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All systems go!

Strengthening WASH systems in Ethiopia

Paper for the WASH systems symposium

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In response to perceived weaknesses in existing approaches to delivering rural water, sanitation and hygiene (services in Ethiopia, several NGOs and alliances are developing and testing new approaches inspired by systems thinking and ideas. Common to these efforts is an interest in building the capacities of public service delivery systems that are led by local government. All these initiatives aim to support the country to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals for WASH, which means universal, sustained and higher levels of service delivery. This significant step up in desired sector performance implies both doing different things and finding new ways of working. Until recently, the focus of most NGOs has been delivering the construction of new rural water supply facilities, effectively acting as 'contractors'. Such facilities are handed over to communities to manage. This paper summarises the different system strengthening initiatives and makes recommendations for joint learning and collaboration. The initiatives described mainly relate to rural water services and involve NGOs taking on a wider range of roles to support innovation, learning, capacity building and change. Together the projects cover 11 woredas (districts) and 37 towns.

Introduction

This paper provides a brief introduction to rural water service delivery challenges in Ethiopia, and then summarises several NGO initiatives that have recently moved away from more traditional supply-driven infrastructure-focused activities to wider systems strengthening approaches. Building infrastructure is just one aspect of sustainable service delivery of these efforts - driven by the ambition of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The paper aims to contribute to the debate on the relevance of systems strengthening approaches in WASH programming, by reflecting on how such approaches are being adapted and tested in the Ethiopian context and by sharing lessons. Ongoing and planned organisational initiatives in area-wide systems strengthening were included where they were identified to be explicitly taking a systems approach to WASH (mostly relate to water) services delivery and seeking to affect more than one sector challenge or issue (i.e. coordination, planning, financing etc.) based on holistic understanding or approach.

WASH context in Ethiopia

Ethiopia achieved the Millennium Development Goal on water reflecting the government's success in rolling out improved community-managed rural water schemes. However, an estimated 42 million Ethiopians still lack access to an improved water source and the services provided by improved schemes are often poor.

Our WASH systems strengthening activities seek to support the goals of the Government of Ethiopia (GoE) as set out in the Growth and Transformation Plan II and the One WASH National Program (OWNP). These plans include increasing access to improved water sources in rural areas from 59 to 85% by 2020 (Government of Ethiopia, 2016). The Ethiopian WASH sector benefits from a government structure that reaches from the national government vertically to kebele (ward) administration levels. The Ministry of Water, Irrigation and Electricity takes leadership for sector development. Three other Ministries closely involved in WASH are the Ministry of Health, which engages on WASH in health care facilities, hygiene, household water treatment and water quality monitoring; the Ministry of Finance and Economic Cooperation, which allocates funds; and the Ministry of Education, which provides oversight for WASH in schools.

Despite previous achievements, challenges still exist in operationalising the WASH Implementation Framework, which is supported by a cross sectoral Memorandum of Understanding to implement a sector-wide approach through the OWNP. There are also significant challenges around sustainability: service levels including water quality, and the capacity of systems; with gaps including low levels of financing, weak monitoring and limited ability to maintain facilities.

Despite the huge stock of infrastructure assets, asset management has been widely neglected and is only now receiving due attention. As set out in the national water policy, most improved rural water supplies are managed under the system of community management by WASHCOs. WASHCOs are voluntary bodies representing the user community, and they are responsible for operations and maintenance (O&M) though most lack the capacity, finance and motivation to realise this.

Examples of ongoing WASH systems strengthening initiatives

Table 1 summarises key characteristics of ongoing systems strengthening initiatives by NGOs in Ethiopia.

Table 1. Ongoing systems strengthening initiatives in rural water by NGOs in Ethiopia

	Location	Status	Long-term commitment to specific woredas/ cities	Costed plans to achieve long-term goals	Woreda/ city wide approach to monitoring
WaterAid Ethiopia	Currently 3 focus woredas (and 37 towns)	Three ongoing projects where woreda-wide approach institutionalised as core organisational approach. 37 ongoing projects in urban areas (town/city-wide) focusing on utilities, based on systems and capacity development model	Woreda and town project- based funding typically for 5-10years with commitment to long-term presence	Yes	Yes
USAID Sustainable WASH Systems Learning Partnership (activities led by IRC WASH in Ethiopia)	2 woredas in Afar (Mile) and SNNPR (South Ari)	Completed baseline studies/ systems analyses. Established Learning Alliances and engaged in systems strengthening activities and pilots	Yes, project-based funding for next 3 years but IRC committed to continuation.	Not yet	Yes
Sustainable Services Initiative (Welt Hunger Hilfe)	Becho district, West Shoa Zone of Oromiya region	Asset inventory done Familiarization workshop conducted Data system established	Commitment given for one more year, though extension might be possible	Cost allocation done for the woreda wash team. Meeting has been facilitated	Woreda -wide monitoring system being piloted
Millennium Water Alliance	3 woredas in Amhara (North Mecha, Dera and Farta).	Partnership and proposal development in 2018; pending funds for implementation phase to start in 2019.	Expected, working with a funding partner (Conrad N Hilton Foundation) that has a long-term strategy.	Yes, currently being finalised	Already in place in 2 woredas and being developed in the third.
Netherlands WASH SDG Consortium	2 woredas in Oromia led by AMREF (WASH Alliance International); 2 woredas in Amhara (Plan)	Completed an inception and planning phase in June 2018. Now implementing.	No	Yes, planned.	Expected

