

WASH Results Programme learning brief #4

Experiences in WASH systems strengthening

October 2020

Institutional sustainability is a fundamental part of realising the global goal of providing sustainable WASH services for all. This brief explores some of the approaches used by the three WASH Results Programme suppliers to strengthen systems for sustainable WASH services: working with and between public, private, community organisations and structures. SAWRP reflects on supply chain strengthening work with local sanitation entrepreneurs; SNV share lessons on working with local government to support inclusive, district-wide approaches to service delivery; and SWIFT describes approaches to professionalising water user committees and brokering between stakeholders in fragile contexts.

Key lessons

SAWRP: A well-functioning network of local sanitation entrepreneurs (LSEs) is important to facilitate and sustain latrine uptake. LSEs need support for business viability and to ensure they provide affordable products including those adapted for different needs. One challenge is ensuring LSEs reach people in remote areas.

SWIFT: Sustainability of water supply in fragile contexts can be strengthened through formation of professionalised water user committees financed by user fees. This requires work with communities to promote ownership and behaviour change communication to shift attitudes towards paying for water.

SNV: Local governments can be supported to adopt district-wide and multi-stakeholder approaches to sanitation and hygiene interventions; engagement of local private sector and civil society is essential and needs to include potentially vulnerable groups.

Cross-cutting insights:

1. It is important to be systematic in reaching the last mile, recognising that the most vulnerable are particularly difficult to monitor.
2. Systems strengthening takes time, necessitates building political will, flexible funding and eventual government budget allocation and capacity.
3. NGOs can play a role in brokering connections between actors in a system.

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 DFID¹ 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.²

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 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 second dimension: institutional sustainability.

¹ The Department for International Development (DFID) was replaced by the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) in September 2020. As the majority of WASH Results Programme implementation and learning was undertaken prior to this date, this publication refers to DFID throughout.

² DFID (2013): Terms of Reference for the Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Results Programme.

Working with local sanitation entrepreneurs (LSEs) in Bangladesh: Lessons from the South Asia WASH Results programme II (SAWRP II)

SAWRP II experience was presented by:

- John Dean, Senior Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning Specialist at Plan International UK.
- Shewly Akter, Research and Knowledge Management Specialist at Plan International Bangladesh.

The SAWRP consortium presented their work in sanitation supply chain strengthening in Bangladesh. The consortium worked to strengthen existing LSEs to enable them to play an ongoing role in ensuring sustainability of WASH outcomes.

Key activities included: provision of training in areas such as development of business plans, product diversification (e.g. sato-pans) safe construction and design; the creation of linkages with microfinance institutions and sanitation workers; and the establishment of SaniMarts to support wider implementation.

Four important considerations for sustainability were identified, one of which is the viability of the LSEs themselves (see Figure 1).

SAWRP shared learning on progress in each of these four areas, based on monitoring data and reflective learning by key programme stakeholders.

Progress and lessons in the four key areas

- **Access:** *Ensuring the LSEs were accessible across all regions of implementation.* This had been successful, in that there was at least one LSE in the majority of the Union Parishads (UPs) where SAWRP was working. However, it had been difficult to stimulate interest from LSEs in the less accessible UPs where transport was a challenge.
- **Adaptations:** *LSEs need to provide a range of products and services to meet the different needs of different users.* There had been anecdotal evidence of LSEs offering inclusive products and designs in their portfolio, and LSEs supporting hardware stores to carry products and materials that can support people who are bedbound. However, not all LSEs knew about adapted technologies – they need more training on disability and gender-friendly WASH. LSEs helped increase demand by working as a linkage between service providers (e.g. mechanics and sweepers) and communities, leading to higher quality and cheaper products and service providers.
- **Affordability:** *Products and services are affordable for different users.* Some affordable products and services have been made available, including through different financing options, with 10–11% of latrines funded through loans or credits. However, the products

Key considerations for sustainability



Access: LSEs are accessible across different regions



Adaptations: LSEs provide a range of products and services, in order to meet the different needs of different users



Affordability: Products and services are be affordable for different users (including through different payment options)



Business Viability: LSEs have viable businesses

Figure 1. SAWRP identified four considerations for LSEs to contribute to sustainability of WASH outcomes

and services were still not within reach of some poorer households, and some households reported problems repaying loans.

