operated reliably at scale across a geographic area larger than Uganda, reaching over 1,700 unique rural water points that serve over 600,000 rural water users and achieving over 90% functionality. All data are shared continually with the CAR WASH Cluster and with government. The full costs of delivering these services in 2018 were just over $512,000, and Water for Good shares this financial performance data with stakeholders to increase the visibility of the costs of basic water services in CAR.

Thus, the preventative-maintenance service model has strengthened some of the weakest building blocks that directly relate to service delivery: professionalizing service providers, monitoring, coordinating, and financing the system.

District-wide coordination, planning, budgeting, and learning

Water for Good has chosen to focus on increasing water access and services in one prefecture, Mambéré-Kadéï, and is in the process of collaboratively developing a district-wide plan for universal access and services. This will be the first prefecture-scale plan for reaching universal water access and services in CAR, and therefore presents an opportunity to test and adapt the district-level roadmap approach in a fragile state context.

In 2018, Water for Good completed a baseline needs assessment to determine the population and existing water infrastructure in the region and anticipate the level of investment in new water infrastructure and rehabilitation that would be required in order to achieve universal basic access. Now, these data are an input into a collaborative process for planning, budgeting, and coordination at the regional and national levels and guide Water for Good's own borehole drilling and pump installation investments in the prefecture.

In the focus prefecture of Mambéré-Kadéi, a roadmap is being developed based on Water for Good's comprehensive baseline assessment. The roles and responsibilities of all of the different stakeholders are being detailed and clarified. Coordination of interventions has become more systematic, and one maintenance system is being studied among key stakeholders who operate in the prefecture. Water for Good closely cooperates with service authorities to ensure quality services, clear communication, and their integral involvement in community training and post-construction monitoring of well-committee management.

Successes and challenges

The approach to building private sector service delivery capacity has had success in catalysing systems-building in CAR, an extremely fragile context. The extension of this expertise to district-wide planning is an opportunity to demonstrate that it is possible to improve access to sustainable services and improve the strength of the WASH system, even in a fragile state.

However, systemic change will only increase and be sustained through government ownership and stronger coordination with the humanitarian sector. As such, Water for Good has sought technical assistance from Agenda for Change to create a platform for better coordination and collective action.

Lessons learned

The approach shows promise for scaling and wider uptake in the sector. The data collected during the baseline assessment serve as the basis for a collaboratively developed Prefecture-Wide Plan for water access and services from 2018 - 2030. Together with UNICEF, Water for Good and the district-level services of the Ministry of Hydraulics have agreed to establish the prefecture-wide plan as the main roadmap for the region. The expectation is that this roadmap will contribute toward a model for universal, reliable water access that demonstrates what is possible in terms of addressing a complex problem in an extremely low-development, fragile state.

4. Scaling up municipal WASH offices in San Marcos department, Guatemala. CARE

Background

CARE focuses on scaling and strengthening the management capacities of the OMAS (municipal WASH offices) to improve urban and rural WASH services in Guatemala. CARE Guatemala, along with partners Helvetas, Millennium Water Alliance, FEMSA and others, has been successful in creating better governance and accountability in the provision of water and sanitation services through its support for OMAS. Beginning in 2007, as an outgrowth of the *Proyecto Mi Cuenca* (My Watershed Project) with CRS and Helvetas, there are now over 117 OMAS (out of 340 municipalities) nationwide. In the San Marcos department, where CARE Guatemala has focused local efforts, 28 out of 30 municipalities have OMAS.

What has been done and the journey so far

In 2007, CARE supported Helvetas to establish the first OMAS, decreasing their funding support over three years. Each year, the local government took on greater responsibility for the budget, training and personnel for the OMAS. CARE piloted the opening of a municipal WASH office in two more municipalities of the San Marcos Department (in Western Guatemala) from 2007 to 2011. In 2012, CARE began a concerted effort to scale up the municipal WASH offices – with one staff person working locally in San Marcos and another involved in scaling a model for replication at the national level.

