

AGENDA FOR CHANGE

CAPTURING EVIDENCE OF THE IMPACT
ON WASH SYSTEM STRENGTHENING
FROM THE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE
FACILITY PHASE 2



AGENDA FOR CHANGE

SUMMARY

To support Agenda for Change country collaborations improve their capacity to utilize systems strengthening approaches, a Technical Assistance Facility was established in 2019 to fund capacity building, and technical and research support to selected member non-governmental organizations. Building on lessons from the first phase, Agenda for Change launched a second phase of the TA facility in 2023 with US\$ 450,000 in funding for a further three-year period. This learning brief captures experiences from this second phase from across five countries and covering a range of systems-based activities from a Young Professionals Programme in Cambodia, support to a WASH sector performance review and development of a five-year WASH Multi-Year Action Plan in Rwanda, to assistance in establishing a national regulator in Guatemala. In all cases the systems strengthening activities were identified in collaboration with government. This learning brief analyses the TA Facility activities and includes insights into emerging impacts on the WASH system, and key successes and challenges.

Key lessons

The Agenda for Change TA Facility has successfully supported several important systems strengthening interventions, directly impacting approximately 200 stakeholders across five countries. Signs of indirect impacts range from scaling up trainings and leadership capacity for systems thinking to strengthened sector coordination and, potentially, nation-wide benefits of a new regulatory arrangement. These represent important gains for funders interested in strengthening WASH systems over the longer-term.

However, concrete evidence of such longer-term and indirect impacts on the strength of the WASH systems in these countries is less quantifiable. This is partly due to the fact that the targeted systemic changes often unfold over extended timeframes and largely dependent on other stakeholders acting upon the outcomes of the TA activities. The focus of the TA facility on issues that are upstream of direct service delivery, and weaknesses in monitoring also make it more challenging to identify clear indirect impacts. TA-funded activities that have a clear rationale and buy-in and which are embedded in, and supported by, formal (government-led) structures have the greatest chance of long-term impact.

Recommendations

The TA Facility was never designed to deliver large-scale infrastructure or support service provision directly, but the evidence from this assessment shows that small, flexible funding can play a meaningful role in advancing systems strengthening when strategically aligned with government priorities and existing initiatives.

As we envision future TA investments, this learning from systems practitioners provides useful guidance for donors and development partners looking to support catalytic activities: funding that is timely, locally anchored, and modest in size can help address specific system gaps, strengthen collaboration, and build momentum for longer-term change.

While the indirect returns may not always be immediately visible or easily measurable, the TA Facility shows that with the right conditions, even small investments can contribute to broader systems outcomes over time.

Introduction

Agenda for Change members have extensive experience working with local stakeholders and governments to strengthen Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) systems. However, external, specialized support can bring new perspectives to meeting challenges within WASH systems, helping address critical bottlenecks. To meet this need and to help Agenda for Change country collaborations improve their capacity to utilize systems strengthening approaches, Agenda for Change launched the first phase of the Technical Assistance Facility ('TA Facility') in 2019. This mechanism is designed to provide capacity building, technical, and research support to selected Agenda for Change member non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and to boost their efforts in WASH systems strengthening.

The experience of the first phase of the TA facility showed that support is most fruitful when the recipient is part of a wider collaboration and if the focus of the TA is on strengthening the collaboration and developing products and approaches that can be used more widely in the sector. In 2023, Agenda for Change launched a second phase of the TA facility for a three-year duration, which built on these lessons and was aimed explicitly at strengthening country collaborations and their capacity to utilize systems strengthening approaches.

This learning brief captures experiences from this second phase of the TA facility in five countries (Cambodia, Ghana, Guatemala, Rwanda, and Uganda), including emerging impacts on the WASH system, and key successes and challenges¹. The TA activities - the consultations, training, reviews and engagement supported by the TA facility - in each country are at different stages. In some countries, the TA is still ongoing, whilst in others it has been completed, and in the case of Guatemala, activities have only just started, which means that the time for impact to be realized varies considerably. The learning brief also provides cross-cutting lessons from all five countries and recommendations for how small-scale TA can be effective, and on how the TA facility can be strengthened in any future funding rounds.

¹ Most of the TA activities refer to the concept of "building blocks" to capture the complexity of a WASH system. Each building block is an individual component that describe functions of the WASH system, such as finance, planning, or regulation [The Agenda for Change building block framework](#) has eight building blocks, whilst individual member organisations may use their own framework with similar building blocks. Breaking the WASH system down in this way can make it easier to understand strengths and weaknesses and set priorities for strengthening the WASH system.

Cambodia: Building sector capacity for WASH systems strengthening

Overview

In Cambodia, the TA facility supported two complementary initiatives to build capacity for systems strengthening initiatives in the WASH sector: developing and piloting training on WASH Systems Building Blocks assessments for central and local government staff, and supporting a new cohort of the Young Professionals Programme (YPP), which trains youth and university students on WASH solutions and soft skills.

