

 **Agenda**  
For **Change**



**APPLICATION OF THE DISTRICT-WIDE  
APPROACH IN 5 PILOT DISTRICTS OF  
RWANDA: LESSONS LEARNED**

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Photo credit: Stef Smits, 2018

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## Introduction

Rwanda has been piloting a District-Wide Approach to WASH service delivery. This entails that districts develop a costed WASH plan for their entire area, based on a series of assessments. These plans are expected to guide future investments in WASH service delivery and help them mobilise funds for that.

Between 2017 and 2019, pilot districts worked on the first “assessment” and second “planning” phases of the District-Wide Approach, and prepared WASH plans. Districts will now use their investment plan to source funding and move into the third “implementation” phase. Based on the experiences so far, the Ministry of Infrastructure and sector partners consider that the proof of concept has been adequately demonstrated, and that the approach can be scaled up countrywide. This learning note seeks to capture the lessons learned in applying the District-Wide Approach to inform stakeholders to be involved in countrywide scaling up and conveying lessons from Rwanda to a global audience.

The note is based on experience gained by partners involved in the District-Wide Approach, including a sector meeting on the progress of development of district WASH plans (July, 2019), as well as the review of the Ministry of Infrastructure’s guide on the District-Wide Approach to Sustainable WASH Services and several papers written about the application of the District-Wide Approach.

## Background

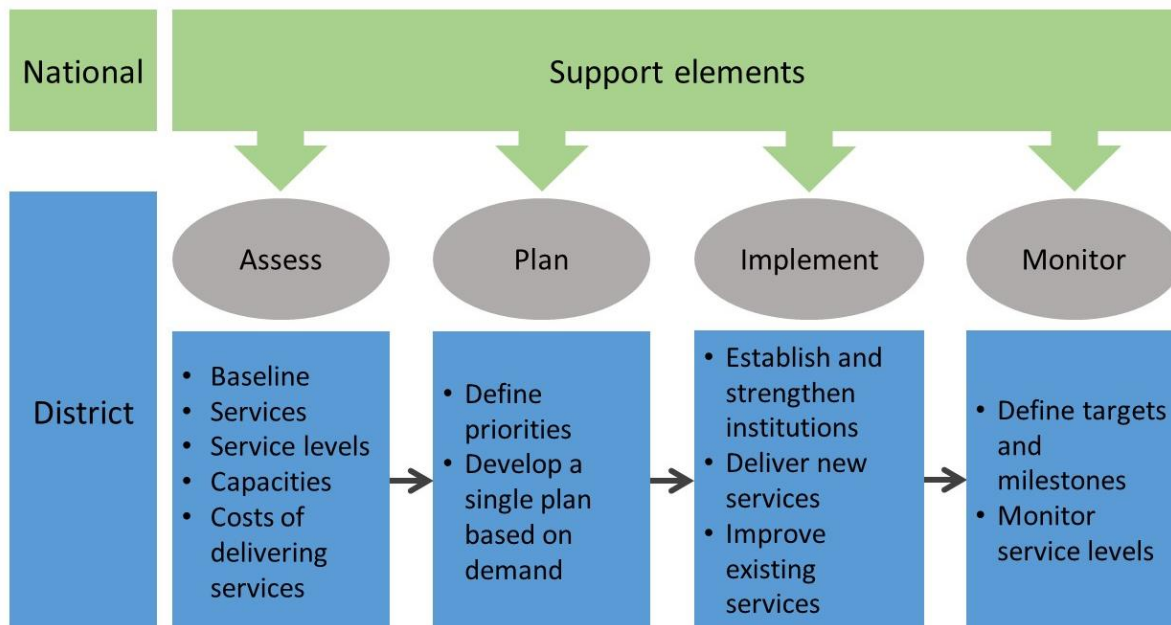
Rwanda has set ambitious targets for achieving universal access to basic water supply and sanitation by 2024 and providing safely managed WASH services by 2030. To meet targets and address sector challenges of fragmented planning, uncoordinated approach and ineffective implementation modalities, Rwanda adopted the District-Wide Approach in 2016, establishing the district as unit of analysis and work, and incorporating this integrated planning approach into national WASH policies and funding strategies.