At the department level, CARE staff worked with municipalities that had OMAS to collect data on water quality, water quantity, and coverage. CARE worked directly with community water committees to encourage the active participation of women, teach essential WASH practices and behaviours (safe storage, handwashing, latrine use, and grey water disposal), and train committee members on how to improve collection, management, and transparency of funds for water services.

Simultaneously, CARE worked with local government to set up OMAS – using data and evidence (from the three existing municipalities with OMAS) to demonstrate improved coverage, health, and service delivery. Currently, these municipalities have data on the number of households, the population, the main water source, the state of the water source, latrine coverage and status, management and practices of the water committee, and tariffs charged. Each local community collects money for their water source, and then pays the trained municipal technician to fix the water system. CARE was seen not as an NGO implementing a water project, but rather as a facilitator – a connector between the community and the municipality. Municipalities without OMAS quickly began to see the value of having an office where communities could contact the municipality about technical needs or concerns regarding water and sanitation.

Additionally, at the department level, CARE and local government partners ran a series of workshops with the purpose of promoting the active participation of women in WASH projects implemented at the community and municipal level. The main attendees for the workshops were OMAS technicians, and women and men working for the rural government in public health, agriculture or women's development.

At the national level, CARE partners with government offices and other NGOs like Water For People and Helvetas, as part of a network advocating for official implementation of the OMAS model across the

country (RASGUA). Through this network, NGOs are using data (collected by municipal governments) to make the case for establishing OMAS, while also advocating for a model that has been developed and promoted by multiple agencies in Guatemala. The model puts women and the marginalised at the centre to ensure they have a strong role, they are consulted, and are integrated into defining sustainability.

Successes

- OMAS is seen as a successful model with over 30% of municipalities independently establishing offices for water and sanitation.
- Municipalities are now collecting data on water and sanitation coverage and use.
- CARE worked with partners to create a manual for how to implement OMAS in Guatemala.
- Recently, CARE supported 10 municipal governments to develop gender action plans to reduce gaps in women's participation and decision-making in community structures.

Challenges

- Strengthening local governments to address gender equality while simultaneously focusing on ensuring effective WASH services.
- Provide regular follow-up to the WASH commissions and local governments to keep focus on quality WASH and accountability.

Lessons learned

Through the implementation of the Water+ project in San Marcos, much progress has been made in ensuring sustainable and equitable management of WASH services. However, it is clear there are additional capacity building efforts needed for OMAS to provide quality and reliable services to the municipalities. Capacity strengthening and follow-up is needed in planning and monitoring, modernisation of current offices, regular data collection and review, and ensuring greater functionality and administration of WASH services. One way to address these barriers is to establish dialogues at the municipal level that includes civil society actors, so all perspectives are included. As a pilot, five municipalities with OMAS are implementing this model with CARE.

Explanation of the parts of a drinking water supply system by OMAS (Photo: Enri Maldonado/CARE Guatemala)

5. Linking the local and national WASH Systems in Honduras. *Para Todos por Siempre*

Participants at the second national conference of community water board associations, Honduras (Photo: PTPS)

Background

The WASH system in Honduras faces multiple challenges to improving its efficiency in providing quality services to the population, sustaining the results achieved, and expanding the coverage to meet Sustainable Development Goal 6 by 2030. The main challenges are the poor capabilities of authorities, institutions, and local actors at the municipal level and the low prioritization, coordination, and support of the central government for the WASH system.

Given this reality, since 2013 the *Para Todos Por Siempre* (Everyone Forever) movement, an alliance of 17 major water-related NGOs, 26 municipalities, and the principle WASH government entities, has been working to address systemic issues that underpin the delivery of reliable services. In the last three years, *Para Todos Por Siempre,* with the support of Water For People, IRC, and the Osprey Foundation (all of which are Members) has facilitated collective, innovative, and comprehensive actions to strengthen the WASH system in coordination with local, municipal, and national stakeholders.