The building block training included designing a training package, delivering initial training of trainers to a cadre of master trainers, and supporting cascade training at the district and provincial levels. The YPP was conducted as a series of five in-house trainings, followed by exploratory visits to local communities, and a project pitching session for participants to propose projects to solve real-world WASH challenges using systems approaches. A second phase will support participants to pilot two selected projects.

Rationale

Both activities were designed to contribute to building a cadre of WASH professionals at all levels who have an understanding of WASH systems strengthening concepts and how these can be applied in their roles. Previous projects with the Cambodian Government and the World Bank had identified a skills gap in the WASH sector, particularly in mid-career and young professionals. Capacity development is also a key aspect of the National Strategic Plan for WASH.

The training on building blocks was a response to decentralization in the rural WASH sector, which has left district governments with a mandate for service delivery but limited capacity to implement this. The decision to design the training around UNICEF's WASH-BAT tool reflected the use of this tool in national sanitation programmes and a demand from stakeholders to focus on five simplified building blocks.

The YPP was a pre-existing programme run in conjunction with universities. The TA facility supported a new cohort of this programme and extended the programme to include the practical exploratory visits and project pitching components for participants.

Key actors

The TA activity was coordinated by WaterAid Cambodia. The WASH Building Blocks training was facilitated by the WASH Skills Development Organization in collaboration with the Ministry of Rural Development (MRD). The YPP was facilitated by the Centre for Sustainable Water.

Evidence of Impact:

Direct Impact

- YPP – 20 young people completed the programme, including 13 female, 7 male
- WASH-BAT training – 91 participants from: Ministry of Rural Development (MRD) = 17P (F5); Provincial Department of Rural Development (PDRD)= 28P (F5); District Work Group for Rural Water Supply Sanitation

Learnings:

Key Successes

- The TA facility has allowed the YPP to move beyond theory, to supporting young people to implement pilot projects in areas where access to WASH is limited.
- Supporting young people to engage in the WASH sector helps to introduce new, innovative solutions and rejuvenate the WASH sector workforce.

and Hygiene (DWG-RWSSH) = 46P (F21)

Indirect Impact

- There are plans for MRD and provincial staff to deliver cascade training in 5 districts in 4 provinces.

Systems Change

- Evidence of increased capacity for systems thinking in local government participants who are more open to new ideas and have learnt how to engage with key stakeholders.
- The national ODF roadmap includes more consideration of the lifecycle costs of sanitation, as participants apply systems thinking.
- Young people can develop projects to apply systems thinking and engage actors to support these.
- Participants in previous YPP cohorts (not funded by the TA activity) are now applying systems thinking in senior positions in the WASH sector.

Leverage

- Training participants include members of the WASH technical working group in the MRD, who can influence the inclusion of systems interventions in the sector resource mobilization plan.

- Implementing the TA through local organizations has also built their capacity to support systems strengthening skills beyond this project.
- The TA activities contribute to an overall government objective to increase sector capacity. Agenda for Change members are clear on the role in supporting this objective and acting as role models for systems strengthening.

Key Challenges

- The WASH-BAT tool was localized for the Cambodian context, but systems strengthening terminology can be alienating for local stakeholders and significant effort was needed to find context-appropriate language.
- A strengthened monitoring framework and improved documentation would help better understand the impact of the TA activities.
- Soft skills development remains a low priority for the government, which still focuses on infrastructure and engineering skills.
- The WASH sector can still be reluctant to adopt innovative solutions proposed by young professionals.

Ghana: Enhancing the capacity of stakeholders to deliver climate-resilient WASH services

Overview

In Ghana, the TA Facility supported the training of WASH stakeholders in climate-resilient WASH service delivery. Key activities included identifying and mapping relevant stakeholders, assessing their capacity needs for climate-resilient WASH, developing tailored training materials, delivering the training sessions, and documenting and sharing lessons learned. The training was delivered in two three-day capacity-building workshops: one in the Northern Zone in December 2024 and another in the Southern Zone in April 2025. The training focused on climate risk assessment, appropriate technological solutions, financing mechanisms, and policy and advocacy strategies.

Rationale

Climate-related events, such as floods, droughts, and extreme heat, have become increasingly frequent and are already negatively impacting sustainable WASH service delivery in Ghana. In this context, the Government of Ghana has placed increasing emphasis on how the WASH sector can improve climate resilience. The latest WASH Sector Development Programme (2021-2030) outlines a clear pathway towards climate-resilient WASH services, supported by a renewed emphasis on Water Resources Management in the recently revised national water policy. Meanwhile, WASH is integrated into Ghana's latest Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs).