- **Business viability:** Data on the sustainability of LSEs was encouraging. There was an increase in LSEs accessing credit to enable them to acquire more resources, but this had also been a challenge due to high rates of interest from microfinance institutions. There was some discussion around size and viability of LSEs. In SAWRP experience, it was still unclear whether there was a particular size the LSEs needed to reach before they became viable and sustainable businesses. SNV work on supply chain strengthening had explored what proportion of the market LSEs need to be viable. They had found that where there is initially low sanitation coverage, demand creation leads to lots of opportunities, but later on the market becomes saturated and so LSEs need to evolve or move elsewhere, thus limiting the longevity of the model.

Systems strengthening in fragile contexts: Lessons from the Sustainable Water in Fragile Contexts (SWIFT) consortium

The 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 predominantly in fragile areas of Kenya and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). In such contexts, systems strengthening is typically less straightforward than in other settings, as government or private sector institutions are not always sufficiently established and robust.

This does not mean systems strengthening is not possible; it is about identifying existing systems in place and finding entry points to build into and develop further.

Enablers for success identified in the SWIFT programme are listed in Box 1.

Box 1: Key enablers for success in the SWIFT programme

- Ambitious and pragmatic programming
- Long-term and flexible funding
- Planning for scale and understanding the details
- Responsive communication and building trust
- Scope for evolution and influencing

Approaches taken by the programme include the following:

Professionalisation of water management: the ASUREP model

One gap identified in DRC was the lack of an established approach for the delivery of water in semi-urban areas. Previously, people living in such areas had typically received water as part of humanitarian efforts, but there was no system in place to cater for their longer-term needs. To combat this, SWIFT's partner HYFRO³ established professional water users committees known as 'ASUREPs'. These formalised water management bodies recruited paid staff with the required technical and management skills, marking a shift away from a voluntary model of water management towards a more business-like sustainable structure financed by user fees. There is optimism that these structures will continue beyond the scope of the SWIFT programme.

³ <http://swiftconsortium.org/portfolio/hyfros-work-in-a-very-fragile-context/>

Changing mindsets; moving towards payment for water

ASUREPs were initially supported by SWIFT but required long-term financial inflows to be sustainable. This meant that the beneficiaries of the supply had to get involved, and start paying for water. In a conflict-affected setting with a history of short-term humanitarian interventions, this was not an easy sell, with people reluctant to commit money to what had previously been a free service.

Getting the community on board was a significant challenge for SWIFT and its partners and took a lot of time and effort to change mindsets. Strategies employed to succeed in this endeavour included working with local government, leaders, civil society and other institutions such as the church, to encourage a sense of ownership over the initiative. Behaviour change messaging was designed to help sensitise communities, both regarding the idea of paying for water but also to discourage the use of unprotected water sources. This worked to good effect, and over time SWIFT's financial support to the ASUREPs was phased out as local user fees covered costs of operation and maintenance and staff salaries. SWIFT found that after three years, enough user fees were saved to enable one ASUREP to purchase a motorbike to help staff carry out their activities.

“The biggest driver of sustainability [for the ASUREPs] isn't how much people pay, but how many people pay, and the consistency of that.”

Brokering between different stakeholders in the system

The brokering role is an important one in systems strengthening and in fragile contexts, NGOs can play a brokering role between institutions and the people they serve. SWIFT found space to play this role in Kenya and DRC, bolstered by the positive, long-standing relationships that Oxfam and Tearfund have with government institutions and the private sector in these contexts.