What has been done and the journey so far

Para Todos Por Siempre takes the municipal level as its entry point of scale, with the goal of achieving universal access through effective and sustainable WASH services. In 2018, *Para Todos Por Siempre* followed the roadmap in 14 municipalities: a structured assessment was carried out, and local institutions were strengthened or established to undertake their functions, implement a participatory planning process, study and quantify the life-cycle cost of services, and develop and manage the service delivery infrastructure using a sustainable approach.

However, the progress of the system strengthening process at the municipal level has been limited by the weaknesses of the national enabling environment and sector functioning. System strengthening to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 6 requires harmony between the national and municipal level. For this reason, *Para Todos Por Siempre* facilitates a dialogue platform for knowledge exchange, advocacy, and coordination between 17 NGOs and central and municipal government institutions to improve the sector enabling environment and apply a systems approach at the municipal level.

Para Todos Por Siempre links the local and national WASH systems by:

- Organizing sector meetings, forums and training workshops.
- Facilitating the communication, coordination and support between the local and national actors.
- Strengthening capacities of service providers and its interaction with local and national authorities.
- Promoting technical exchanges and field visits.
- Advising and monitoring the application of national policies and strategies by local actors.
- Supporting the development of tools and guidelines for systems strengthening and its application at local level.
- Developing and testing new strategies and methodologies at local level to improve the national system.
- Documenting and disseminating good practices and lessons learned in other municipalities and nationally.

Successes

- Involvement of national government WASH authorities and institutions committed and open to the systems approach, as partners of *Para Todos Por Siempre*.
- Joint system review and diagnostic performed from both national and municipal level perspectives that helped to identify and prioritise system strengthening actions.
- Increased and strengthened interaction and coordination between national and local authorities, institutions, and actors.
- Establishment of the WASH authorities coordination committee to improve the system functioning and results.

- Recognition of the *Para Todos Por Siempre* coordination platform that facilitates joint work of multiple actors for systems strengthening actions, linking the municipal and national levels.
- Mechanisms and guidelines for developing a national strategy for technical assistance delivery were defined by municipal, central government, and WASH organisation's technicians.

Challenges

- Little political will or interest from municipal authorities to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 6 and adopt the system approach.
- Low prioritisation and support from high-level central government authorities for the WASH systems.
- Poor capacities of authorities, institutions, and local actors at the municipal level.
- Low operational and technical capacities of some *Para Todos Por Siempre* partners, including the WASH authorities, to facilitate the road maps and the system approach.
- Financial sustainability of *Para Todos Por Siempre* to continue functioning as a coordination platform that facilitates and supports the systems strengthening process.
- Weak interactions between the WASH system and other external systems, such as health, natural resources, and environment.

Lessons learned

- Bringing together WASH authorities, institutions, and other actors from the national and municipal levels allows collective action to strengthen the system and its core elements. This requires that institutional actors understand and efficiently perform their roles, and that communication and coordination mechanisms are facilitated by a multi-stakeholder platform.
- Documenting and disseminating local experiences and good practices creates opportunities to scale the system approach, and to change or improve national policies and methodologies, for strengthening the WASH system at both the national and municipal levels.

6. Strengthening routine water supply monitoring and effective planning and budgeting, Myanmar. WaterAid

Background

In 2016, the Government of the Union of Myanmar agreed to the country's first National Strategy for Rural WASH[11], providing a framework for achieving country-wide, basic water supply access by 2030. While 82% of the population has basic water access (JMP 2017), this does not account for deficiencies in service quality and reliability, or seasonal changes in the water supply. Surveys[12] showed that when reliability was considered, water supply access declined drastically to between 20 and 40%. To ensure improvement in services, the Department of Rural Development recognised the need for high quality and timely data and information management systems for improving approaches to planning, budgeting, resource allocation, and prioritisation. To achieve this, the Department of Rural Development, with technical support from WaterAid, has been co-developing and adapting a model for routine monitoring of rural water supplies. The mid-term goal is to establish a reliable, sustainable, and effective WASH monitoring information system (MIS) that can contribute to the wider outcomes of improving financing, accountability, and sustainability of service delivery needed to achieve Sustainable Development Goals.