Despite the acknowledged importance of climate-resilient WASH, a recent systems assessment across 10 districts in Ghana, led by members of the Agenda for Change country collaboration, highlighted knowledge and capacity gaps among local stakeholders regarding climate resilience in WASH service delivery. Against this backdrop, the training supported by the TA facility aimed to strengthen the capacity of WASH stakeholders to deliver climate-resilient services through a systems-thinking approach.

Key actors

The TA activity was coordinated by the Coalition of NGOs in Water and Sanitation (CONIWAS), supported by other country collaboration members. A national consultant was contracted to carry out the training activities. The training participants include government institutions, civil society organizations, CONIWAS member organizations and the private sector. The Ministry of Sanitation and Water Resources (disbanded in early 2025 following national elections) was also consulted for the stakeholder mapping.

Evidence of Impact:

Direct Impact

- 62 participants from different organizations received the training (30 in the Northern Zone and 32 in the Southern Zone).

Indirect Impact

- 29 people (staff and interns) from three participating organizations have received cascade training.
- Participants extended the information sharing to their various district assemblies, especially at the Tamale Metropolitan Assembly in

Learnings:

Key Successes

- Having dedicated funding available for the activity ensured the delivery of high-quality training, with **93% of participants rating it as excellent overall**. This reflects the relevance of the training content, the expertise of the facilitators and the strength of logistical arrangements.
- Active involvement of Agenda for Change country collaboration members in procuring a consultant and conducting the first post-

the Northern Region for the Environmental Health and Sanitation Unit and the staff of the Kasena Nankani district health directorate in the Upper East Region.

Systems Change

- Action plans have been developed by seven participating organizations, integrating climate resilience in their ongoing programmes.
- Improved knowledge on climate-resilient WASH among participants, particularly around climate risk assessments, practical interventions to mitigate these risks in different local contexts, and accessing finance to implement those interventions.
- One organization has initiated the process of piloting technological interventions to make existing WASH facilities climate-resilient in one of their focal communities. This includes two boreholes, one public toilet and six household latrines.

Leverage

- Participating organizations are using the training to incorporate climate resilience into new proposals to secure additional finance for their programming.

training evaluation, which informed the inclusion of lifecycle cost analysis in the second training.

- Most of the participating organizations are relatively new members of CONIWAS (~2 years old) and benefited greatly from the capacity-building training, which will help guide their work as they grow and become more established.

Key Challenges

- Additional practical training is needed on proposal development, particularly for less established organizations, to secure funding for climate-resilient WASH service provision.
- Understanding of climate finance mechanisms and how these can be accessed remains a gap for many organizations.
- The timeline was underestimated, particularly around consultant selection and mobilization of Agenda for Change members for the activities.
- The lack of a standardized Agenda for Change process for the selection of a consultant made the process longer than expected.

Guatemala: Creación de una autoridad reguladora del agua y el saneamiento

Resumen

En Guatemala, el mecanismo de asistencia técnica se está utilizando para ayudar al Gobierno a crear un organismo regulador del agua y el saneamiento. El objetivo de esta autoridad reguladora es reforzar la prestación de servicios mediante el establecimiento de indicadores clave de rendimiento, mecanismos para la fijación de tarifas y la supervisión general de los proveedores de servicios. El mecanismo de asistencia técnica incluye la contratación de un consultor para elaborar una propuesta de iniciativa de ley para crear una autoridad reguladora, promover el intercambio de experiencias regionales, preparar un plan de socialización y validación con actores clave. Además, se han realizado y se realizarán talleres de consulta y validación con el gobierno, la sociedad civil y el sector privado.

Progresos realizados

Esta actividad de asistencia técnica se inició a finales de 2024. Los miembros de la Agenda para el Cambio facilitaron visitas de intercambio con funcionarios gubernamentales en Panamá y Perú para comprender las funciones de una autoridad reguladora y cómo establecer una institución similar en Guatemala. Se está llevando a cabo una colaboración técnica con las principales partes interesadas y se está prestando apoyo al Gobierno. Dado el alcance potencial del establecimiento de una autoridad reguladora, se puede prever que esta actividad beneficiará indirectamente a toda la población, de alrededor de 18 millones de habitantes, si tiene éxito, aunque la magnitud de este impacto potencial y el plazo para lograrlo dependen totalmente de factores ajenos a las actividades de asistencia técnica, como la aprobación legislativa, la asignación presupuestaria y el compromiso político. Se prevé que la actividad de asistencia técnica concluya durante el primer trimestre de 2026.

Contexto y justificación

En Guatemala, la prestación de servicios de APSH está muy fragmentada y carece de una supervisión suficiente. En las zonas urbanas y periurbanas, los servicios son prestados principalmente por los municipios, mientras que en las zonas rurales esta responsabilidad recae en organizaciones comunitarias. A pesar de que los municipios son proveedores formales de servicios en virtud del Código Municipal, la mayoría no cuenta unidades administrativas y técnicas específicas y dedicados a ASH y rara vez se asignan presupuestos para este fin. Como resultado, la prestación de servicios suele agruparse con otras funciones municipales y varía mucho en función del liderazgo político local y la capacidad del municipio.

