WASH SYSTEMS, SUSTAINBILITY, AND RESILIENCE: WHY DO THEY MATTER?

BACKGROUND

Stockholm World Water Week was moved to an online event for 2020. Since we could not see each other in person, we wanted to offer a chance to network and learn about building resilient WASH systems in a different format.

Agenda for Change, Australian Aid, BORDA, Millennium Water Alliance (MWA), The Mortenson Center in Global Engineering, Rural Water Supply Network (RWSN), Sustainable Sanitation Alliance (SuSanA), Sustainable Services Initiative (SSI), WaterAid Australia, WaterSHED, and Water for Women hosted three virtual learning and networking sessions during World Water Week at Home with the theme "WASH Systems, Sustainability, and Resilience: Why do they matter?"

The online format allowed much broader participation than a typical conference. The sessions were hosted at different times on 25th and 26th August to encourage more people to join. Sessions 1 and 2 were conducted in English, French, and Spanish to enable broader participation. These accommodations paid off! 617 participants from 75 countries registered to attend the events.

Tuesday, 25 August 2020

- Session 1 | 1500 – 1630 STOCKHOLM time, convened by BORDA, Rural Water Supply Network, Sustainable Sanitation Alliance, and Sustainable Services Initiative. See thematic introduction in English, French and Spanish.
- Session 2 | 1300 – 1430 NEW YORK time, convened by Agenda for Change, Millennium Water Alliance, and The Mortenson Center in Global Engineering. See the recording here (with subtitles in English, French, and Spanish).

Wednesday, 26 August 2020

- Session 3 | 0930 – 1100 DELHI time, convened by Australian Aid, WaterAid Australia, WaterSHED, and Water for Women. See the recording here (English only).

THANK YOU!

Thank you to our global team of co-conveners, who planned and facilitated sessions.

Session 1 | Jona Toetzke and Stephan Simon (SSI), Franziska Volk (SuSanA), Sean Furey (RWSN), and Shobana Srinivasan (BORDA)

Session 2 | Alec Shannon and Susan Davis (Agenda for Change), Laura Brunson (MWA), Laura MacDonald and Jamie McDevitt-Galles (Mortenson Center)

Session 3 | Fraser Goff (WaterAid Australia) and Allyson Beach (WaterSHED)

HIGHLIGHTS FROM DISCUSSIONS

Each session offered a brief introduction to the topics of WASH systems, sustainability, and resilience followed by moderated breakout room sessions. Each session offered up to 7 breakout topics. Moderators provided key points from the breakout discussions, summarized below.

CLIMATE CHANGE

• Involving local community and other stakeholders like youth is key. An NGO should get to know the communities and learn more about what they require. Learn about local competitors and include women's and other marginalized group's voices.

- o Work with women so they can be engaged in WASH committees and discussions and adaptation planning.
- o Create awareness and understanding in the community on climate change effects and build capacity of local champions who can encourage communities to take sustainable measures against climate change effects.
- o Work holistically – don't just provide hardware – but support the government, and include source protection, disaster risk reduction, multi-use water systems, and training for communities.

• Collective advocacy/influencing is needed to encourage government leadership to focus on WASH and/or climate change and integrated water resource management (IWRM). Government needs to be involved from the beginning so they will fully participate.

- o Approaches depend on how the Government is organized in a country (e.g., those who oppose the climate agenda can have more power).
- o Look for allies to increase influence – environmental agencies or youth-led movements can be strong allies with the WASH sector, for example.
- o In some countries, government WASH actors are less engaged in climate change dialogues than ministries of agriculture or forestry. We can learn from their years of experience and engage through the existing climate change working groups.
- o Climate change advocacy should be an inter-sectoral effort. We should also consider inter-sectoral efforts in community-level climate resilience interventions.

- We need to institutionalize the use of data at the national level (e.g., maintaining and aggregating local hydrological data with national level inputs).
- To help drive forward a climate change agenda within development approaches, we should learn from the success of other movements, like the integration of menstrual hygiene management into WASH/Youth/Adolescent/sexual reproductive health programs.
- We need to think about climate change impacts on sustainability of water services over the long-term. How will climate change influence our plans for strengthening the WASH systems building blocks over decades to come? For example:
    o Government WASH budgeting needs to consider climate resilience and they should be held accountable for proper budget utilization.
    o Climate change will not only affect water supply but should also be considered in sector efforts for sustainable and resilient sanitation and hygiene.