What has been done and the journey so far

WaterAid identified support for monitoring as a key entry point for broader Myanmar WASH-sector reforms (particularly for planning and financing) and created a formal memorandum of understanding for working jointly with the Department of Rural Development to target this challenge. To ensure government ownership of the process, key government drivers were identified, including the desire to improve progress in water supply tracking, recognition of required improvements in service delivery management, and the aspiration to modernise processes in line with the rapid technology uptake. An initial structured assessment to identify key bottlenecks and opportunities for strengthening Department of Rural Development monitoring was undertaken at the national level, with subnational input from three state offices. Based on this assessment, three townships within different geographic regions (dry zone, mountainous, and coastal areas) were selected to demonstrate the model (Myaing Township, Magway region; Maubin Township, Ayeyarwady Region; Hsiheng Township, Shan State). At the same time, 200 government staff from the national and sub-national levels were engaged in review and development of rural water supply indicators, data collection, and analysis. The approach included co-designing, testing, and adapting key improvements to monitoring processes in the following ways:

- Identifying data needs at both the sub-national level (i.e., coverage, water supply asset management, maintenance, and financial management) and the national level (i.e., progress tracking, comparison, and prioritisation across the country's regions).

[11] *National Strategy for Rural Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH), WASH in Schools and WASH in Health Care Facilities*. Government of the Union of Myanmar. May 2016

[12] Strengthening Rural Water Supply Monitoring – Outcome of 3 demonstration townships, Department for Rural Development and WaterAid, 2019

- Introducing water supply indicators in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (i.e., accessibility, quality, quantity, and reliability) and sustainability indicators (i.e., management, finance, and technical support) and improvements to existing asset inventories. These were reviewed and validated through sector coordination and consultation processes.
- Demonstrating the use, feasibility, appropriateness, and benefits of a free technology, mWater, for data collection, analysis, management, and development of a customised MIS.
- Developing models and frameworks for routine water supply monitoring, including delineation of roles and responsibilities for data collection, water quality testing, data analysis, management and use, and other processes. Funding for regular monitoring is currently being secured by leveraging existing donors' project resources (e.g., World Bank and UNICEF). The long-term aim is to ensure that data can be collected while government officials are visiting communities for other reasons (to reduce costs) plus securing a dedicated regular government budget.

Successes and challenges

Following the demonstration phase, country-wide scale up is underway with leadership and ownership from the Department of Rural Development. WaterAid has shifted its role to technical advisory support as required. Routine improvements are expected to ensure that the MIS continues to provide the required data for decision making. While a data culture is growing within the Department of Rural Development teams, additional work is required to shift the culture of 'reporting upwards', particularly at the subnational level. Additional outcomes include improvement in sector coordination and monitoring processes harmonisation, for example, leading UNICEF in adopting the new Department of Rural Development monitoring framework and contributing data to the national MIS.

Lessons learned

Several key factors have led to this rapid progress in the development of a national monitoring system:

- Establishing clarity around government ownership of the processes, while positioning the supporting agencies as technical advisors.
- Identification of key political and technical champions within government staff, at both the national and sub-national levels, who provided a clear vision of the needs and system change required. Within the Myanmar context, the historical top-down political model has facilitated the scale up and adoption of change processes.
- Supporting the creation of a common vision between government, supporting agencies, and the broader WASH sector, by encouraging sector coordination, discussion, and engagement in the process, particularly during the MIS development.
- Adopting adaptive approaches that allowed for a period for adapting and learning together with government to review outcomes and ensure suitability of processes for responding to data needs at the local and national levels.

7. Strengthening planning and monitoring systems of newly created local authorities in Nepal. Welthungerhilfe and Aguaconsult[13]

Background

In 2015, Nepal adopted its Federal Constitution, which led to major institutional reform. A total of 753 local authorities were defined, many of which were newly created, and they were given considerable decentralised responsibilities for ensuring WASH services to their citizens. However, these somewhat embryonic local authorities were not able to effectively deliver on their mandates. In the years prior to Federalism, considerable capacity gaps in the former district-level government led many donors and NGOs to become used to direct programme implementation, often creating parallel systems for programme implementation and service monitoring to those of government.