Guatemala es uno de los pocos países de América Latina que no cuenta con una autoridad reguladora formal para el APSH. Una evaluación reciente de Building Block realizada por miembros de la Agenda para el Cambio identificó la falta de un ente regulador como una de las debilidades más críticas del sistema, con funciones y responsabilidades institucionales dispersas en diferentes marcos, lo que da lugar a mandatos superpuestos, líneas de rendición de cuentas poco claras y una aplicación limitada. Es fundamental señalar que el país dispone de normas técnicas, reglamentos y acuerdos ministeriales aplicables al sector APSH; sin embargo, carece de un sistema de seguimiento que vele por su cumplimiento. El Ministerio de Salud Pública y Asistencia Social (MSPAS) es la única entidad gubernamental que ejerce la supervisión, pero su función se limita al control de la calidad del agua y carece de capacidad para hacerlo de manera regular en todos los proveedores. La ausencia de una autoridad reguladora ha supuesto que no se apliquen los principios de recuperación de costes, no exista una verificación independiente de los niveles de servicio y no haya aislamiento de la interferencia política.

La experiencia de otros países de la región latinoamericana subraya el potencial transformador de un marco regulatorio bien diseñado. Por lo tanto, la actividad de asistencia técnica responde a la necesidad urgente de apoyar al Gobierno de Guatemala en la elaboración de legislación para establecer una autoridad reguladora que promueva la profesionalización, la transparencia y la sostenibilidad a largo plazo en la prestación de servicios de APSH. Hasta la fecha, la asistencia técnica ha realizado consultas iniciales con el Gobierno y se están llevando a cabo esfuerzos para alcanzar un consenso.

Actores clave

La actividad de asistencia técnica está siendo coordinada por los miembros de la Agenda para el Cambio HELVETAS, Water For People y CARE. En la labor de establecimiento de la autoridad reguladora participan las partes interesadas, entre ellas el ministerio de Salud Pública y Asistencia Social (MSPAS) el Instituto de Fomento Municipal (INFOM), que presta asistencia técnica y financiación a los municipios, la Red Nacional de Agua y Saneamiento (RASGUA), que facilita el diálogo y la coordinación entre las partes interesadas del sector. En los talleres que se realizarán en diferentes puntos del país se espera la participación de alcaldes municipales, diputados distritales y otros actores del sector presentes en esos territorios. La iniciativa es liderada por una diputada que ha demostrado interés y apertura para impulsar la propuesta de iniciativa de ley.

Rwanda: WASH sector performance review report and multi-year action plan 2024-2029

Overview

In Rwanda, the TA Facility supported a WASH sector performance review and the development of a five-year WASH Multi-Year Action Plan (MYAP) from 2024 to 2029. The activity started with a national reflection workshop in September 2024, followed by stakeholder consultations and a desk review to assess the sector using a WASH Building Blocks assessment tool to identify strengths and gaps in the system and propose targeted actions. The findings of this review informed the development of the MYAP, which sets out detailed, costed activities to strengthen the WASH system in alignment with national plans and strategies. The MYAP was formally approved by the Ministry of Infrastructure (MINIFRA) in February 2025.

Rationale

WASH is a national priority in Rwanda, as reflected in the Second National Strategy for Transformation (NST2), which aims to ensure universal access to water and sanitation services in line with SDG 6, building on the progress made under NST1 (2017-2024). The government has also adopted a new Water and Sanitation Policy (2023) and developed a WASH Sector Strategic Plan (2024-2029) to guide implementation. However, while there is a clear strategic direction, there are no detailed activities outlined to coordinate efforts across the sector and among the sector partners. Persistent financing challenges, particularly for operations and maintenance, as well as disparities in rural-urban service levels, further underscore the need for more actionable planning.

The MYAP, which repeats an exercise undertaken for 2017-2024, was intended to fill this gap and provide concrete priorities for all stakeholders working in the WASH sector in Rwanda. While the Strategic Plan is mandatory for all sectors in Rwanda, the MYAP is a WASH-specific initiative that reflects the sector's complexity and the need to coordinate numerous and diverse actors.

Additionally, WATSAN sector strategic plan indicates that to achieve WASH targets country wide, the Government of Rwanda needs an estimated investment of RWF 1,395 billion by 2029. Therefore, the multi-year action plan will be a supplementary force among other strategic priority strategies to support the government mobilize more WASH funds and achieve the targets set in the Sector Strategic Plan.

