

Intro/background

- Thanks Carolyn. Good morning everyone. What a pleasure it is to be here with you today. My name is Patrick Moriarty, and like Carolyn says, I'm going to talk to you today about something called the Agenda for Change partnership. To frame that, I'm going to talk a little bit about water, sanitation and hygiene services; about water, sanitation and hygiene systems; and about building and strengthening those systems.
- But first a little bit of background about me. I'm 51 years old, I head up an NGO based in the Netherlands, called IRC, or sometimes IRC WASH. I'm from Ireland originally, where I gained my first degree in Civil Engineering. I've spent the bulk of my professional careers since graduating in 1992 working on water. On water supply projects, on water resource management, on hydrology and hydrogeology. I gained a doctorate on the latter two, for which I spent four years living in rural Zimbabwe studying the interactions between water and people: how they affected each other, and how access to water changed people's lives and livelihoods.
- Since leaving Zimbabwe in 2000, I've worked for IRC, a think and do tank based in the Netherlands, and now with offices in Ghana, Uganda, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Honduras and India.

- I've never been a Rotarian, though for a couple of years in the early 1990s I was a member of the Rotaract club of Niamey, Niger. Several of my staff members are keen Rotarians, and they send their greetings!
- When Carolyn and Ron asked me, last October at the annual water and health conference in North Carolina if I would give a keynote on water, sanitation and hygiene systems I was delighted. I spend a lot of my time talking about the importance of understanding WASH from a systems perspective. This later morphed into talking to you about a movement called the Agenda for Change. Which I'm also delighted to do, as the two are closely linked.
- But let me start with some background. About water, sanitation and hygiene services; about water, sanitation and hygiene systems; about the challenge that I call systems blindness; and about what I think we can do about that. **(3:30)**

Waters, Sanitation, Hygiene (WASH) Services and Systems.

- In 2015 the united nations agreed the sustainable development goals, that came into force on the first of January 2016. There are 17 goals, touching on all aspects of human development and the environment in which we live. As you all know, I'm sure, one of these is Sustainable Development Goal Six, *Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.*

- I'm not going to waste your time telling you why this is important, I'm sure you wouldn't be here if it wasn't. Suffice to say, that access to water and sanitation are the most fundamental of human rights, that when recognised and coupled with the appropriate hygiene behaviours have the potential to unlock multiple other aspects of human development. I am sure that the very fact of you being here, means that you are committed to the vision of water and sanitation for all.
- I'm going to talk about this simple diagram for the next few minutes, because it frames much of the rest of what I want to talk about. What does it say? It says that to deliver Water and sanitation services to all calls for strong and resilient water and sanitation systems
- I'm convinced that sustainable water and sanitation services for everyone – leaving no one behind - can be delivered, but only by strong national and local WASH systems. Not by charity. Not by aid. Not sustainably at least. The only way to achieve SDG 6 is by building national and local systems that can deliver services. The challenge lies in figuring out how we build those. And the challenge I'm going to pose to you as Rotarians and members of WASRAG, is what role you can play in doing that.
- But first let me unpack a little what I mean by water and sanitation services; and by water and sanitation systems. Because even though the words seem simple and are maybe familiar, I think that the way I am using them is perhaps not.

- First of all lets talk about services. Services are you receive if you're wealthy. Some are free, some you pay for. You turn on a tap – and water flows out. You flush the toilet and the contents disappear. You don't think about what happens (well – some of YOU might – but most folks don't!). In some countries you pay a fee for those services. In other countries they are 'free' – which means of course they're paid for out of tax. When they break down, you call someone and they get fixed.

Critical concepts that come with that of services, service providers, and service authorities, and regulators, and clients. Someone, somewhere, makes sure that they meet certain standards: of water quality, or reliability.
- Now let's compare that to something that isn't a service. The sorts of water and sanitation interventions that are often provided by projects. Like a village water pump. This may have been provided by an outsider. Perhaps a project? Perhaps a Rotary project. Someone well meaning somewhere decided to help a village out with a village pump. Which is a great gesture. So why do I say its not a service? Because the things that make it a service are often not there. You may or may not pay for it; it likely doesn't have water quality tested; when it breaks down, there's no system in place to repair it.
- At any one time, our best guess is that around 30% of rural water points in sub-saharan Africa aren't working. What that means, is that someone

who once had a safeish source of water now doesn't; that a girl who only had to walk 500 metres now has to walk 2 kilometres; that people go back to drinking from unsafe surface sources.

