



Agenda for Change members from CARE, CRS, Helvetas, IRC, Splash, WaterAid, Water for Good, Water For People, and Welthungerhilfe gather with stakeholders from the Ethiopia Ministry of Water and others on Day 2.

‘THE ROAD TO COLLABORATION’

MEETING SUMMARY (JUNE 2022)

By Frehiwot Gebrewold

BACKGROUND

Agenda for Change aims to learn from the experiences of country-level collaborations and promote global best practices in water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) systems strengthening. In support of this aim, the Agenda for Change collaboration, with the support of IRC Ethiopia, organized a three-day meeting in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in June 2022.

The purpose of the meeting was to bring together seven representatives from Africa (Central African Republic, Ethiopia, Malawi, Uganda, Rwanda) and Asia (Cambodia, Nepal) to discuss technical challenges, learning opportunities, and practical implementation of WASH systems strengthening efforts in a pandemic context. It further served as an opportunity to hold conversations about the district- and sector-wide approaches across country contexts through a participatory in-person exchange. Discussions included Agenda for Change members as well as participants from the government of Ethiopia and other country-level stakeholders. A video with highlights of the full session can be viewed [here](#).

KEY TAKEAWAYS - OVERALL

- We need to contextualize and simplify WASH systems strengthening approaches across countries, especially the Building Blocks Assessment Tool.
- Fragility is here to stay; we can no longer rely on stable operating spaces as the norm.
- Systems change takes time and courage; we must reject the status quo and re-imagine a better narrative that is fit for delivering universal access for all.
- Trust is the currency of influencing. Be clear about your position and role and if you don't know something, admit it. That humility will garner respect and trust.
- Acquiring key skills such as critical thinking, persuading, and convincing are critical for getting the most out of the systems tools and approaches.
- Having an agile approach is key. Being able to recognize when a shift is needed, and 'how' we can tackle the problem collectively will lead us further than going forward alone.
- We must be effective conveners of not just the water sector but other sectors that influence the WASH sector (e.g., health, education, finance, etc.)

KEY TAKEAWAYS - BY DAY

Day 1: Implementing systems thinking during a pandemic; what were the lessons and what to do better?

During the morning of the first day, lessons from Rwanda and Ethiopia were presented on the successes and challenges during the pandemic regarding application of a district-wide WASH roadmap and master planning in the two countries. Lessons learned around future planning were also discussed.

Key messages of Day 1 included:

- Globally developed tools are useful in providing the “how,” though they need to be shaped by “what”. This helps in different contexts as a country collaboration differs from country to country based on their experiences and priorities.
- It is becoming increasingly difficult to rely on stable operating spaces for system thinking to take place and even when that happens, it takes time and courage. Sector actors must reject the status quo and re-imagine a better narrative that is fit to deliver universal and equitable access for all.
- You cannot rush the district-wide master planning process if the end goal is ownership and sustainability, as the “who” should be identified first.

Day 2: Widening Impact through Influencing - National level systems advocacy

A representative from the Ethiopian Ministry of Water gave an example of a sector wide approach to WASH based on the One WASH National Program. Following this, Agenda for Change collaborators from WaterAid Ethiopia, IRC Uganda, and CARE Nepal, shared their



Jane Nabunnya, Country Director of IRC Uganda, shares her advocacy and influencing tips on Day 2.

experiences advocating for changes in the WASH sector. Though the organizations follow different approaches, it was clear that their shared goal is to disrupt the internal and external status quo, while also acknowledging and respecting the legitimate role of the state.

Key messages of Day 2 included:

- The process of change-making is complex and an acute understanding of the politics of the WASH sector is important to make members’ role as systems thinkers impactful.
- Organizations should work to influence not just the water or sanitation sector actors, but also reach across other sectors that influence the WASH sector (e.g., health, finance, education).
- Long term and flexible funding commitments should be prioritized if we are to achieve our goals by 2030.
- Providing evidence has a high chance for impact and having an advocacy map was suggested as one way to get the most out of the systems tools and approaches.
- Investing in relationships based on detailed mapping and scoping of power/relations/mindsets, and being clear about the organization’s position and role, were suggested for how to convince and make a key stakeholder [in this instance, the commissioner of water] a partner/ ally from the first conversation.

Day 3: Looking forward to an Agenda for Change Global Strategy

The two major outputs of the third day included coming up with recommendations for the General Assembly on the strategy development process and establishing a strategy working group to move the strategy forward (alongside the Global Secretariat).

Thus, the attendees were given a chance to answer and discuss questions like where they currently sit on the systems change continuum (see Figure 1), what they need for progress, and how long that will take; ways of costing the process for different countries; how to create incentives for members and partnerships; how to leverage the collaboration to support national governments; and ways of monitoring effective collaboration. The discussion outcomes and answers helped determine Agenda for Change’s success in the next five years.

Key messages of Day 3 included:

- Countries are starting on different levels of the continuum. For instance, Nepal was on level two while Malawi and Uganda are on level three. Each level has time and cost implications and knowing where each member is starting will help us plan better for getting to our 2030 goals.

- Among the things that countries need for progress are: improving coordination with central and local levels and WASH members, coordination with government and other development partners, and exploring collaboration with other organizations who work on systems strengthening at different levels.
- Country representatives also suggested defining linkages across member programs and with other global systems strengthening partnerships (e.g., Sanitation and Water for All, Millennium Water Alliance, D30, Partnership for WASH systems in Africa, etc.).

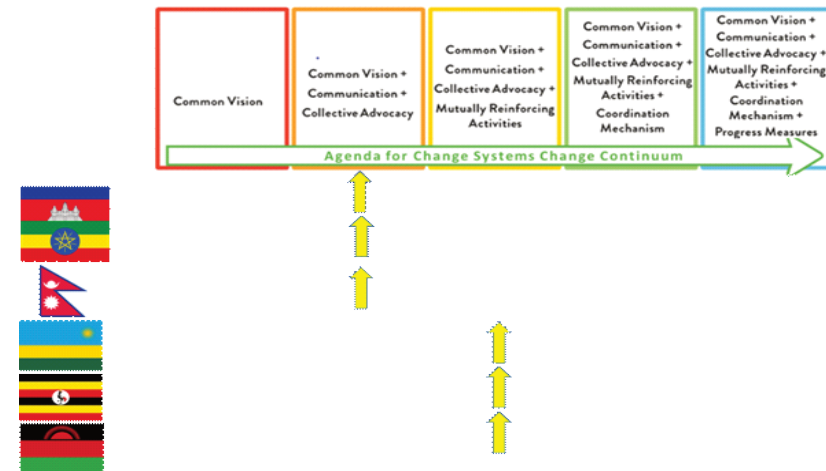


Figure 1. Agenda for Change Systems Change Continuum with country collaborations depicted as starting at different levels.

All attendees stand and clap after a successful series of presentations on Day 2.

