WASH Results Programme learning brief # 3

Reaching the vulnerable and working in fragile contexts

October 2020

The global commitment to ensuring availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all means paying particular attention to reaching the potentially most vulnerable people in society; those who, due to their location or characteristics, might be denied access to services. Equity is a key dimension of sustainable WASH. This brief shares reflections from the three suppliers on the WASH Results Programme, SWIFT, SAWRP and SNV, about some of the approaches they used to reach the potentially vulnerable with sustainable WASH services, including when reaching them means working in fragile contexts.

Key lessons from programme suppliers

SNV: Planning and resourcing for reaching the potentially vulnerable needs to be factored in at the outset. Research is needed to understand who 'the last mile' are, and monitor progress towards reaching them.

SWIFT: Programming in fragile contexts comes with its own set of challenges; leaning into risk rather than away from it can generate positive results.

SAWRP: There are advantages and drawbacks from taking a community-based approach to identifying and reaching the potentially most vulnerable.

Cross-cutting themes

- The importance of local adaptation driven by formative research
- Approaches to supporting local adaptation in large programmes
- Use of subsidies in reaching the most vulnerable
- Monitoring progress in reaching and sustaining access for the most vulnerable

Introducing the WASH Results Programme

The £112 million WASH Results Programme aimed to support poor people in 11 countries to access improved water and sanitation, and to practise improved hygiene. Three consortia ('suppliers') of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) were contracted by DFID in 2014 to undertake large-scale delivery of WASH in advance of the conclusion of Millennium Development Goals. This ambitious delivery goal was coupled with payment for outcomes – measured up to two years later – to encourage the continued use of water supply, latrines and handwashing at critical times. A second phase of the programme expanded to reach more people from 2017–21 in 9 of the 11 countries. In total, the WASH Results Programme has enabled over 1.6 million people to gain access to water, 7.4 million to sanitation, and 16.1 million with hygiene promotion. The programme has also overwhelmingly achieved its outcome targets.

WASH Results operated under a Payment by Results (PbR) modality, where suppliers receive payment upon successful verification of their results. This was intended to incentivise both large-scale delivery and longer-term outcomes. Verification was systems based, meaning that the third-party Monitoring and Verification agent contracted by DFID independently appraised the suppliers' monitoring systems and verified that the data they produced were accurate and realistic.

Sustainability within the WASH Results Programme

Although the WASH Results Programme was created in the era of the Millennium Development Goals, suppliers and DFID were committed to longer-term sustainability and worked to pursue it under supplier-specific sustainability frameworks. Unlike output and outcomes targets, these were not consistently linked to payment. In the WASH Results Programme sustainability was considered through the following dimensions of sustainability.[1]

Functional sustainability: Can projects show how they will ensure services remain operational in the long term, including aspects such as appropriate design, quality of construction, the availability of spare parts, supply chain development?

Institutional sustainability: Do projects show how they will support and ensure organisations and structures (public, private, community) are in place to support functional, financial and environmental sustainability, and that these are aligned with country norms?

Financial sustainability: Do projects demonstrate that funds collected will be sufficient to meet annual recurrent and periodic costs?

Environmental sustainability: Do projects demonstrate that they have assessed the impact on water resources (groundwater) and of the potential impacts of climate change and built climate resilience and adaptation into the design of technology or systems?

Equity: Do the projects show that they have assessed whether vulnerable groups are benefiting from the interventions, and to understand whether there is any exclusion?

This brief focuses on efforts made by suppliers around the fifth dimension: equity.

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[1] DFID (2013): Terms of Reference for the Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Results Programme.