- So, that's services. To those of you who come from an engineering or business background, and who like to describe things in formal ways, I would say that a safe water service can be defined in terms of quantity, quality, reliability, and sometimes cost. These are often formally defined in countries – including poor countries. Where IRC (and others) examine the extent to which such service norms and standards are met, the findings are often shockingly low – sometimes as low as single figures.
- The United Nations Joint Monitoring Programme, that provides the global figures that we present to each other at meetings like this, has defined a simple set of service ladders for both water and sanitation. Those are the definitions of the different levels – which I leave you to read.
- So, that's a service. And I said earlier that it takes a system to deliver a service. And now, speaking as a one time civil engineer I want to be very clear about what I mean. Because for many engineers, when we talk about systems we have something very concrete in mind. Or something very concrete and very metallic and plastic. We're thinking of pumps and pipes and settling tanks. And those, let's call them the physical system, are an essential part of delivering a service. But they're not the only, or

necessarily most important part of the whole system. Because there's another part, which if you like is the social or human part of the system. The managers and engineers and local governments; the policy and regulatory frameworks; the model contracts and means for their enforcement.

- And for water and sanitation services to be sustainable, the entire system has to be in place and it has to work. Which is much, much more difficult than just drilling a borehole or building a toilet.
- Anyone who's heard me talk about systems before or seen my tedx on this, will have heard me talk about systems blindness. About how those of us who are lucky enough to have access to functioning systems – whether those are for health, education, transport – or water and sanitation take them for granted.
- We turn on the tap, we flush the toilet and we don't know or don't care about the magic that happens behind the scenes to make the water safe to drink, or that recovers nutrients from the shit and makes it safe to discharge to the environment again. **We're systems blind**, and that systems blindness is hugely damaging.
- In rich countries it makes people resist paying taxes for things they take for granted; in poorer countries it opens the way for magical thinking and the wrong sorts of intervention – like building hand-pumps in villages when we have no idea how they will be maintained over time; or giving

people latrines without having looked at the underlying culture and practice around hygiene.

- **(13:30 total – 10 mins for this section)**

Systems building

- So, that's WASH services and WASH systems. What I'd now like to talk about a little is about building strong and resilient national and local WASH systems to meet the challenge of the SDGs. Which is what IRC seeks to do, and which we co-founded the Agenda for Change to do with other likeminded organisations.
- And no. I don't see the need to build strong systems as a hypothesis. And no, I don't have to prove that a systems approach is better than a non-systems approach. The proof is all around us for anyone who wants to see.
- All the countries in the world that provide their citizens with WASH services, have functional WASH systems. The failures we see – of broken infrastructure and wasted investment - spring directly from the lack of those systems. Sustainable WASH services can only be delivered by strong national and local WASH systems. The challenge lies in how we build them, together.

- Back in March, we held a symposium on WASH systems in the Hague (to celebrate IRC turning 50). Around 400 WASH systems practitioners and thinkers came together during the symposium to share their experiences and the state of the art. The proceedings are online and provide a rich resource.
- I gave a keynote at the opening of the symposium, and in it I made three points that I'm going to repeat to you here today. About WASH systems and what we, collectively need to do to build them. Point One is about helping WASH to lose its systems blindness – learning to dance with the system; Point Two is about the public nature of WASH, and about the critical role of government; Point Three, is about how we, together, can drive systems change and build the national and local systems that we need to deliver the SDGs.
- I've already talked about the first point – about systems blindness. The point about removing systems blindness is that it's not just about knowing intellectually that there has to be a system there. It's about acknowledging that if we want to change the system – and I think we all do – we need to engage with it, however uncomfortable that might be.
- Uncomfortable because it may mean acknowledging that what we are doing may not entirely make sense; that it may not be sustainable.
Uncomfortable because we may have to engage with people or institutions we don't really like – that we see as being inefficient or

corrupt (and inefficiency and corruption themselves are, of course, systems issues).