The new federalist context created a clear opportunity for NGOs such as Welthungerhilfe to assist local authorities in building and strengthening systems for sustainable WASH service delivery, and in the process, to demonstrate effective ways which NGOs could collaborate with and support these authorities. The central government drafted the national WASH Sector Development Plan, and there are now expectations for all 753 authorities to develop plans. This presents a time-limited opportunity for NGOs such as Welthungerhilfe to demonstrate approaches to local government WASH planning, to help inform wider efforts across the country.

What has been done and the journey so far

Nepal is one of the pilot countries for the Sustainable Services Initiative. As such, it has benefitted from ongoing technical support from Aguaconsult in piloting the application of the Agenda for Change Roadmap in five local authorities (palikas) in the Chitwan and Siraha districts.

The journeys in each of the palikas commenced with a multi-day stakeholder orientation and visioning workshop. This helped build an understanding with Welthungerhilfe, their local NGO partners, and the palikas concerning sustainability issues, and established a commitment to collaborate to address the existing systemic barriers to achieving universal, sustainable services. As a pre-requisite for subsequent support, the palikas committed to 'putting their house in order' and preparing to lead the roadmap process: they established WASH focal persons, and created WASH coordinating committees.

A series of assessments have been undertaken collaboratively with the palikas to provide the evidence base for the development of the strategic WASH plan. These assessments often created first-time datasets, and Welthungerhilfe is facilitating dialogue with the local authorities and higher levels of government to define protocols and costs to move from one-off surveys to recurrent monitoring systems (Figure 8).

[13] This case study summarises a more detailed paper, available here.

At the national level, Welthungerhilfe has organised two stakeholder workshops which sought to share the plans and experiences of the Welthungerhilfe pilot and encouraged others who are working on palika WASH planning to share their approaches and experiences, to strengthen sector learning and coordination.

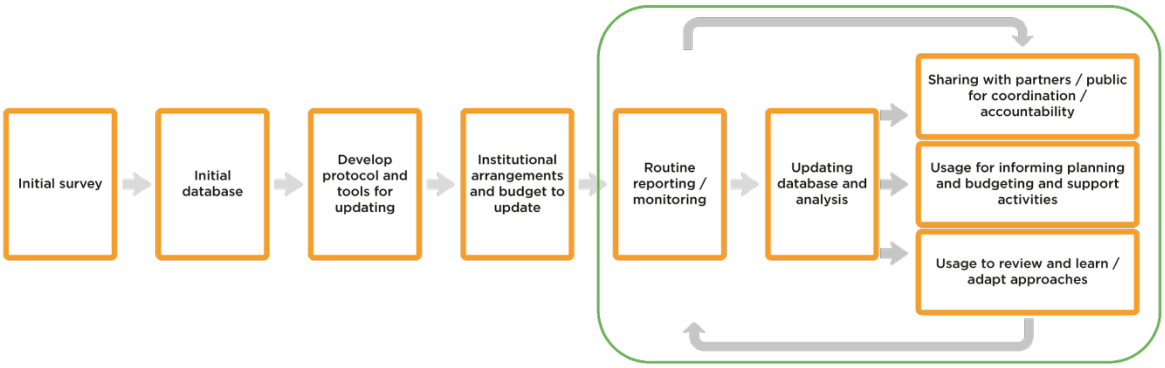


Figure 8 Example process of turning a one-off survey into recurrent monitoring processes (Source: Tillett, Bastola & Gautam, 2019)

Successes and challenges

Although the process of developing the WASH plans is ongoing, key successes include:

- Political and institutional support for sustainability has increased considerably in the palikas, with marked increases in budget allocation of direct support costs.
- Building block scores for the palikas are progressively increasing, and they are due to increase significantly once the WASH plan is developed and recurrent monitoring protocols are finalised.
- Sector workshops have led to central government commitment to increasing sector consultation in the development of guidelines for palika WASH planning. In this consultation, Welthungerhilfe and Aguaconsult have helped identify the need for full life-cycle costs in the WASH plan, and to balance the focus on achieving and sustaining universal access to WASH services. The sector influencing process helped to raise Welthungerhilfe's sector profile in a relatively short timeframe.
- Through initial successes in one district using Sustainable Service Initiative funds, Welthungerhilfe was able to scale up interventions to two additional districts through German Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development funding.