Reaching the last mile: lessons from SNV's Sustainable Sanitation and Health for All (SSH4A) programme

SNV experience was presented by:

- Dr Jackson Wandera, Global Technical Advisor for Rural Sanitation and Hygiene, SNV

The SSH4A programme, as part of WASH Results, was implemented by SNV across nine countries. An area-wide sanitation service model was used, which worked with local government to strengthen their WASH systems. A key aspect of this was a drive to ensure that the most vulnerable were reached. Below are five key lessons from SNV on their experiences in doing this:

1. **Reaching all people is resource intensive:** It is key to consider how *all* people are going to be reached at the outset of the programme. Thinking this through at the end of the programme does not allow enough time or budget to effectively ensure everyone has been reached.

2. **Formative and targeted research is key:** Gathering data on who the 'last mile' are, and understanding why they haven't been reached, is required for appropriate follow-up. The results can be surprising – see Box 1.

3. **Structural change towards inclusion:** Engaging the government and local institutions in an approach that is explicitly designed to reach the most vulnerable is vital to ensure sufficient support mechanisms are in place. This includes sustainable enforcements, monitoring and reporting.

4. **Engage social support mechanisms outside the sanitation sector:** Other programmes and initiatives, such as social safety network programmes, may have resources that beneficiaries can draw on to bolster activities.

5. **Subsidies:** SNV aimed for a non-subsidy approach where no money from the budget goes towards construction of latrines, but encourages the responsible authorities to put in support systems. The first consideration should be self-help or drawing on support from the community, and the second should be support from the lowest local government level.

"When money for subsidies does come in from the outside, it is quickly politicised. It is also not sufficient to reach everyone equally, and there isn't the capacity to allocate it in a just and transparent way at the local government level. This in turn undermines the credibility of the local government."

Box 1: The 'last mile' in Tanzania

Action research conducted by SNV in Tanzania found that 75% of the 'last mile' were young/middle-aged headed households with the socioeconomic resources available for latrine construction. These men tended to be out of the house early and back late at night (often '*boda boda*' or motorbike taxi drivers), and considered a latrine in the house low priority as a result.

SNV Learning Brief (2018) [Sanitation and hygiene for all: a comparative study of approaches to leaving no one behind across five countries](#) (pdf)[2]

SNV Learning Paper (2018) [Sanitation for all: A comparative study of approaches to leaving no one behind across five countries](#) (pdf)[3]

All papers from the SSH4A programme including results and learning from each country, manuals and research can be accessed from the [SNV website.](#)[4]

Programming into risk: Lessons from the Sustainable Water in Fragile Contexts (SWIFT) consortium

SWIFT consortium experience was presented by:

- Joanna Trevor, SWIFT Global Programme Manager, Oxfam UK

- Dr Josué Ibulungu, SWIFT Consortium Coordinator, Oxfam DRC

The SWIFT programme operated in Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Kenya and faced high levels of risk ranging from active conflict, election violence, public health emergencies (such as cholera outbreak and Ebola) and cyclical drought.

Working amid such risks poses a number of obstacles to programmers: plans interrupted by delays, relationships impeded by mistrust, and aid affected by politics. It also means that having a lasting and sustainable impact – the ultimate but somewhat elusive goal of any development intervention – is even more of a challenge.

Rather than trying to avoid these risks, SWIFT took an approach that worked *into* risk; accepting these dynamics as inherent to the context, and planning activities to accommodate such uncertainty. This worked to good effect, and as of 2020, SWIFT managed to exceed all their output and outcome targets in spite of the challenging circumstances.

SWIFT shared some of the principles behind their success that guided their approach for reaching the vulnerable:

Flexibility: When working into risk, flexibility is vital. Programmers need to take a flexible approach when working in fragile contexts that expects the unexpected. Delays and obstacles are an inevitability and need to be anticipated and accounted for when planning activities. Teams and workplans need to be set up in a way that allows agile and responsive programming to the changing circumstances.

Community engagement: Keeping local people at the heart of implementation significantly increases levels of trust and support for the project across communities. Oxfam's Community Perception Tracker was utilised to understand and respond to people's concerns: In DRC, where Ebola was spreading at the time of implementation, this allowed SWIFT to have the pulse on and address perceptions that negatively affected programming.