Key actors

The TA activity was coordinated by IRC-Rwanda in collaboration with Water For People, WaterAid, World Vision and other WASH partners. A national consultant was engaged to conduct the assessment and develop the action plan. The Ministry of infrastructure(MININFRA) took full ownership of the process and, through its WATSAN Secretariat, will monitor implementation of the MYAP. Key WASH stakeholders from government, civil society, and development partners participated in the performance review consultations and the validation workshop.

Evidence of Impact:

Direct Impact

- 28 stakeholders participated in the performance review consultations (6 from government agencies, two from development partners, 20 from NGOs).
- 50 stakeholders participated in the validation workshop (15 from government agencies, eight from development partners, three from the national utility, 24 from NGOs).

Learnings:

Key Successes

- The TA activity was specific and closely aligned with existing government processes, making the MYAP a sector-owned coordination tool, contributing to strong buy-in from stakeholders.
- MINIFRA has an existing WATSAN secretariat, responsible for

Systems Change

- Some activities in the MYAP are already underway, including the nationwide dissemination of the new sector policy and the drafting of a new WASH law.
- The MYAP serves as a reference point for government and partners to prioritize interventions and mobilize resources beyond infrastructure investments, with partners assigned to specific districts and activities.
- The MYAP is embedded in government planning processes, thereby improving investment efficiency and reducing duplication.
- Stronger sector coordination through five thematic working groups and quarterly sector-wide review meetings.

Leverage

- Through the MYAP, partners have committed to specific activities and are expected to mobilize the corresponding funding.
- IRC, Water For People, and UNICEF have supported the government (via the national utility, Water and Sanitation Corporation) in developing a climate-resilient WASH project to access Green Climate Fund financing.
- The sector is mobilizing resources to develop a sanitation tariff and a private sector investment framework for WASH.
- Water For People and IRC are supporting in the project preparations functions within WASAC in order to prepare bankable pipeline projects in water and sanitation to attract more funds in the sector.

monitoring the MYAP through a regular sector review process.

- A formal request from A4C country collaborators led by IRC helped to secure A4C support and good collaboration with MININFRA ensured smooth implementation of the TA activity.

Key Challenges

- Broader funding constraints and global financing dynamics remain a barrier to the full implementation of the MYAP.
- Attracting private sector investment remains an unaddressed priority to address the sector's financial gap.
- Further support may be needed to review and update the MYAP, with a revision planned in 2027, two years before its end.

Uganda: A framework to operationalize the Inter-ministerial Roadmap for WASH Coordination

Overview

The Agenda for Change country collaboration in Uganda used funding from the TA facility to support the development of a *Framework for Strengthening the Inter-ministerial Roadmap for Coordination of WASH Sector*. This Framework is intended to guide all stakeholders – government ministries, departments and agencies, and development partners – in the operationalization of a pre-existing roadmap for strengthening the national WASH system. The TA funding was used to contract a consulting team to undertake sector consultations, develop the Framework, and validate it through sector workshops.

Rationale

The Ugandan WASH sector has a long track record of work to strengthen local and national WASH systems. In 2021, WASH Agenda for Change members used catalytic funding to support the Ministry of Water and Environment (MWE) to conduct a National Level WASH Systems Assessment to highlight a number of challenges and recommendations for action across the various ‘building blocks’ of the WASH system. Subsequently, during 2023, an Inter-ministerial Roadmap for the National WASH Sector Coordination Committee was developed by the Ministry of Health (MoH) together with the MWE and the Ministries of Education and Sports (MoES), Local Government (MoLG) and Gender, Labour and Social Development (MoGLSD). Developed through extensive consultations, this Roadmap supports the Human Capital Development Programme under the National Development Plan, and sets out a high-level, one-government approach to achieving WASH targets.

This history of system strengthening in Uganda meant that there was a strong baseline understanding of the key challenges and what was needed to address them, but less clarity on how to achieve this. The TA activity was designed to address this gap. Not to repeat the Roadmap exercise, but to propose a set of priority actions which the Inter-ministerial Coordination Committee (IMCC) and partners can take forward to realize the ambition set out in the Roadmap for a stronger WASH sector.

Key actors

The TA activity was coordinated by IRC, Water For People and WaterAid, in partnership with the MoH, together with the MWE, MoES, MoLG, and MoGLSD. All 11 Agenda for Change members in Uganda – including UWASNET, the national civil society umbrella for WASH – were fully involved in consultations for the Framework.

Evidence of Impact:

Direct Impact

- 35 individuals were involved in the consultation process, reflecting a strong commitment to coordinated, systems-wide WASH approaches. Participants included 9 from national government, 19 from district and municipal government, 6 from development partners and civil society (representing MoH, MWE, MoES, MoLG, MoGLSD, NPA, and OPM).
- The National WASH Coordination Committee and a Steering/Technical Committee were established, with draft TORs outlining roles in planning, monitoring, and accountability.