WaterAid Ethiopia

The district or woreda-wide approach (Mengistu, 2017) followed by WaterAid Ethiopia currently focuses on three woredas (WaterAid Ethiopia also implement a substantial programme in 37 small towns). With a long-term presence in Oromia and Amhara regions, WaterAid have been implementing the woreda-wide approach since 2016, which has been institutionalised within the organisation as its main focus. The woredas and projects involved are:

- The Tokke (FCP Project) involves: 1) Strengthening One WASH coordination platforms and developing a fully costed WASH plan, and 2) building professional systems for O&M at woreda level.
- The Burie (DFID Deliver Life Project) in West Gojjam, Amhara addresses institutional and coordination gaps identified as priority activities and includes: 1) Strengthening One WASH Coordination platforms and fully costed WASH planning to achieve universal access, and 2) supporting and building the health sector WASH system.
- The Gololcha (Sus WASH project) in Bale Zone, Oromia includes: 1) Baseline including systems analysis; 2) Identification of gaps in systems; 3) Supporting One WASH Coordination platforms and fully costed (LCCA based) One WASH plan development; 4) Social Accountability actions to strengthen demand and 5) system supports based on gaps identified and regular monitoring.

The 37 towns project in the four big regions of Amhara, Oromia, Tigray and SNNPR includes: 1) Baseline including system analysis, 2) Identification of system and capacity gaps, 3) Supporting governance and accountability issues (board management and leadership, establishment of integrated urban WASH management forum and establishment of citizens' forum), 4) Supporting system improvement issues (strategic business plan development, asset management, leakage management, GIS and network management, financial management, application of ICT to service delivery – integrated data management; water safety plan and water quality; integrated solid waste management; shit-flow diagram for liquid waste management); and 5) Capacity development..

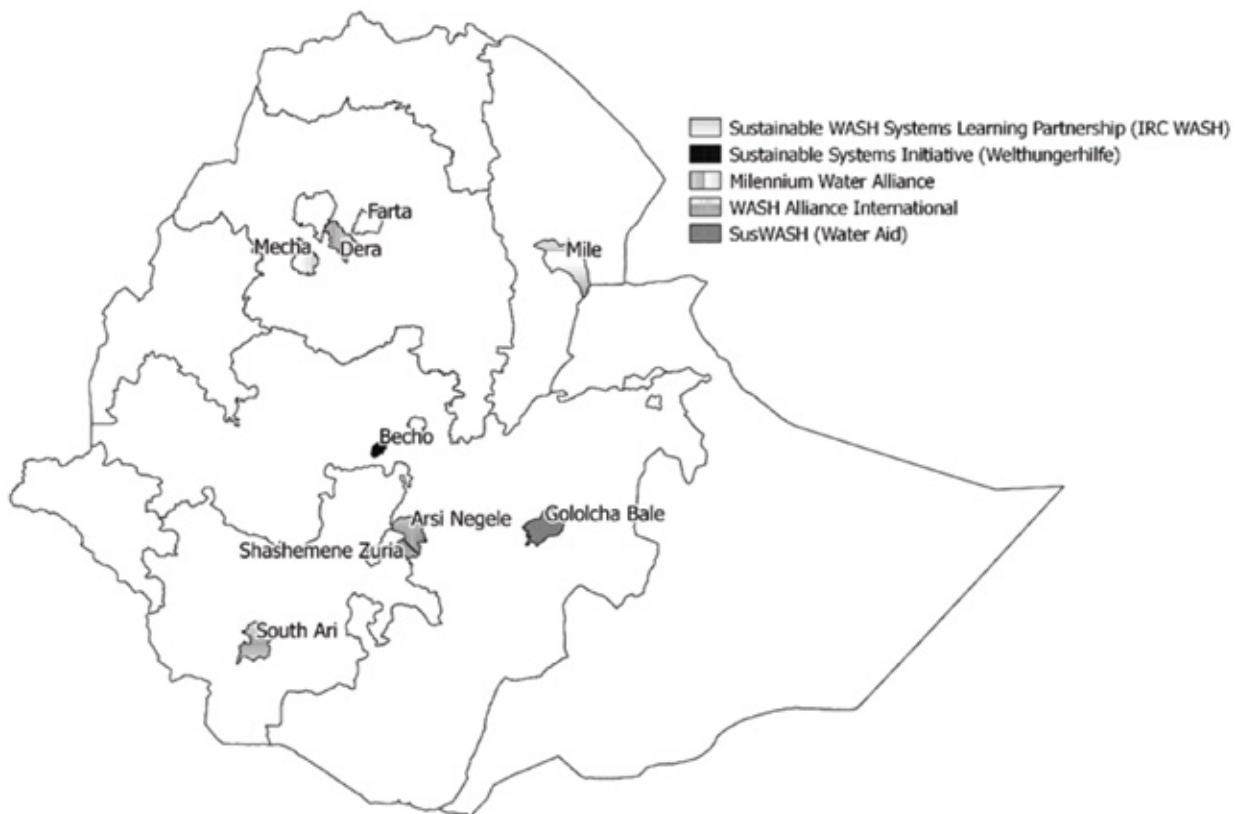
System strengthening is measured against a set of building blocks: Coordination, Strategic planning, Financing, Institutional arrangements, Service delivery and Monitoring. Each are assessed as either: Emergency, Fragile but strengthening, Transitional or Desired. The following proxy indicators are used to measure the success of sector strengthening investment and the implementation of the District Wide Approach:

- A district/utility WASH plan that draws from the OWNP
- All WASH stakeholders in the district /town contribute to this plan
- The presence of a well-resourced district / town coordination mechanism
- A district/town WASH plan that is drafted against actual needs, is costed and is based on a
- clear baseline showing the district WASH status
- Number of WASH facilities delivered (new construction and rehabilitation of facilities)
- The presence of a monitoring system that tracks WASH asset, levels of service, quality and financing, which can inform planning and decision making
- Presence of accountability systems where user feedback is regularly included to improve service delivery. (Mengistu, 2017).

USAID Sustainable WASH Systems (SWS) Learning Partnership

The Sustainable WASH Systems (SWS) Learning Partnership is a global U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) cooperative agreement to identify locally-driven solutions to the challenge of developing robust local systems

FIGURE 1. LOCATION OF PILOT WOREDAS FOR DIFFERENT SYSTEMS STRENGTHENING INITIATIVES



Source: IRC

capable of sustaining WASH service delivery. Led by the University of Colorado at Boulder, it emphasises partnership and learning for catalytic change in the WASH sector in four priority countries – Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda and Cambodia. In Ethiopia, a team led by IRC is developing and testing a structured and replicable approach to understanding, engaging with and strengthening decentralised woreda and small-town systems for WASH service delivery¹.

Comprehensive systems analyses are expected to provide a basis for action research experiments –currently focused on monitoring and maintenance issues identified as priorities by local stakeholders who gather as a Learning Alliance (a learning alliance is a local stakeholder platform in which different stakeholders and/ or representatives meet to discuss issues related with WASH and try to find solutions) – to find new solutions to service delivery and sustainability challenges. Emphasis is on strengthening the service delivery system as a whole; finding a balance between competing priorities to extend, improve and sustain services; and delivering the capacity development and communications activities that are needed at local, regional and national levels to scale up successful innovations and outcomes.

Activities on rural water are linked to the USAID Lowland WASH Activity led by AECOM and involving the International Rescue Committee and CARE as implementing NGO partners². Two rural woredas where the USAID Lowland WASH Activity operates were selected for SWS rural water supply activities: South Ari, part of South Omo Zone in the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region (SNNPR) (south-western Ethiopia), which relies heavily on hand pumps and springs, and Mile, in the Afar Region (north-eastern Ethiopia), where water schemes include motorised boreholes pumping deep groundwater. Community management is the primary service delivery model for both the simple and more complex rural water supply schemes, with utility management present only in some small towns.

To date activities have involved:

- Establishing baselines on system strength and service levels, and related diagnoses;
- Facilitating the establishment of local stakeholder platforms, Learning Alliances, and identifying priorities to strengthen systems;
- Initiating action research on the strengthening of monitoring (in Afar at regional as well as woreda level) and maintenance of rural water supply facilities;
- Learning visits to Uganda and Tigray focused on rural water supply maintenance;
- Building capacity of government and service providers.