The District-Wide Approach initiative in Rwanda is linked to a global initiative, known as Agenda for Change. Agenda for Change is a collaboration of like-minded organisations that have adopted common principles and approaches to accelerate progress towards sustainable WASH service delivery by strengthening national and local WASH systems. In Rwanda, Agenda for Change members Aguaconsult, IRC, WaterAid, and Water For People supported the District-Wide Approach. Experiences of the District-Wide Approach in Rwanda informed the [Agenda for Change district-level roadmap](#) for universal access for sustainable WASH services, which is now applied globally.

As one of the government officers involved in the District-Wide Approach mentioned: “The District-Wide Approach is not a new idea... it is a *traditional project cycle*, which is improved to include details of critical steps that need to be completed to ensure delivery of universal and sustainable services.”

The District-Wide Approach is conceptualised as a number of steps followed to achieve the set targets (see figure below):

**Figure 1: Components relevant in a District-Wide Approach**



The “assessment” phase gauges the current state of affairs through a baseline of service levels; asset analysis of water supply infrastructure; capacity needs for district officials and private operators; and a costing assessment for new infrastructure and full replacement of existing non-functional and abandoned assets.

During the “planning” phase, districts set priorities and a clear vision, which are not just about filling gaps in access but about setting service levels they want to reach and maintain. During this phase, districts also analyse the costs and resources required to move from the current to the future situation and prioritise these resources over time. A WASH plan needs a vision, targets, data and information, finance and the people on board that can make it happen. As such, the district WASH plan is both a process and an output, which combines a political/strategic process of decision making with a technical process of assessments and projections of costs with a consultative process with sector stakeholders. Districts use costed WASH plans to identify funding gaps and define funds for mobilising strategies, i.e. advocate with the Ministry of Finance and other institutions, such as the Local Development Agency (LODA) and build partnerships for financing.

The “implementation” phase is about strengthening the enabling environment to implement the service and network changes.

Finally, the “monitoring” phase is about cross-checking promises if universal access are made and kept.

## Application of the District-Wide Approach

The District-Wide Approach has been applied in the following five pilot districts: Bugesera, Gicumbi, Karongi, Ngororero and Nyamagabe between February 2017 and June 2019, supported by the Ministry of Infrastructure – Water and Sanitation Department, the national utility Water and Sanitation Corporation (WASAC) and external partners: WaterAid and Water For People. The Ministry of Infrastructure had a supervisory role across pilot districts, as it is expected to lead the subsequent further roll-out.

**Table 1: Pilot districts with implementing partner(s)**

Pilot District	Partner
Bugesera	WaterAid
Gicumbi	Ministry of Infrastructure, Water For People
Karongi	Water For People
Ngororero	Water and Sanitation Corporation (WASAC)
Nyamagabe	Ministry of Infrastructure, Water For People

During the pilot, the originally conceptualised steps were largely followed, though some (minor) adjustments were made. The main one was that during the assessment phase, the sector realised that it would be impossible to provide a comprehensive investment plan without considering the costs for developing new infrastructures. Thus, the idea was to include detailed engineering designs for water supply systems and carry out needs assessments for onsite sanitation to ensure the district receives a tool with a full package to help them with planning and funds mobilisation. To cut down costs, experienced freelance engineers were contracted to complete detailed engineering designs, which drew out the planning phase.

## District-Wide Approach Evaluation

In order to structure the lessons learned, we use the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development’s Development Assistance Committee’s (OECD-DAC) criteria: Relevance, Effectiveness, Efficiency, Impact and Sustainability.

### Relevance of the District-Wide Approach

The District-Wide Approach is relevant to achieving universal and sustainable access to services in the Rwandan context, as it is supported by high-level policies and strategies and through facilitation, rural district local governments understand their role as WASH authority, supported by the national government.