Country specific considerations:

- The intersection of WASH and climate change will particularly affect communities like those in in Bangladesh and Cambodia that already experience flooding.
- In Indonesia the rainy season is changing a lot due to climate change.
- Nepal has a newly restructured federal system. Climate activities are slowly being taking up by local government; in the future it may be more prioritized.
- In Tanzania, a few organizations have included climate adaptation considerations, and many are working with other organizations and the private sector to push collaboration with government on policy reform and mitigating long term effects.

> # "THE SYSTEMS DON'T TAKE CARE OF THEMSELVES; WE NEED TO INVEST MORE IN STRENGTHENING LOCAL CAPACITIES" – PARTICIPANT FROM ECUADOR

SANITATION

- Integrating sanitation across other sectors is a key system strengthening approach that needs to happen more often.
- Some sanitation stakeholders find systems terminology to be intimidating. Reframing or emphasizing the holistic and long-term sustainability of sanitation approaches is one way to make it more accessible.
- Community-led total sanitation (CLTS) has its own process/logic which is very community-based, so applying systems thinking to it is not self-evident.
    o A major tension exists between the "theory" of CLTS, which does not allow for subsidies for latrines, and the inability of many households to spend resources on or construct a latrine. In many countries, sanitation development objectives are born entirely by beneficiaries, with a potentially harmful effect on the most vulnerable.

- National governments have an important role to play in harmonizing sanitation sector approaches and policies, sector capacity, and financing (and ensuring sustainability is considered from the beginning).
- Very few can bridge the gap between engineering tools and tools needed for the social and cultural aspects of sanitation programs – we need a better balance of tools to be used by different stakeholders. Some useful tools for sanitation systems include:
    - Fecal Sludge Management (FSM) Toolbox, World Bank's Urban Risk Assessment to understand the enabling environment.
    - Organizational network analyses help with the institutional level work and provide information about sharing and hierarchies of systems
    - The Shit Flow Diagram tool is great and participatory, but it's very technical
    - Sanitation safety planning
    - Systems mapping
- Collective action between stakeholders was often raised as a requirement for a strong sanitation system.
    - Stakeholders should include organizations that adopt a market-based approach, which pays equal attention to the voice and need of other constituents.
    - Private sector stakeholders are often missed in systems approaches. Especially where services such as pit emptying might be more informal (in some rural areas), there can be resilient services but with tenuous links to government or formal structures.
- Sanitation service sustainability cannot be achieved unless NGOs, implementers, and funders are willing to exit the system and have locally owned and led sanitation chains.
- Water, sanitation, and hygiene should stand on their own, individually; instead of being combined as WASH.

Country specific considerations:

- A consortium in Niger is implementing a 5-year program in one region, covering three communes and 325 villages (coverage of 60% of all villages, so not area-wide due to funding constraints). The consortium is supporting government services to achieve open defecation free zones through CLTS. Some key takeaways:
    - The consortium's main entry points are (1) the communal services, who are in charge of planning and monitoring of activities and are supported through training and budget allocation to help them supervise activities, and (2) departmental technical services, who support the communes.
    - The framework within which actors operate has recently been harmonized (building block "policy"): there is national-level guidance on CLTS, whereas previously every partner developed its own approach.
    - One weakness is in the "accountability" building block. There have been no (local) elections for several years. Mayors are nominated and not elected, and not accountable to achieving development objectives.
    - Another weakness is in the "finance" building block: competent authorities and budget allocations for sanitation at both national and local level are not sufficient; most of the resources go to water supply. The consortium is doing advocacy to improve this.
- In Cambodia, development impact bonds are being used for funding sanitation initiatives. The roles of formal and informal actors are still evolving, and this raises questions about how regulation can/cannot be applied to all sanitation actors.

Inauguration of a community water supply system in the municipality of Tacaná, built in a tripartite manner (CARE Guatemala)