IRC are testing new tools to measure systems strength as part of the activities. These include a monitoring framework based on nine ‘building blocks’ as well as assessing a set of actor behaviours linked to a theory of change about systems change.

Sustainable Services Initiative (Welthungerhilfe)

WHH Ethiopia office is working to strengthen WASH systems in Becho Woreda, located in South West Shoa Zone, Oromia region. The district-wide approach ensures a comprehensive plan for assessing need, planning and delivering WASH services and monitoring performance in such a way that no communities or people are excluded. It is an approach to ensure universal and sustained access to water, sanitation and good hygiene. It demands clear lines of responsibility, effective partnerships, sustainable financing arrangements and mechanisms for accountability.

As the WHH project is in the last year of implementation, a key question was what do we need to do to best support the service authority to continue and expand sustainable services in the district? To assist answering the question a comprehensive scoring of the building blocks for sustainable WASH services was carried out in April 2018 in partnership with district and zonal service authorities. The consensus was to focus on key gaps that were holding back progress to universal access in the district. These priorities were agreed in a joint planning session with the district service authority and are:

- **Asset registry and Monitoring:** Co-create a WASH asset registry that would assist the service authority to plan, monitor and report to the national systems;
- **Service Delivery Infrastructure:** Improve the supply chain for spare parts, in particular, the quality of spare parts and infrastructure works;
- **Regulation & Accountability:** Strengthen and support the functionality of WASH coordination platforms in the district.

Progress to date

Asset registry - Progress has been made on a district wide asset registry using trained service authority personnel. A comprehensive data collection exercise is being followed up with verification and data analysis.

Service Delivery Infrastructure: The spare parts supply chain can be divided into two sub-categories Spare parts for (1) **Hand Pumps** and (2) **Pipe Fittings**.

- A preferred supplier for hand pumps and spare parts of hand pumps has been identified by the district water office in Addis Ababa and the community (scheme managing committee) directly purchase from this

supplier. Up to now, the quality of spare parts provided by this supplier is good.

- There are a number of suppliers in Addis Ababa, but Woreda Water Office experts through experience have identified one supplier providing of genuine parts (“by their evaluation”). And inform the water managing committees to communicate this supplier for purchasing of parts; but the committees are not obliged to buy only from this supplier. There is no any way for the committee to check the quality. Quality checking is very difficult even for the expert.
- Other districts also follow their own procedure; may or may not the same as Becho district.
- Quality of pipe fittings remains a problem; district water office experts tried to provide technical support for the community (scheme managing committee) while purchasing the pipe fittings. But, it is being difficult even for the district water office experts to check the quality for pipe fittings due to lack of equipment/ simple technique.

Regulation and Accountability (creation of a

coordination platform): Woreda WASH team exists at all district level but having several limitations: most of there are not active, there is no clear role and responsibility and it not clear to whom it is accountable to.

The first exclusive meeting with Woreda WASH Team (WWT) was organized by WHH in November 2018, and agreement reached on the following points: WWT to fix a regular schedule for coordination meetings; In the next meeting of WWT, to discuss the issues observed during asset inventory; Woreda water office to update the asset inventory.

By the facilitation of WHH field officer, the second WWT meeting was organized on February 8, 2019. There is high turnover of WWT members. Discussion, especially regarding water supply problem in schools was raised. Roles and responsibilities of Woreda office of Education and Woreda water office were agreed to solve observed water supply problem in schools. Monthly basis regular WWT meeting was also decided.

Millennium Water Alliance Ethiopia programme

The Millennium Water Alliance (MWA), a permanent consortium of leading NGOs with WASH expertise, is currently working in Ethiopia with a focus on strengthening woreda systems for universal, safe and sustainable water services delivery in three woredas (Dera, Farta and North Mecha) in Amhara region. Extensive preparation has been undertaken (December 2018 – March 2019) through the

assessment of WASH systems and their status and existing capacities and long-term strategic planning. Funding is provided by the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation (CNHF) to implement activities in line with its Safe Water Strategy. Partners in this programme include: CARE, Catholic Relief Services, IRC WASH, World Vision, Food for the Hungry, WaterAid, Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, Splash and Stanford University.