> *"People believed we were getting paid to spread the virus"*

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[2] https://snv.org/cms/sites/default/files/explore/download/sanitationhygiene-for-all-5-country-study-learning-brief.pdf

[3] https://snv.org/cms/sites/default/files/explore/download/snv_isf_sanitationforall-comparative-study.pdf

[4] https://interactive.snv.org/snv-rural-sanitation-publications#196494

Adaptive management: In the SWIFT programme, teams were empowered to exercise adaptive management, tailoring the approach to the local needs and shifting dynamics of the context. This meant that behaviour change communication work was organic and fluid, with different strategies employed depending on the situation.

> **Box 2: Where will your mother-in-law go?**
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> One example of local adaptation in the SWIFT programme in DRC, came when the team were struggling to convince communities of the need for latrines. After conducting some formative research, SWIFT realised that showing respect to mothers-in-law was especially valued in that region, and so the programmers adapted their messaging approach by asking "where is your mother-in-law going to go when she comes to visit?" This alternative behaviour change communication was highly effective and led to a sudden flurry of latrine building activity.

Power dynamics: It's important to recognise the power dynamics of the context. Stakeholder mapping was undertaken to identify who the formal and informal actors were, and where power and influence lay. Understanding the networks of decision-making was necessary to help manage the unpredictability of the context. Advocacy was also an important strategy in helping encourage buy-in with key players and mitigate interference or mistrust.

Sustainable infrastructure: Building into the future in a fragile context means prioritising technologies that are more likely to endure and anticipate future issues. Examples drawn from the SWIFT programme include solarisation of water systems, ATMs, e-billing and mobile money, and the design of water infrastructure that could expand and contract in response to moving populations.

Further information:

Further information resources and case studies are available at the SWIFT Consortium website [5]
[SWIFT Consortium Learning Brief: SWIFT water ATMs: experience and impact in Turkana and Wajir counties of Kenya](SWIFT Consortium Learning Brief)[6]

Identifying and reaching the most vulnerable: Lessons from the South Asia WASH Results Programme II (SAWRP II)

SAWRP II experience was presented by:

- John Dean – Senior Monitoring Evaluation, Accountability & Learning Specialist at Plan International UK

- Clive Bacon – Senior Manager: Strategic Programmes at Plan International UK

The SAWRP II programme utilised a community-driven method for identifying and reaching the most vulnerable in their work across Bangladesh. The approach taken engaged

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[5] http://swiftconsortium.org/
[6] http://swiftconsortium.org/resources/

communities to self-identify their most vulnerable households, looking at respective wealth and households with disabled members. This was achieved through the use of Community Situation Analysis (CSA), a process in which members of the community map out the WASH status of the households and apply a tiered wealth ranking. This data is then used to inform decision-making and monitor progress over time as the WASH status changes and develops.

Such initiatives are understood to empower beneficiaries by allocating responsibility to the communities to make their own decisions – a central tenet of the Community Let Total Sanitation approach adopted in the SAWRP II programme. This, in turn, encourages community buy-in and ownership over the project, and has helped stimulate the uptake of WASH practices and construction of facilities across Bangladesh.

Different approaches to WASH programming bring different challenges to identifying and reaching the most vulnerable, including CSA. Below are some of the key lessons learned from the SAWRP programme in this regard.

Identifying the vulnerable was subjective and relative to each community. Determining which households fall into wealth quintile categories was decided by the community. This makes it difficult to compare the levels of vulnerability across communities within the dataset generated.

Some demographics were deprioritised in relation to others. Research conducted by SAWRP found that some demographics were deprioritised in the community self-assessment process. The evidence generated suggests that older single women were more likely to be overlooked than other members of the community (see Box 3)

There are more disabled community members than the numbers suggest. An evaluation conducted of the programme compared its numbers of disabled members in the community and found they were higher than those identified in CSA process. This could be attributed to differing definitions of disability across communities, as well as potential under-reporting in the self-assessment process.