- Losing systems blindness is, above all, about thinking yes – this is my bit of the system – whether that’s as a service provider, or a service authority or a development NGO or a social enterprise, or a Rotarian. But its then about thinking: what do I need from other actors within the system for me achieve my goal. It’s about identifying what is missing – and how I – or we – can fill the gaps.
- At IRC we talk about nine building blocks that are required for a functioning WASH system – there they are – and don’t worry – I’m not going to go through them all now. I’m often asked ‘but Patrick, these nine building blocks of IRC’s, we can’t work on all of them at the same time can we – where do we start – which are more important?’ Which is a really, really tough question.
- To see why, let’s take a metaphor for a moment. Picture a bicycle - now think of the building blocks of that bicycle – wheels, frame, chain, pedals, brakes. And now – pose that question again. Which building block is more important? Does it make sense for me to build an ever more perfect rear wheel if there’s no frame? And yes –lights and a bell are probably less essential than wheels and brakes. But some minimal set of elements need to be there, and they need to mesh with and work with each other for the whole to work.

- I introduced this as a metaphor, but of course, a bicycle IS a system, as much as it's a factor within a broader system: a transport system. And bicycles, like water pumps, need to be maintained. And to play their part in an effective transport system, they need roads to run on and rules to stop them being squashed by a bus – and those are part of the system too.
- **Systems are all about framing** – but whatever the frame – some minimal set of elements are absolutely essential for the whole to function. What those elements are largely depends on the service the system needs to deliver!
- Enough! WASH is a system that we need to learn to dance in. And, all this said, what's my first ask of you? Simply this. **To become champions of systems; of losing systems blindness; of dancing with the system.**
- The second point that it is crucially important to make is that WASH is a public system – it's about providing a public service. No one (or almost no-one) ever dies of thirst (they seldom die of constipation either if we're honest!). But they do die of diseases related to and spread by unclean water or poorly managed sanitation. Their lives are negatively affected by having to spend hours of the day collecting water, or missing school because of lack of menstrual facilities, or fear of being raped by a man because there is no latrine in their home.

- That's why access to water and sanitation is a human right. And it's also why providing water and sanitation services is a public health intervention. And as a public health intervention – water and sanitation always pays back economically. The challenge, as we know, is that it doesn't always pay back financially.
- But, the critical, unavoidable point in all this is that government and only government - has the means or the mandate to lead and oversee the delivery of the human right and the public health intervention that is access to a safe water and sanitation service. And no, this doesn't mean that government has to be the service provider. It does have to provide the framework for service provision but others can provide the service. However, as part of its leadership it has to provide at least some public finance, it has to provide some subsidy – so that no-one is left behind, and unavoidably, it has to do so using taxes.
- Government, and especially local government are the duty bearers for WASH. In the end, it is they who will (and should be) judged by their fellow citizens on their ability to deliver. Often, their work is insufficiently seen or appreciated – or funded. Because people are system blind. When it works – no one see it – when it doesn't- they come to knock on local government's door!
- And while talking of government, let's not forget politicians and political leadership. The reality is that universal access to water and sanitation

only comes when there is strong political leadership. We know that when national level political leadership – the executive, parliament, the president – take action we can achieve amazing results. We have the examples of the Southeast Asian states who achieved universal access in a generation – many starting when their incomes were lower than those of today’s LDCs. Right now, we see the example set by the Modi Government in India, or the OneWASH National programme in Ethiopia.

- So, my second ask of you is twofold. To support and appreciate your national and especially local government colleagues. But secondly, to become advocates and supporters of political leadership for water, sanitation and hygiene.
- Now to my third and final point, how to drive systems change and build strong national and local WASH systems and to my suggested answer, the one that IRC is betting the farm on, the one that lies behind our decision to found, along with others, the Agenda for Change collaboration. And that is through effective collective action.