Learnings:

Key Successes

- **Collaboration** Developing the Framework brought together a much wider group of stakeholders than typical for WASH sector initiatives, and continued the momentum for cross-government action started with the Roadmap.
- **Continuity of Support** The TA activity built on long-term engagement of Agenda for Change members with the government, including previous activities funded by the Catalytic Fund, which

- Stakeholders highlighted the critical importance of high-level political support from OPM and NPA to ensure the roadmap is embedded in NDP IV and future government policies.

Systems Change

- Involvement of key government actors** The Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) convened the Roadmap initiative, and the National Planning Authority (NPA) is a member of the IMCC. The close engagement of strategic and influential government entities beyond line ministries adds impetus for change in the WASH system.
- Clarity and agreement on the way forward** The Framework provides clarity and consensus on the priority actions for systems strengthening at the national level. The most senior ministry officials have accepted the Framework, and it is awaiting formal approval at the ministerial level.

Leverage

- By setting out specific interventions, the Framework provides an opportunity for different stakeholders to contribute to funding the Roadmap; this remains a subject for discussion in future meetings.
- Beyond the three core line ministries (Water and Environment, Health, and Education and Sports), active participation has also come from: Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development (MoFPED), Ministry of Local Government (MoLG), National Planning Authority (NPA), Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA)
- Other key development partners (WHO, UNICEF, GIZ, and WA4C partners) expressed willingness to fund and provide technical backstopping for Roadmap implementation.
- WASH CSOs, through UWASNET, are already contributing off-budget funding and aligning with government priorities—for example, in the recent review and update of the WASH Indicator Monitoring Guide.

provided the foundation to develop the Framework.

- Government-led** The Roadmap was a government-led initiative, and the Framework was a direct response by Agenda for Change to support the Roadmap. Aligning with government directives increased stakeholder buy-in for the process.
- Evidence generation** The content for the Framework was collected through a rigorous process of literature review, interviews, focus group discussions and analysis. Efforts were made to reach and talk to a representative sample of stakeholders from government, development partners, civil society organisations and academia.

Key Challenges

- Although the Framework has been completed, long-term engagement with the government is needed to ensure that it is validated and the proposed interventions are actioned.
- The OPM has convened the initiative to date, and the MoH permanent secretary leads the IMCC, but no single government entity is responsible for driving the Framework forward, monitoring performance and holding stakeholders accountable.
- There is a risk of losing momentum due to rotation or replacement of key champions, which can be addressed by securing high-level political buy-in and formally housing the Roadmap under NPA/OPM for continuity.
- Weak political will at the local government level, coupled with limited awareness of the Roadmap and siloed departmental planning, can be mitigated through targeted awareness raising, training of district leaders and technocrats, and expanding the mandates of DWSCCs.
- Budget reallocations, such as those toward the Parish Development Model, along with shrinking donor funding, may undermine WASH financing; this can be countered by engaging MoFPED to ring-fence conditional grants, diversify financing sources, and strengthen advocacy for WASH investment.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Government rationalization and overlapping mandates risk weakening inter-ministerial cooperation, which calls for continuous engagement with Permanent Secretaries of key line ministries to protect WASH sector interests and clarify responsibilities.
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Key lessons for making small-scale technical assistance for systems strengthening effective.

The Agenda for Change TA Facility has successfully supported several important systems strengthening interventions, directly impacting approximately 200 stakeholders across five countries. Signs of indirect impacts range from scaling up trainings and leadership capacity for systems thinking to strengthened sector coordination and, potentially, nation-wide benefits of a new regulatory arrangement. These represent important gains for funders interested in strengthening WASH systems over the longer-term.

However, concrete evidence of such longer-term and indirect impacts on the strength of the WASH systems in these countries is less quantifiable. This is partly due to the fact that targeted systemic changes often unfold over extended timeframes, and are largely dependent on other stakeholders acting upon the outcomes of the TA activities. The focus of the TA facility on issues that are upstream of direct service delivery, and weaknesses in monitoring also make it more challenging to identify clear indirect impacts. TA-funded activities that have a clear rationale and buy-in and which are embedded in, and supported by, formal (government-led) structures have the greatest chance of long-term impact.

Be clear on the rationale for TA Facility activities.

Being clear on how interventions are expected to contribute to wider change is essential to the success of systems strengthening actions. The small monetary size of the TA facility funding makes this even more critical, as there is little chance of the funded activities having a wider impact in isolation, and the Facility has insufficient resources to start completely new initiatives. This lesson reinforces the need to be explicit in how the TA activity will combine with and support other initiatives to contribute to systems change.

In **Rwanda**, developing the MYAP was a direct request from the government, and supports the implementation of the national WASH strategy. In **Uganda**, the activities set out in the initial ToR (a national Building Block assessment) did not take into account the government-led Roadmap; however, the revised activities explicitly supported this much larger process. In **Ghana**, the training provided was relevant and high-quality but remains de-linked from structured government initiatives.