There is a lack of knowledge on available options. Many disabled and elderly users who struggle with the squatting action were reportedly unaware of available options to accommodate their respective needs. This includes hardware such as handrails and customised chairs for seated use.

Box 3: Focus group discussions reveal gender disparities in sanitation access

In focus group discussions (FGDs), some older single women reported that they were not prioritised in community meetings for a subsidy nor supported by family or neighbours to build a latrine. Older women in FGDs reported difficultly and pain in squatting – but were less likely to have knowledge of available solutions than male community members.

Further information:
For further information SAWRP see the [Plan International website](#)[7]

National Water Supply and Sanitation Training Centre, DWSS, Nepal (2017) [Options on Household Toilet Facilities for People with Disabilities and Difficulties](#) (pdf)[8]

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[7] https://plan-uk.org/about/our-work/healthcare-and-clean-water/clean-water-and-sanitation/south-asia-wash-results
[8] https://snv.org/cms/sites/default/files/explore/download/handbook-disabilities-toilet-option-nepal.pdf

Cross-cutting themes

Importance of local adaptation driven by formative research

A recurring theme was the importance of local adaptation of approaches in order to reach the most vulnerable. All suppliers undertook formative research to understand contexts and inform adaptations. SNV research revealed that the households in the last mile were not as previously thought – SWIFT's formative research helped identify the important role mothers-in-law play in a particular region and allowed the programme to adapt its behaviour change messaging approach (see Box 1). SAWRP also reported having greater success in taking locally adapted approaches to behaviour change communication.[9] Through their research, they found that some communities were more/less receptive to some methods of behaviour change communication than others, and worked with a creative agency to produce material designed for specific areas. For example, the use of jingles was considered inappropriate in a more conservative Upazila in Bangladesh, and the format for messaging was tailored to accommodate local preferences.

Approaches to supporting local adaptation in large programmes

Local adaptation is important but enabling it can be challenging in large programmes. In the WASH Results Programme, the PbR financing mechanism enabled adaptation because changes in activities did not need to be negotiated in advance with donors. This flexibility was welcomed by programme suppliers. However, there can be a tension between supporting local adaptation while maintaining oversight and quality of implementation across the whole programme.

Programme management responses included allocating budget to the recruitment of senior people at national and sub-national levels to ensure high-quality reflection and subsidiarity of decision-making, an approach adopted by SNV and SWIFT. In addition, suppliers identified that programme management can play an active role in supporting organic processes of local adaptation through close communication, support for documentation and reporting of adaptations.

Use of subsidies in reaching the most vulnerable

There are mixed feelings about the use of subsidies for reaching the most vulnerable, although there was consensus that they should only be used within institutional contexts where they could be sustained. One positive example of cross-subsidies came in the SWIFT programme in their work with a water utility company in Turkana, Kenya. SWIFT supported the company to improved their billing system: savings made allowed the company to carry out assessments of the poorest in the region and provide subsidised water as part of a management agreement.

SNV reflected that in rural sanitation, subsidy schemes were often operated on an ad hoc basis and the source of funding is not sustained. Instead the SNV programme lobbied country governments to monitor vulnerable groups and provide special attention in terms of their access and needs. This philosophy is premised on the understanding that if there isn't money for subsidies in the long term, then perhaps they shouldn't be introduced at all.

SAWRP had a larger subsidy programme than the other suppliers, which was bolstered by a micro-finance initiative to help beneficiaries access capital. An outcome survey in 2019 found that 11% of latrine construction was undertaken through a loan or credit, 13% were

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[9] For more information on SAWRP approach to behaviour change communication see https://plan-uk.org/about/our-work/healthcare-and-clean-water/clean-water-and-sanitation/sawrp-behaviour-change

funded through subsidies/gifts, and 69% were self-financed). Further work to evaluate the outcomes of the subsidised latrines is underway but delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Monitoring progress in reaching and sustaining access for the most vulnerable

Suppliers in the WASH Results Programme invested heavily in monitoring outcomes, driven in part by the programme's PbR modality in which payment was linked to achieving output and outcome targets. Efforts to monitor disaggregated outcomes for specific vulnerable groups (e.g. people with disabilities, poor households) identified the following lessons:

- Monitoring of disaggregated outcomes for specific groups requires that M&E systems are designed to measure these disaggregated outcomes from the start (e.g. in baselines).