WATER SCARCITY / SECURITY

- Local solutions and partnership are important with different criteria and methodologies on delivering district-wide or city-wide solutions to the global issue of water scarcity.
- While access to water from perspective of the community is the most pressing need, integrated water resources management (IWRM) is important to minimize the risk to communities considering the three "Rs": Recharge, Retention and Reuse.
- It is important to understand water sources and issues impacting them, such as pollution, overuse, and technical issues such as improper drilling.
- Resolving water scarcity challenges needs to involve behavior change both to improve culture and habits around how water use is planned and managed.
- Water Safety Planning can help to bring diverse actors together around a phased climate-resilient plan and form the basis for coordinated support to government around mapping, data sharing and maintaining borehole logs.
- There are possibilities to provide different qualities of water fit-for-purpose.
- If the community is involved in planning and implementation of program, they will likely face a funding gap versus a foreign NGO. It is important to find economic incentives for sustaining the system.
  - o Creating business opportunities that drive water sustainability can be one way to overcome this. Examples include implementing water demand-side management programs such as water trading and allocation or creating an enabling environment that encourages large-scale private sector to implement wastewater recycling.
- Working at the watershed level is important, but we have much to learn.
  - o Transboundary and even cross district watersheds are challenging to manage.
  - o One approach may involve buying land to protect the watershed – this could be funded by government, water user's association, or a local NGO.
  - o Land tenure is a significant issue in many locations (e.g., poor systems of land ownership records, government owns all land).
- Other important issues/factors:
  - o Education of users, policy makers on water issues;
  - o Collection and dissemination of useful, accessible, and timely water data;
  - o Finding ways to avoid a change in leadership or lack of continuing funding undoing positive steps forward (e.g., money gets tight and priorities change).

- o The movement towards water security needs to be people-driven rather than policy-driven.

EMERGENCY RESPONSE

- There should be an exit strategy from emergency response for WASH which
  - o Includes an up-front needs assessment;
  - o Considers Internally Displaced Peoples (IDPs);
  - o Understands details of the existing system;
  - o Establishes water tracking activities;
  - o Links with existing systems to ensure sustained services.
- Humanitarian responders must engage the host community in designing and approving programs and approaches before moving forward.
- Humanitarian responders need to focus on building relationships, sharing information between actors and joint planning.
- In fragile contexts, UNICEF was referred to as the "sector lead" (rather than cluster lead) by 2 participants.
- Approaches and technologies in humanitarian responses are often fragmented. Clear technical standards and implementation approach guidelines are important – either from the government, or if not, from the cluster.
- To help users pay for services in fragile contexts, WASH interventions should be linked with livelihood interventions.
  - o Cash- and market-based approaches hold good potential for avoiding "direct service delivery" by NGOs, but it is better to use existing local service providers, if any.
  - o Proper assessments of markets and the region are needed to avoid overlapping efforts.

Country specific considerations:

- In Yemen, there is always destruction of newly constructed WASH facilities due to human conflict, and there is always a threat of cholera and other diseases. While some responders provide emergency latrines and chlorine for taps, the problem is waste management.
- In Cox's Bazaar, the work on fecal sludge management (FSM) in the refugee camp was used for sector learning for the whole of Bangladesh, involving local universities.

A locally manufactured, foot operated handwashing station is used outside a healthcare facility (Helvetas Nepal)

HEALTHCARE FACILITIES

- There has been some progress made in recognizing the importance of WASH in Healthcare Facilities, as highlighted by its inclusion in the Joint Monitoring Programme (JMP) reporting.
- There is an institutional divide between the WASH and health sectors, and more needs to be done to bring WASH to the center of healthcare facilities interventions.
  - Governance of WASH in healthcare facilities is complex because often the roles and responsibilities between WASH and health actors are unclear.
  - To bridge the existing gap, there's a need to identify the overlap, advocate for a distinct budget for WASH in all healthcare facilities and build the capacities of healthcare workers on WASH services.
  - There is a need to build ownership and engagement of WASH among health actors; the WASH in healthcare facilities agenda usually seems to be driven by the WASH actors rather than health actors.
  - There are lessons to be learnt from WASH engagement in the education sector.
- It is pertinent for WASH advocates/stakeholders to raise the profile of WASH as a contributor to health outcomes because WASH provision is an investment in prevention, which is a proactive measure.
- We need to balance monitoring of WASH in healthcare facilities between infrastructure indicators, behavior indicators and community feedback and accountability indicators.
- In an analysis of the 8 practical steps in the World Health Assembly's Resolution for WASH in healthcare facilities, participants mostly had made progress on the first two steps. This may be partly due to challenges in driving progress against other practical steps but also because WASH in healthcare facilities is an area of work still in its infancy.
- Two key points are emerging of how COVID-19 has changed progress on WASH in healthcare facilities:
  - Encouraging a holistic approach by raising the importance of community engagement to support WASH in healthcare facilities.
  - Raising discussions about where roles and responsibilities best sit between infection prevention control and WASH actors.