Agenda for Change

- Agenda for Change is a collaboration set up by organisations who subscribe to a systems building agenda. Originally started by WaterAid, Water for People, IRC and Aguaconsult, in the last year we’ve been joined by another four non-governmental organisations and social

enterprises (Care, Water for Good, Splash, ???). Through different working groups we seek to develop a shared advocacy agenda, to learn and to share from each other, and above all to develop a shared way of approaching water and sanitation systems building and service delivery.

- An important part of that work has been the development of what we call the district road map. This is, at its simplest, a series of steps that need to be gone through at a district level to develop and then start to implement a shared vision of universal access: something that in IRC we refer to as a WASH master plan. Why is the district such an important focus for our work? Because it's the level at which we find local government. But also because it's the level at which we begin to see opportunities for the sort of scale that makes water and sanitation businesses work, and cross subsidy to help the poorest possible.
- Over the past year I've taken part in launching district WASH master plans –in Ghana, Burkina Faso and most recently Uganda. Each plan has been the first of its kind in the country. Not that there haven't been plans before (dusty cabinets around the world are full of un- or partially implemented plans). But these ones are different.
- Different because they are district level and squarely focussed on achieving universal access. But, more importantly, different because these plans are milestones in, and outputs of, political and social processes.

- Each was developed by a multi-partner team **led by local government** – both political and technocratic. They brought together private sector, civil society, civil servants and political leaders. Supporting implementation of these plans – getting them financed and rolled out – will be a – the – major focus of IRC’s work in the next few years. In our role as a change hub.
- Each plan represents a practical, systems level, intervention. Each one is an expression of political support backed by a multi-constituency partnership. This approach of collective action in support of government initiative, lies at the heart of multiple initiatives, networks and partnerships of which IRC is proud to be a member: Sanitation and Water for All; Agenda for Change; the Millennium Water Alliance; the WSSCC, the Dutch SDG alliance, the Conrad N. Hilton Safe Water Strategy, the Sustainable WASH Systems Partnership.
- And so my final ask. To those of you who are not part of any of these initiatives - please join them – we need you. Agenda partners are explicitly working together on projects in Honduras, Rwanda, Malawi and Uganda. Members of the Agenda for Change are working on systems building activities in many more countries, including Ghana, Niger, Mali, Ethiopia, the Central African Republic and India. We’d encourage Rotarians from any of those countries to get in touch

Conclusion

- We all want the same thing – to achieve SDG6. To get water and sanitation to everyone. We all need each other. When you are talking to people, when you are listening to people, think about who you are talking to. Think about what part of the system they represent – and how you need them to do your job.
- SDG 6 is an audacious, challenging, but also inspiring goal. I am convinced, that by learning to dance with the system, by putting government at the centre, by working effectively together in collective action we can build the strong systems – drive the systems change - we can achieve it. We can make water and sanitation for everyone, everywhere, forever a reality.
- Thank you

Notes

Who I am

- CEO IRC
- Water Nerd
- Rotaract in Niger

What I'm going to talk about

A little framing

- Not the challenge of the unserved – because you all know that
 - Get latest JMP – graph

Water, sanitation and hygiene – services; water, sanitation and hygiene systems; systems change in water, sanitation and hygiene

But the challenge of sustainability and the challenge of delivering the SDGs – and the challenge of doing that in a sustainable way

- Caroline and Ron asked me to make this speech back in October last year. At that time – ask was about a talk on systems. I now see its advertised as a talk about Agenda for Change. Luckily they are more or less the same – so I'll talk about both.
- I'm not a Rotarian, though I was once a member of Rotaract, at the very start of my career, in the early 1990s in Niamey, Niger.
- But I'm going to try to link what I have to say about systems to your values as Rotarians – as I understand them. Please forgive me if I get anything wrong.
- And then more detailed – the challenge of service delivery
- And then more detailed – the challenge of systems
- I'm going to tell you about the movement we've created to try to build strong and resilient systems
 - Agenda for Change
 - Leading NGOs
 - Growing
 - Committed to a systems strengthening agenda
 - Working out what that looks like
 - Working in multiple countries
 - Taking district as the lab to test ideas.
- And I'm going to try to relate it all back to Rotary – and what you as Rotarians, and as WASRAG can do
- Systems blindness
- My ask – remove the systems blindness