- As explored in this brief, time is required at the start to identify **who** vulnerable groups are: definitions may vary in each context; numbers and location of vulnerable groups will change over time, particularly in fragile contexts with high levels of population movement.

- There is additional complexity and cost involved when collecting disaggregated data. Disaggregation may require an increase in sample size in surveys to provide results which are statistically significant, particularly if they are to be used as a basis for payment decisions. Qualitative approaches, such as focus group discussions, may also be required.

Although challenging, suppliers found that efforts to track their progress in reaching and sustaining access for different groups generated valuable insights that strengthened their programmes.

Conclusion

This brief has outlined some of the strategies adopted by suppliers in the WASH Results Programme to reach potentially vulnerable groups and to monitor their progress towards inclusion and equity. Further information can be found by following links within the brief. The experience of the WASH Results Programme adds to the evidence base about what needs to be done to realise the ambition of ensuring availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.

In closing, it is worth noting that supplier's efforts to reach the most vulnerable in the WASH Results Programme were not motivated by the PbR modality but by organisational commitments to inclusivity. Progress in this area was monitored regularly as one of five dimensions of sustainability. However, unlike output and outcome targets, these were not consistently integrated into the PbR financing mechanism for each supplier and progress monitoring was qualitative rather than quantitative.

The alignment of interests between donor and programme suppliers experienced in the WASH Results Programme and mutual commitment to equity and inclusion cannot be assumed. In future programmes in which outcome targets are set at less than 100% coverage, donors committed to equity and inclusion need to consider how to design programmes that incentivise and reward efforts in this area, for example through disaggregated targets and upside incentives. A general lesson from the programme is that, to focus on progress of sustainability – such as the building blocks used in WASH Results – targets need to be designed in and pursued from the outset.

Box 4: Background to this brief

This brief summarises presentations made by suppliers and subsequent discussion at the WASH Results Learning event held virtually in June 2020 and attended by programme suppliers, DFID and the Monitoring and Verification supplier. This brief was produced by the Monitoring and Verification team and has been approved by programme suppliers. Links to further information on the topics discussed are available throughout the brief.. Thanks to all presenters, participants; also thanks Joanna Trevor and Rachel Stevens (SWIFT), Katrice Knight (SAWRP), Antoinette Kome (SNV) and Leonard Tedd (DFID/FCDO) for reviewing and commenting on drafts.

This is one in a short series of WASH Results Programme learning briefs, comprising:

#1 Outcome achievements in the WASH Results Programme: data and insights

#2 Setting and monitoring outcome targets in WASH programmes

#3 Reaching the vulnerable and those in fragile contexts with WASH services

#4 Experiences in WASH systems strengthening

Box 5: About the WASH Results suppliers

The **Sustainable WASH in Fragile Contexts** (SWIFT) Consortium led by Oxfam GB; worked in DRC and Kenya contributing to all three areas of WASH.

The **South Asia WASH Results Programme** (SAWRP) a consortium led by Plan UK; worked in Bangladesh and Pakistan across all three areas of WASH. SAWRP II (2017–2021) works only in Bangladesh.

The **Sustainable Sanitation and Hygiene for All** (SSH4A) Results Programme implemented by the SNV Netherlands Development Organisation; worked in Ghana, Ethiopia, Kenya, Mozambique, Nepal, South Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia, focusing on sanitation and hygiene only.

The e-Pact consortium, led by Itad, joined by OPM, IWEL and Ecorys was the **Monitoring, Verification and Evaluation** (MVE) services provider.