Challenges have included:

- Creating processes in a vacuum: with respect to the process of institutional reforms, there have been uncertainties in mandates for service monitoring, and a clear national monitoring framework is not yet in place. As such, it has been necessary to define such processes at the local level.
- Due to the institutional reform, certain posts in the palikas were not filled for some time.

- The WASH sector in Nepal is relatively fragmented, and until recently Welthungerhilfe has not had a strong sector-level profile. This has posed some challenges in sector-level influencing activities.

Lessons learned

This experience has generated useful learning about local level WASH planning and systems strengthening. This includes the following:

- While it is often quicker to contract consultants to undertake surveys or write certain aspects of a WASH plan, it does not necessarily build ownership or capacity for implementing the plan.
- Undertaking sector influencing work can be a challenge in the context of a competitive aid sector and requires meaningful partnerships and collaboration at the sector level.
- Developing a strategic WASH plan takes time, and there may be a need to develop 'interim' plans to influence government annual budgeting, in lieu of a plan being developed.

8. Reaching Universal Services in Rwanda: District-Wide Approach. Water For People[14]

Background

The Government of Rwanda has set ambitious targets for achieving universal access to water and sanitation by 2024 and providing safely managed services by 2030. The Government has adopted the 'District Wide Approach', a systems-based approach which considers the district as the entry point, while also recognising the broader national enabling environment. Districts are responsible for oversight on all service delivery, including comprehensive and sustainable WASH services. Agenda for Change Members seek to strengthen the district as a service authority in all core functions, including planning, finance, regulation and accountability, and institutional arrangements.

What has been done and the journey so far

In 2010, Rulindo District leadership and Water For People ambitiously agreed to reach everyone with safe water and sanitation services, and to develop institutions so these services last forever. This was a shift from the status quo in that Water For People directly engaged with the national government and also leveraged technical and financial support from the Ministry of Infrastructure from the project's inception. Based on the experiences in scaling service delivery in Rulindo, the approach was reframed as the district-wide approach with the goal of expanding to the national scale in May 2016. Planning is now underway for a nation-wide roll-out of district-wide approach as per the 2016 National Policy. Water For People is now working closely with other NGOs (World Vision, WaterAid, and others) to replicate the experience from Rulindo and bring the district-wide approach to scale.

The national-level district-wide approach process involves the following steps:

1. The district, with the support of its partners, assesses the baseline status of WASH infrastructure, quality of services, the capacity and performance of the different service providers, the capacity and performance of the district authority, and developing an understanding of the water resource availability.

2. The data collected as part of the assessment stage are being used to develop a comprehensive District WASH Investment Plan to achieve universal and sustainable services. This includes defining targets at the district level, identifying activities required to achieve this target, and developing a financial and operational plan. The duration of this plan should be determined in each district but would ideally be aligned with the current planning cycle and duration, or with plans for achievement of national targets. An asset assessment process and a district capacity assessment methodology have now been developed and incorporated into the district-wide approach roadmap, so that a more comprehensive understanding of full lifecycle costs is considered for establishing a functioning service environment.

3. On an annual basis, elements of the comprehensive plan are prioritised and carried out dependent on

[14] Agenda for Change Members Aguaconsult, IRC, WaterAid, and Water For People are all working in Rwanda. Read more here. This case study is presented from the perspective of one of the Members.

the capacity to resource the plan and balance the delivery of new services (through new construction, extensions, or rehabilitation) with strengthening capacities of service providers and authorities.