The District-Wide Approach is in line with the (national) Decentralisation Policy (2012), and the National Water Policy and Strategy (2016) acknowledges decentralisation, placing the responsibility of WASH service delivery with districts. Decentralised entities tend to be nimbler and offer opportunities to better understand WASH sector interaction with other sectors, such as health, education, agriculture, land use planning and financing. Similarly, district governments are already responsible for development plans, of which WASH plans are now a priority component.

Furthermore, the District-Wide Approach addresses the critical challenge of a systematic approach to planning. Prior to the District-Wide Approach, districts obviously also carried out planning, but the District-Wide Approach takes a more systematic approach, covering the entire area of jurisdiction of a district, and not a particular community or scheme.

## **Effectiveness of the District-Wide Approach**

The process so far has been effective in the sense that the final products – WASH plans – were produced, as are the underlying assessments and studies, and with that a much wider information base. The process was also effective in the sense that it mobilised the districts' officials and provided them with a clear perspective.

Where the process has had some shortcomings is in the content of the plans. So far, the plans focus mainly on the investments required, and O&M and capital maintenance have not been fully addressed yet; those parts of the plan are still being developed. Moreover, the focus has been mainly on water and less on sanitation. This was done on purpose, as it was felt that the methodology was better developed for water than for sanitation. It was decided to first proceed with water, whilst in parallel working on the methodology for sanitation. The five plans do include some elements of costing for sanitation, such as for public institutions, and some districts also estimated costs for treatment facilities. For example, Gicumbi's WASH Plan included an estimation for a sanitary landfill and onsite wastewater treatment plant. However, the methodology for household sanitation planning is still being defined.

Despite a clear output – the actual WASH plans - the planning process is rather implicit and may be critiqued for lack of analysis. The underlying strategies that explain the costed scenario are not clearly explained, for example, locations of pump stations or why the district selected on-site sanitation over piped sewerage. Justifying the line of thought and reasoning behind a scenario is an important mechanism for transparency and accountability to users/citizens (years) down the line.

The District-Wide Approach relies on technical assistance from national stakeholders to district government. In the pilot, the Ministry of Infrastructure proved its role as the main driver of the entire process, providing strategic and technical guidance to districts and dedicating one Ministry of Infrastructure staff member to each district. Joint monitoring teams seemed an effective organisational set-up, for example supervising engineers contracted to complete the asset analysis and detailed engineering designs.

Tools for conducting the various assessments have been tested and proven effective. The development of WASH MIS (Management Information System) is a welcome iteration, and an incredible effort that can be repeated at intervals several years apart. Feedback on the asset inventory methodology is to include additional scenarios.

## Efficiency of the District-Wide Approach

The development of investment plans experienced a delay of more than a year, as compared to the original planning. The water demand analysis was especially time consuming as the analysis required shapefiles, which needed to be drawn. The costing of infrastructure, which is based on population settlement plans, also took a long time.

Given the local context of semi-urban and large rural piped supply schemes that require multiple pumping stations in complex geographic conditions, the decision to incorporate district-appropriate engineering designs and accurate costing of water infrastructure into the planning phase may be relevant. As a result, each district has a specific ask for water service delivery infrastructure.

The inclusion of detailed engineering designs contributed to delays, also increasing the cost of the assessment and planning phase to US\$ 110,000 per district (approximately US\$ 60 per capita). Around 60% of these costs relate to the detailed engineering designs, as shown in the table below.

**Table 2: Costs for producing detailed engineering designs per district**

Pilot District	Cost of Engineering Design
Bugesera	US\$ 40,000 (15 sectors)
Gicumbi	US\$ 68,000 (21 sectors)
Karongi	US\$ 52,000 (13 sectors)
Ngororero	No data
Nyamagabe	US\$ 87,000 (17 sectors)
<b>Average cost for engineering designs of water infrastructure per district</b>	<b>US\$ 61,750</b>

These investment plans are worth US\$ 40 million each. With these concrete plans Rwanda could advocate for finances from international banks and bilateral relations to bridge funding gaps.