One way in which this played out was through interventions in policy. In both countries, progressive water laws had been passed at national level but were not well known or implemented at the local government level. SWIFT worked with both national and sub-national governments, which allowed them to broker between the two levels and help officials at sub-national level understand what the law was, and how they could implement it.

Another brokering role is through provision of technical support. In Kenya, SWIFT worked closely with water utility companies to increase transparency and trust. Technical and management expertise was shared to help improve financial sustainability, increase morale and respect, and encourage greater focus on inclusion through the use of subsidies. In Turkana in Northern Kenya, this led to a 30% increase in income; and in Nairobi an entirely new department was opened, dedicated to reaching informal settlements with subsidised rates previously excluded from the city plan. Likewise, the work conducted by SWIFT with the Congolese government in semi-urban areas was considered highly successful and was replicated by the government in other areas outside of the WASH Results Programme.

Finally, NGOs can also help hold actors to account. In one example, an ASUREP was seen as doing good business, and consequently was pressured by local authorities to pay 'informal taxation'. With support of the SWIFT partner, the ASUREP contested this and took the case all the way up to the provincial Governor in North Kivu, eastern DRC, who deemed that what the local government was attempting was illegal.

Long-term engagement is required to build sustainability in fragile contexts

It was noted that some programmes in DRC worked better than others – and that one of the biggest lessons was that, in a fragile context, four years is not long enough to ensure long-term sustainability. Many of SWIFT's partners, including HYFRO, have stayed on to support the ASUREPs. SWIFT are exploring ways with local partners to ensure the progress achieved can be supported beyond the scope of the WASH Results Programme.

Further information

For further information about the programme see the [SWIFT consortium website](#).

For details of the ASUREP model, see [The ASUREP: a promising water management model in the DRC](#)⁴ and [Research on the ASUREP model: interview with Ian Langdown from ODI](#)⁵

Strengthening WASH governance in local governments: 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's work on the WASH Results Programme had a strong emphasis on systems strengthening built into the programme from the outset. WASH governance, alongside strengthening sanitation supply chains and finance, were two of the four core components of the SSH4A programme; progress in these areas was measured through sustainability indicators.⁶ Lessons shared here focused on the governance component.

Supporting local governments to shift to a district-wide approach

SNV's approach to on WASH governance involved supporting local governments to shift from village focused programming to a district-wide and multi-stakeholder approach to service delivery. This involved training and coaching to local government to:

1. Develop district-wide sanitation plans
2. Strengthen multi-stakeholder forums
3. Strengthen monitoring and reporting mechanisms
4. Roll out informed choice sanitation options, including for vulnerable groups

The starting point for this was the development of the district-wide sanitation plans, whereby stakeholders were brought together to set joint sector priorities, targets, budget estimates and harmonised approaches. After four years in five countries, all local governments were able to develop district-wide plans, extracting and implementing annual plans, and ensuring these were executed as agreed. The process of developing district-wide plans became a starting point for joint sector work, with priorities, targets and approaches agreed and harmonised.

⁴ <http://swiftconsortium.org/portfolio/the-asurep-a-promising-water-management-model-in-the-drc/>

⁵ <http://swiftconsortium.org/portfolio/interview-with-ian-langdown-odis-research-on-the-asurep-model/>

⁶ Details of the four components of the SSH4A model and its performance framework can be found at <https://snv.org/cms/sites/default/files/explore/download/2019-1-impact-indicators-ssh4a-performance-monitoring-review.pdf>

Connecting national and sub-national-level planning

The focus with systems strengthening approaches is often on connecting the national-level planning and cascading down. With systems change, however, there needs to be a focus on the sub-national level as well, as harmonisation at the national level does not automatically translate to something tangible on the ground.