4. On an ongoing basis, the District WASH Investment Plan should be monitored, using a set of pre-determined indicators and processes. At a minimum, the monitoring needs to include data on service levels at the community and institutional levels (e.g., public clinics and schools) that are collected on a regular basis.

Successes

Major milestones include:

- Recognition of the district-wide approach in the National Water Policy and Strategy.
- Establishment of District WASH Boards in national WASH policy.
- Commitment from the Local Government Development Agency to joint funding throughout the programme's lifecycle.
- Consolidation of private sector engagement with larger and fewer private operators recognised by the national regulator.
- National support to partners to promote creation of service environments, not just infrastructure.
- A WASH Management Information System to capture service-level data nationally.
- Implementation of an Asset Assessment and full lifecycle costing tools.
- National regulator revising rural water tariffs to ensure coverage of recurring costs.
- District-wide approach moving from pilot phase to full national roll-out.

Challenges

- Identifying and building the appropriate national institutional mechanisms for providing ongoing support to all district-level institutions. Support to specific districts is a process that happens over several years and requires ongoing accompaniment, review, and reflection. At present, there is no clearly identified institution in Rwanda with this responsibility.
- At first, the focus on capital expenditure masked the need for an assessment and commitment to ongoing capital maintenance expenses and direct support costs. This resulted in the incorporation of an asset assessment process and a district capacity assessment methodology into the district-wide approach process.
- Greater priority must be placed on WASH investment at a national level; moreover, funding must be more holistic in considering the entire ecosystem of the sector (e.g., not just hardware).
- Creating appropriate oversight of private operators remain, as well as setting appropriate efficiency incentives through new tariff and contractual arrangements.
- A tariff that covers the operation and maintenance expenses of system operation.

Lessons learned

Implementing a systems strengthening approach has required collaboration across NGOs and government partners. As momentum shifts from pilot districts to national implementation, government leadership and continued collaborative efforts will support sustainable service delivery at scale. The commitment of NGOs and funding partners to a long-term engagement is also crucial for building trust and bringing about institutional change, with the balance of power ultimately resting with government.

Key learnings include:

- *Systems strengthening and capacity building*. It is necessary to strengthen the capacity of both the district government and the private operators involved in the provision of water and sanitation services. A District WASH Board was established in Rulindo in 2014 to provide oversight of WASH services and prioritise investment. The role of the WASH Board is now detailed in the Rwanda WASH policy.
- *Customer feedback platform.* A system has been established in Rulindo to provide early warning of service failure and enhanced accountability of both service provider and service authority.
- *Water Resource Management planning*. Initially, water systems were planned based on identified resources rather than a comprehensive understanding of all available water resources and potential future uses. In Rulindo, a Water Resources Management Plan was developed to build this comprehensive understanding and prioritise activities such as catchment protection.
- *Monitoring and peer-learning*. The practice of annual reflection on outcomes and service levels has been a cornerstone to strengthen different components of the system. Challenges are identified and action plans to mitigate them are developed through meetings of all partners.
- *Political leadership*. The leadership shown by senior district staff, and especially political leaders, has been vital to the success of the programme. Political leaders have galvanised support and resources for programme activities from the community, and district staff have advocated for the approach, communicating successes and challenges nationally. This leadership must be accompanied by a willingness to also integrate the district-wide approach with existing national and local government processes and procedures.
- *Technical solutions not recognised by government*. The Government and the national utility, Water and Sanitation Corporation (WASAC), do not recognise basic water supply technical solutions, such as handpumps, as appropriate improved water supply. This leads to confusion about their management responsibilities.
- *Unclear roles and responsibilities for management and maintenance.* Bugesera is one of the few rural districts in Rwanda where rural networks are directly managed by WASAC, but with a remit limited to piped systems. This creates issues around unclear roles and responsibilities for water supply management and budgeting between WASAC and the local government, particularly in terms of maintenance costs. The same issue applies to handpumps, which are not recognised by the government as improved water supply.