There is a risk that the finances will not be attained, and that plans, targets and strategies must be revisited, further drawing out the assessment and planning phase, however, as designs are based on population settlements, the risk for returning to the drawing board (and losing significant efficiency) is perceived as very low. Nevertheless, with multiple detailed engineering designs from five districts now in hand, it may be possible to depart from the pilot approach: deriving reference costs for draft designs of WASH schemes and investment estimates, and completing detailed designs once financing based on the investment estimates have been secured.

Moreover, for the first time ever in this fiscal year 2019-2020, districts have increased budget allocations for water and sanitation sub-sectors. WASH partners and government institutions initially prioritised infrastructure development and have since embraced life-cycle planning.

There are practical experiences/strategies from pilot districts for mobilising additional resources (cash and in-kind) for completing the assessment and planning phases. The District-Wide Approach efficiently builds consensus in that investment planning is not just a plan for initial investment but life-cycle investment. Soon there will also be practical experience in mobilising funding for major medium-term investment plans.

## **Impact of the District-Wide Approach**

In OECD terms, the impact of a programme reflects on the real difference the activity made to beneficiaries. In these terms, the impact of the District-Wide Approach is that district stakeholders are committed to ensuring universal access and the impact that quality WASH service delivery will have on people's lives.

## **Sustainability of District-Wide Approach**

The long-term sustainability of the District-Wide Approach depends on district ownership. In pilot districts, the programme gained experience in convincing district stakeholders in managing competing priorities and raising the relevancy of the District-Wide Approach work. District-level workshops on national policies and methodology of the approach seemed effective at aligning district understanding of roles and responsibilities. There may be an opportunity for national stakeholders to better facilitate internalisation of a district's role and ownership of the process.

Moreover, the success and long-term sustainability of the District-Wide Approach depends on district capacity to coordinate the District-Wide Approach process/activities. Pilot districts recognise their managerial role for WASH services, particularly in planning and budgeting, procurement, and regulation of and support to the entities directly providing WASH services, and also their gaps in human and financial resources and capacity to support the development of required infrastructure and to sustain WASH services.

## **Conclusions**

The District-Wide Approach is a relevant and effective approach for articulating WASH plans, and to get buy-in from various stakeholders for attaining universal access and the stakeholders' roles therein. As both a process and an output to investment planning, the District-Wide Approach has been effective.

At the same time, the District-Wide Approach comes at a cost, both in terms of finances and human resources. This cost is considered to be worthwhile, particularly in view of the amounts of money these plans represent. A major cost item is support to the districts for carrying out the assessments and developing the plan.

Rwanda now has five concretely costed district WASH Investment Plans, which it can use to raise funds with a clear, supported ask. If fund mobilisation is unsuccessful to initiate the iterative process, it will be back to the drawing board to identify alternative scenarios.



## Recommendations for scaling up the District-Wide Approach

The successful scaling of the District-Wide Approach rests with a dedicated national team that provides leadership, support and guidance to districts. It is pertinent that national stakeholders (Ministry of Infrastructure, Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning, Water and Sanitation Corporation (WASAC), etc.) increase human resource capacity to handle the technical and capacity building support it will be providing to districts. At the same time, it is imperative that district stakeholders understand the process, so they can support the district in the coordination of all activities for the long-term sustainability of WASH services.

The information from the Districts WASH Investment Plans indicates what it means for a country to achieve and sustain universal access to WASH. These documents have implications on the government's budget allocation and the WASH sector financing in general. The information needs to be taken to a higher level (cabinet) for discussion and action to avoid a situation whereby the implementation of the plans may rely on only the district's capacity.

Efforts for sanitation infrastructure should not be delayed, and water supply and wastewater discharges (sanitation) are mutually inclusive. Ideally planning for these public services is done together.

Importantly, the five pilot districts are more than proof of concept, these pilot districts are resources for cross learning.

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