NGOs have the ability here to be present at the national and sub-national level to support both planning and implementation. This is particularly useful in countries that have undergone federalisation, such as Nepal, as there are newly elected governments and a disconnect between the national and sub-national levels. In this example, there was guidance on disability inclusion at the national level but not at the local levels. SNV were able to share this and operate as a knowledge broker between these levels in a similar way to SWIFT in DRC and Kenya.

This works both ways, however, and local community sanitation networks were key in feeding information upwards in the SSH4A programme (see Box 2). SNV found that when a critical mass of districts developed different ways of doing things that were found to be effective, this information would be collated and shared at the national level. They in turn would take those approaches and cascade them down to other districts, and even across the whole country.

Box 2: Community sanitation networks

SNV found that community sanitation networks were key for sustainable monitoring and reporting, as reporting needed to be done by community members with a close view of progress. These community sanitation networks are groups of neighbouring households with an interest in their sanitation status who elect a leader to report monthly to sub-village heads on their group's sanitation access. The data then flows up through the levels of government into the national database.

Monitoring increased sector alignment

One key aspect to SNV's system strengthening approach in governance was sector alignment at the district level. To measure this, stakeholders were asked to self-assess their districts using a scorecard as part of a focus group discussion. This method had been used by SNV before the WASH Results Programme.

The baseline (BL) to endline (EL) scoring (see Table 1 below) demarcates a clear increase in sector alignment, with the overall average going from 1 to 3.3 by the end of the programme. As well as providing some indication for this metric, this method of scoring provides an avenue through which stakeholders can hold themselves to account.

Table 1: SNV sector alignment scoring card score averages for five countries

Sub-indicator	Average	
	BL	EL
1. A multi-stakeholder dialogue has started (on rural sanitation)	1.4	3.4
2. All relevant (local) government sector stakeholders are involved in the dialogue	1.3	3.4
3. All relevant (local) donor (or funding) agencies are involved in the dialogue	1.0	3.3
4. Relevant civil society and private sector stakeholders are involved in the dialogue	0.6	2.8
5. Information and data (evidence base) are shared in the group	1.0	3.2
6. Sector priorities (for rural sanitation) are set jointly by stakeholders	1.1	3.4
7. Sector targets (for rural sanitation) are set jointly by stakeholders	0.7	3.0
8. Plans (for rural sanitation) are made jointly	0.7	3.3
9. Approaches (to rural sanitation) are aligned	1.1	3.4
10. Standards and norms (related to rural sanitation) are aligned	0.8	3.5
Average score	1.0	3.3

The 10 indicators used to measure sector alignment and the average baseline and endline score for five of the countries (Nepal, Ethiopia, Zambia, Tanzania & Kenya) in the WASH Programme over a period of four years (scoring 0 = lowest to 4 = highest). The score for each country was calculated by taking the mean average of the beneficiary districts.

Reaching potentially vulnerable groups

Another key component in SNV's work in sector strengthening is ensuring that no one is left behind. The focus on engaging vulnerable groups in multi-stakeholder processes included training and coaching of leadership in engagement. There was substantial improvement in the participation and influence of vulnerable groups during the project. Engagement contributed to substantive improvements including:

- great improvement to sanitation on behalf of vulnerable groups as resources and support were provided; and
- greater awareness and availability of inclusive sanitation options.

Lessons learned

Five lessons learned are:

1. District-wide and multi-stakeholder approaches to sanitation interventions are feasible for local governments.
2. Sector alignment meetings are very beneficial but ongoing financing for these meetings and ensuring inclusivity is a challenge.
3. Engagement of decision-makers with vulnerable groups at the local level is very effective in enabling vulnerable groups to access sanitation.
4. Vulnerable groups should be engaged in the design of inclusive sanitation options so they can be sufficiently involved and catered for.
5. Community sanitation networks are key to sustainable monitoring and reporting.