The project, focused on rural water with matched activities in sanitation, seeks by 2024 to achieve:

- Strengthened key aspects of the service delivery system including planning, partnerships, resources and institutional capacity;
- Increased access to safe water and improved hygiene and sanitation services in public schools, using new and proven models, to reach 45,000 students by 2024;
- Increased access to safe and sustainable water and hygiene services at healthcare facilities, using new and proven models, to reach over 500,000 people;
- Increased proportion of people served with basic access to safe water by 8% and reduce non-functionality by 6% through testing and implementing new and proven models and strengthening government-led monitoring systems;
- Increased access to safe water for over 200,000 people through the deployment of new and proven service modalities and technologies.

During a one-year bridge or planning phase (2018-2019), MWA facilitated the three woredas to develop SDG strategic plans that are aligned with national targets and priorities to achieve SDG 6. These plans are based on comprehensive baseline systems analyses (some of which utilised tools developed by SWS and IRC in the above programme). This proved a challenging process. Woredas are far more used to planning for the next few years based on their capacities than thinking about how they might deliver services in 12 years using different technologies and new institutional arrangements. The baseline at woreda, regional and national level provides a basis to measure change during a proposed five-year implementation phase (pending funding) which combines traditional hardware interventions and systems strengthening. Some innovative elements include a strong focus on institutional WASH; strengthening government-led monitoring as a key gap in the current system; experimenting to find new ways of providing maintenance; and ensuring universal coverage through a wider mix of service delivery models (including self-supply for the most remote households).

Netherlands WASH SDG consortium and the WASH Alliance International

The WASH SDG programme is a consortium of SNV, Plan and WASH Alliance International (WAI) focusing on improving WASH services in seven countries, one of which is Ethiopia. In Ethiopia, WAI and Plan are active in this consortium, but not SNV (although SNV does substantial WASH programming in Ethiopia). WAI (also known in Ethiopia as the Ethiopia WASH Alliance) includes partners such as AMREF (who are the Alliance lead in Ethiopia), Wetlands International, WASTE (through local partner Bole Bible Baptist Church) and IRC.

WAI's interventions focus on two districts in the rift valley in Oromia region; Arsi Negele and Shashamene Zuria in the West Arsi and Eastern Showa zone. These areas are relatively densely populated and economically active with over 200 people per square kilometre. WAI is aiming to reach 100,000 people with WASH services in rural areas and 30,000 people in peri-urban areas (the total population in the three districts is over one million people). Plan is focused on Bahar Dar Zuria and Lasta woreda.

The consortium seeks to promote an area-wide approach focusing on access-for-all. Additional priorities are working with government; promoting private sector engagement (in sanitation marketing); integrating WASH, behaviour change, gender equality and social inclusion; water secure WASH delivery (making links to Integrated Water Resources Management, waste water treatment); climate resilient WASH services and systems change. WAI funding in Ethiopia is 5,700,000 euro over five years, and the consortium aims to leverage investments 1:1 from government, the private sector and households. Sustainability is also a priority with a commitment to deliver services for 15 years through sustainability checks and conducting specific post-implementation monitoring. The project started in late 2017 and an inception phase ran until the end of June 2018. The main phase of implementation is underway with activities including assessments of government-led monitoring and financing with a view to strengthen these components of WASH system. Woredas' WASH plans to achieve the SDGs will be developed in 2019.

Conclusions

The initiatives summarised above are relatively new and work is ongoing. At this stage some tentative insights are offered for further discussion:

- Several well-known organisations and alliances are piloting, testing and improving systems approaches across a total of 11 woredas. These are mainly focused on water, although some involve or integrate sanitation and hygiene.
- Most involve NGOs, although UNICEF also promotes aspects of systems strengthening in its approach to rural WASH in Ethiopia. With UNICEF's larger capacities it can be an influential player. UNICEF's rural WASH portfolio includes some aspects of a systems agenda, including strengthening monitoring systems and piloting a new service delivery model with government: rural public water utilities.
- Most of these projects feature strong partnerships with local government but partnering with regional and national government on system strengthening is a new development. With multiple organisations working across several regions, collaboration will be valuable or indeed essential in further engaging higher levels of government.
- Most of the projects described above have similar components and there is potential for duplication e.g. monitoring tools. This could provide a basis for innovation and sharing learning across the efforts to identify good practices and avoid duplication.

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Notes

1. SWS activities on urban sanitation led by Tetra Tech are not covered in this paper.
2. The USAID Lowland WASH Activity is working in challenging lowland environments in Afar, Somali and SNNP regions to develop, rehabilitate and sustain water supplies and improve sanitation. The partnership provides an opportunity for synergies between the systems-strengthening and learning activities of SWS, and the implementation of a package of construction, rehabilitation and improved maintenance for rural water supply schemes.

Keywords

Systems approaches, system strengthening, Ethiopia, District Wide Approaches, government

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