Technical assistance needs to be anchored in formal structures.

To have a sustained impact, small-scale TA needs to be anchored in formal institutions and processes and co-owned by government. Where the TA is anchored technically (for example, ministry officials or working groups) and politically (ministers or local elected representatives), there is a greater likelihood that appropriate follow-up actions will be taken, and the TA output will be used. Where the TA is a standalone process, with no permanent anchor, there is a greater chance that it will remain just another one-off activity, or a report left on a shelf.

In **Rwanda**, there is a clear structure within the WASH Secretariat of MINIFRA to follow up on actions in the MYAP, monitor achievements, and hold stakeholders accountable. In **Uganda**, although the Framework sets out clear responsibilities for actions, the structures to ensure this happens are disjointed, with unclear overall responsibility within the government. This is a contributing factor to the lack of follow-up since the TA activity was completed.

Technical assistance needs to be facilitated by active system actors.

The selection and design of the TA activities was only possible because Agenda for Change members are active systems actors, who understand the context they are working in and have existing relationships with key stakeholders. In each case study, it was through being actively engaged in ongoing processes and discussions that Agenda for Change members were able to identify opportunities to support the government and how the TA facility could be used to achieve this. Funding outside actors who are not already part of the WASH system would not result in the same positive outcomes. Ongoing engagement and support to the WASH system and government requires continuous funding, and the Catalytic Fund played a key role in supporting earlier initiatives – such as the National Level WASH Systems Assessment in **Uganda** – that can set the necessary foundations for the TA activities.

The TA facility has most frequently been used to support activities upstream of service provision.

In four out of the five cases, the TA facility focused on addressing more upstream challenges, such as sector coordination processes or sector capacity building. Addressing upstream challenges is critical to supporting a strong WASH system, but the timeframe for impact to be fully realized can be very long. This is seen clearly in **Cambodia**, where previous participants in the YPP are occupying senior positions in the WASH sector several years after their involvement in the program. Agenda for Change members are well placed to support upstream TA activities, but, except for the ongoing work to support the establishment of a regulator in Guatemala, there has been less engagement in technical areas which have a more direct impact on WASH service delivery. Similarly, the TA activities included extensive engagement with local and national government officials, NGOs and civil society, but comparatively limited engagement with utilities or other WASH service providers. Expanding the range of activities and stakeholders supported by the TA facility could lead to a greater impact on WASH systems and services and a greater potential return on donor investments. However, support for more technical dimensions of systems strengthening, such as regulation, finance or utility performance improvement, would require different sets of skills from those of many current Agenda for Change members, to firstly identify systemic weaknesses, and then design, implement, and manage TA activities.

Flexible funding can be catalytic and is always helpful to support government priorities.

Small pots of flexible funding can play an outsized, catalytic role in supporting critical pieces of work that governments and many larger donor organizations would otherwise find difficult to support. The TA facility funding provided flexibility and also gave Agenda for Members the time and budget to procure high-quality TA providers both nationally and internationally. Previous learning briefs have highlighted the importance of flexible funding in systems strengthening work, but this remains scarce within the WASH sector. Securing funding for strategic, but low visibility, work such as facilitation, documentation and supporting collective action can be highly challenging. The flexibility of the TA facility was vital in two distinct pathways:

1. **The TA facility funded existing initiatives.** The MYAP in **Rwanda** and the YPP in **Cambodia** were both pre-existing initiatives. However, funding from the TA facility helped ensure they could be continued and, in the case of the YPP, could be expanded.

Whilst both initiatives may have continued with funding from other sources, the flexibility and availability of the TA facility matched the need for funding at a specific time. This pathway – funding existing initiatives – makes it more challenging to understand the ‘added value’ of the TA facility, but should be seen as modelling good systems behaviour.

- 2. The TA facility supported unfunded but strategic processes.** In **Uganda** and **Ghana**, the TA activity addressed an unmet need in the WASH system – for clear actions to implement the Roadmap in the case of Uganda, and capacity development on climate-resilience in Ghana. As these processes had not been funded previously, it may have been challenging to identify funding from traditional donors for relatively small initiatives. The TA facility effectively filled this gap.

Collaborating on the TA activity helped build the capacity of member organizations.

Although small-scale, the TA facility provided a funded opportunity for multiple Agenda for Change members to collaborate on a single initiative. Where there was genuine and deep collaboration on the design and implementation of the TA activities, this process helped to build the capacity of participating organizations in systems strengthening and has strengthened the foundation for future initiatives. The availability of dedicated funding to support collaboration was key, as this meant that all organizations, including the smallest, had the resources and time to engage meaningfully.