Further information:

Details of the SSH4A programme including the design of the programme, results and from each country, manuals and research can be accessed from the [SNV website](https://interactive.snv.org/snv-rural-sanitation-publications#196494).⁷ For details of SNV approach to monitoring outcomes see [SNV \(2019\) Sustainable Sanitation and Hygiene for All \(SSH4A\) Performance Monitoring Framework Part 2. Outcome indicators](https://snv.org/cms/sites/default/files/explore/download/2019-2-outcome-indicators-ssh4a-performance-monitoring-review.pdf)⁸

⁷ <https://interactive.snv.org/snv-rural-sanitation-publications#196494>

⁸ <https://snv.org/cms/sites/default/files/explore/download/2019-2-outcome-indicators-ssh4a-performance-monitoring-review.pdf>

Cross-cutting themes

1. **It is important to be systematic in reaching the last mile, recognising that the most vulnerable are particularly difficult to monitor.** Programmers need to ensure there are systems in place to reach everyone. This is relevant for support to local sanitation businesses as well as for district-wide sanitation planning or engaging communities to pay for water services.
2. **Systems strengthening takes time, necessitates building political will, flexible funding and eventual government budget allocation and capacity.** Programme staff need to recognise that it's not their systems they're working with and understand the roles they play in that engagement. The relationship between programme staff and the government is incredibly important, and having a long-term presence in the country is very beneficial in this respect.
3. **NGOs can play a role in brokering connections between actors.** All of the examples showed suppliers brokering between actors, for example between LSEs and sources of finance, between different levels of government (local and national), between government bodies and other stakeholders, often drawing on established relationships to do so.

Conclusion

This brief has provided a small insight into just some of the approaches that the WASH Results Programme suppliers used to strengthen systems for sustainable WASH services. Even in its very partial view of the work undertaken, it illustrates the range of stakeholders within the systems, the importance of the relationships between the different parts of the system and the multiple potential entry points for those seeking to strengthen those systems. The links within the document will help readers delve deeper.

Future large-scale WASH programmes are likely to be very different to the WASH Results Programme. As the WASH Results Programme is ending, DFID (now FDCO) is considering how future programmes could support systems strengthening. Questions being explored include:

- What frameworks or building blocks are useful for systems strengthening, and what analytical approaches might help get sector buy-in?
- What interventions are useful at national and sub-national levels?
- What are the most useful entry points: balancing looking at a system as a whole and supporting all its different elements as far as possible, alongside selecting a specific part of a system creating a blockage and working to solve those issues?

It will be exciting to follow the next generation of systems strengthening work in WASH and to learn more about what works and what doesn't in the efforts towards sustainable WASH services for all.

Box 3: DFID thinking on WASH systems strengthening

Stephen Lindley-Jones talked about how DFID's (now FCDO's) next steps in systems strengthening will be to improve their understanding of:

- What frameworks or building blocks are useful for systems strengthening, and what analytical approaches might help get sector buy-in.
- What interventions are useful at national and sub-national levels.
- What the most useful entry points might be, balancing looking at a system as a whole and supporting all its different elements as far as possible, alongside selecting a specific part of a system creating a blockage and working to solve those issues.

Box 4: Background to this brief

This brief captures discussions at the WASH Results Learning event held virtually in June 2020 and attended by programme suppliers, DFID and the Monitoring and Verification Team. Each supplier shared insights generated through their own monitoring, learning and research processes in a short presentation. These were then explored by other programme stakeholders. This brief was produced by the Monitoring and Verification Team and has been approved by suppliers. Links to further information on the topics discussed are available throughout the brief. Thanks to all presenters, participants; also thanks to Joanna Trevor and Rachel Stevens (SWIFT), Katrice Knight (SAWRP), Antoinette Kome (SNV) and Leonard Tedd (FCDO formerly DFID) for reviewing and commenting on drafts.

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

- #1 Lessons for setting outcome ambitions in WASH
- #2 Setting and monitoring outcome targets
- #3 Reaching the vulnerable and working in fragile contexts
- #4 Experiences in WASH systems strengthening