> ## "WE ALWAYS NEED TO WORK WITH LOCAL COMMUNITIES, FROM THE BEGINNING OF ANY ACTIVITY" – PARTICIPANT FROM SPAIN

Country specific considerations:

- In Bhutan, situation analysis, baseline data collection through government systems, and use of the WASH Facility Improvement Tool (WASHFIT) complemented strong government management to pilot and scale up improvements for WASH in healthcare facilities.
- In Cambodia, an assessment of 117 healthcare facilities led by the Ministry of Health's research unit and the National Institute of Public Health encouraged government ownership of data. This evidence was used to improve guidelines, standards and to advocate for policy improvements.

GENDER AND SOCIAL INCLUSION

- Having women and marginalized groups at the table in decision-making, coordination and planning enables their voices to be heard.
  - Working with local government and community leadership is key to strengthening the voice of women and marginalized groups.
  - Partnering with local organizations like disabled people's organizations (DPOs) and including them in sector discussions can lead to more inclusive outcomes.
  - Education and economic empowerment are important to build people's confidence, break stereotypes, and raise their own voices.
- We all have certain biases and we need to give ourselves time to acknowledge the biases we carry. Norms and biases within the systems where we work need to be challenged in respectful, safe, and incremental ways to ensure lasting change.
- Sector monitoring of empowerment needs to go beyond counting the numbers of women or marginalized group representatives participating in activities. Tools such as participation ladders, counting how many times people speak in meetings, or holding regular focus group discussions to better understand the level of engagement and empowerment.

Country specific considerations:

- In Cambodia, organizations and disabled people's organizations are working together to help local governments integrate gender equity and social inclusion into their planning and ensuring local leaders understand the WASH needs of people with disabilities.
- In Nepal, an organization working alongside women in community water system management found the work helps to build women's confidence and challenge the gender norms which prevent them from being decision makers.
- Experiences from both Nepal and India highlight that strengthening women's representation on water management committees makes a difference in challenging gender norms.

MONITORING SYSTEMS CHANGE

- For a large group with people coming from different backgrounds and various places along the spectrum of understanding, it helps to get people using the same language and understanding of what "the system" is.
- Different organizations draw the "boundary" around the system differently, and often where the boundary is drawn is an indication of the intentions or strategy that the organizations have in their initiatives.
- Do not just pay attention to what you can measure, pay attention to what is important. It is easier to count the number of WASH committees that have bank accounts and the number of water point maintenance staff who are trained, for example. But how can we monitor things like coordination, trust, and influence?
  - This might mean moving beyond the typical building blocks to also consider the role of government, incentives for various actors to participate (or get in the way)
  - Analyzing and documenting the political economy of the sector and relationships between sector actors is also critical to adjusting and adapting initiatives to be appropriate to their context.
- Regarding frameworks for monitoring WASH systems change, an analysis of many frameworks showed that we are all talking about the same general categories but have differences in how they are connected.

- In some cases, NGOs are further disaggregating blocks into component parts and focusing on monitoring at a more granular level; in others, monitoring focuses on the specific changes within a building block that an intervention aims to bring about; and in other cases, monitoring is around standardized indicators defined by NGOs themselves.
- Increasingly, building block frameworks are explicit in referencing they could be more usefully applied at a district/city or national level to help understand sector-wide change.
- It is important that all actors engage with national WASH Forums/Clusters rather than develop their own frameworks and systems monitoring processes.
- A useful question for a small organization that has a relatively narrow approach is this: "Where do we fit into the 'system'?" Then for monitoring, a second question would be, "Is our contribution part of a sustainable system?"
- The lack of sector capacity was a common theme both in terms monitoring and measure systems change, as well as capacity of actors within the system and how to work with the skills, competencies and experience to support change at scale. Frequently, support of monitoring capacity focuses on the collection of WASH service level data and systems/mechanisms for doing that, with limited focus on broader, sector performance analysis. Similarly, there is a trend to focus capacity development on service delivery rather than institutional strengthening.

Department of Rural Development core team discussing what indicators are needed at national and sub-national level (WaterAid Myanmar)

RESOURCES / WEBSITES

In English and Spanish, unless otherwise noted.

- Beyond Building Blocks: Identifying and Monitoring Dynamic Drivers of Sector
- System Approaches to Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene: A Systematic Literature Review
- COVID19 EMERGENCY needs of rural WASH operators in Latin America
- Yemen WASH Cluster partners presence map
- COLSAR: Latin American Coalition for Rural Sanitation and Water
- Para Todos Por Siempre ("Everyone Forever")
- WaterAid's Global Resources and Blogs on Systems Strengthening and Sustainability