In **Ghana**, a large number of Agenda for Change and CONIWAS members were involved in all stages of the TA. This involvement provided increased exposure to systems strengthening concepts, and built capacity to apply these in future, particularly for smaller and more recent organizations. In **Cambodia**, implementing the TA through two local organizations has helped to develop the capacity of those organizations to provide training and capacity-building services to the WASH sector in the future.

Documenting and monitoring TA is essential for understanding the impact.

It has been possible to trace the direct impact (the number of people reached directly by the TA activity) of the TA facility, but there is little to no structured monitoring to provide evidence of the indirect impact of the funded activities over time. Similarly, documentation of the TA facility – from initial ideas, through confirming proposals to implementing activities – is inconsistent and incomplete. The lack of documentation makes it challenging to track and understand the contribution of the TA facility.

Although some work is ongoing to address this gap, notably in Ghana, where a monitoring framework for the training is being established, a structured approach to monitoring and documentation should have been in place from the outset.

Recommendations for future rounds of the TA facility

The TA Facility was never designed to deliver large-scale infrastructure or support service provision directly, but the evidence from this assessment shows that small, flexible funding can play a meaningful role in advancing systems strengthening when strategically aligned with government priorities and existing initiatives.

As we envision future TA investments, this learning from systems practitioners provides useful guidance for donors and development partners looking to support catalytic activities: funding that is timely, locally anchored, and modest in size can help address specific system gaps, strengthen collaboration, and build momentum for longer-term change.

While the indirect returns may not always be immediately visible or easily measurable, the TA Facility shows that with the right conditions, even small investments can contribute to broader systems outcomes over time.

Ensure all TA is anchored in permanent institutions or processes.

Small-scale TA must be firmly anchored technically and politically in permanent institutions and processes if it is to be more than a one-off activity. Evidence from this review shows that being anchored in existing institutions accelerates national processes without the costs and complexities of launching new, standalone initiatives. Future proposals for the TA facility should include explicit information on how government at the national or local levels will adopt and take forward the results of the activity. Ideally, this should specify which organizations or units will be responsible for any follow-up to ensure accountability.

Encourage country collaboration to work together more deeply on TA.

Whilst all the TA activities involved some form of collaboration between members, the depth and extent of this varied. Lessons show that where TA activities are truly collaborative, there is an indirect benefit in building joint exposure to systems thinking and shared experience that individual organizations could not afford alone. In the future, TA activities should be designed to include genuine and in-depth collaboration between members on the design, implementation and monitoring of the TA, which goes beyond involvement in consultations, to ensure that the opportunity for the TA to support stronger capacity in member organizations is realized.

Expand the range of activities which the TA facility supports.

Focusing on upstream challenges such as coordination or capacity building can help address systemic bottlenecks, but needs to complement initiatives which more directly support service delivery to achieve demonstrable impact. In future rounds, the TA facility should consider supporting activities in more technical areas, including regulation, financing and service delivery. Agenda for Change members should be challenged and supported to engage on topics which may be outside their comfort zone to ensure that the TA facility is being used effectively to address critical obstacles to both stronger WASH systems *and* to improve service delivery outcomes.

Develop a structured and consistent process for proposal submission and review.

A more consistent and well-documented approach to the development, submission and review of proposals can help ensure that the effectiveness of TA funding is maximized. Establishing clearer processes and expectations, while maintaining flexibility, can help ensure that funded activities are relevant to the WASH system context and reflect the role of A4C members within the system. The Agenda for Change Secretariat should take the role of a critical friend, challenging country collaborations to ensure that the funded activities are as relevant and effective as possible. This should incorporate learning from this review:

- That there is a **clear rationale** for the activity, which flows directly from government priorities and ongoing initiatives.
- That the TA activity will be firmly **anchored in permanent institutions and processes** to ensure there is sustained impact.
- That the TA activity will result in **meaningful collaboration** between Agenda for Change members at the country level.

Develop a clear monitoring framework for future TA activity.

Even the smallest TA activities need a clear monitoring framework in order to understand the impact and effectiveness of the activity. Future funding should include a requirement that country collaborations monitor and document the direct and indirect impacts of the activity.

- **Direct impacts** should be monitored more closely through a small number of easily reported indicators, for example, the number of stakeholders (from different types of organizations) involved, or the number of training sessions held.
- **Indirect Impacts** will require more nuanced monitoring:
 - Where there is a **specific indirect impact** which is envisaged as part of the TA, for example, ongoing cascade training following an initial training of trainers, these should be monitored similarly to direct impacts, with a limited number of easily reported indicators.
 - Where the indirect impact is envisaged to be **broader systems change**, this will need to be built into existing systems monitoring by Agenda for Change members. The scale of the TA is too small to warrant a standalone approach to monitoring the contribution to systems change. However, where a contribution to change from the TA activity is identified through existing monitoring exercises, for example, if an organization is using outcome harvesting, this should be documented and reported upon.