

WaterAid Rwanda: A review of the pilot country programme

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Introduction

WaterAid established a pilot country programme in Rwanda in 2009. With three staff and an annual budget of around GBP 285,000, the programme is implementing a national sector influencing programme as well as a district-wide programme in Bugesera, south of Kigali, comprising sector coordination, technical support, rural water supply and technological innovation in rainwater harvesting and eco-san.

WaterAid commissioned a review of the pilot country programme in May 2012 to assess progress, relevance and effectiveness, and to make recommendations for future direction. The review was carried out over eight days in May 2012 by an independent consultant working with WaterAid's Regional Programme Manager.

Main findings

The reviewers found that the presence of WaterAid Rwanda has made a clear difference to the water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) sector. The gaps left by the departure of the World Bank's Water and Sanitation Programme, learning opportunities offered by the specific country context, the potential to engage at the highest levels of government, and the practical need to provide better water and sanitation services to an under-served and predominantly rural population, all justify WaterAid's continued presence. However, a clearer focus is required to halt the progressive creep towards generalisation and a lack of unique value addition.

At sector level, significant political challenges remain in securing government agreement on definition changes that may necessitate revisions to water and sanitation coverage data. There has also been limited technical dialogue between non-governmental actors in the sector and an absence of innovation, which presents an opportunity for more practical sharing of operational experiences and new ideas.

At district level in Bugesera, WaterAid Rwanda's relationships with the Government are excellent and coordination is much improved. However, water supply and technological innovation work has been tilted in favour of infrastructure, with insufficient attention paid to prior problem analysis, management, sustainability and learning. As a result, water supplies, rainwater harvesting systems, school eco-san and a prototype eco-shop show limited sustainability and WaterAid Rwanda's experiences are not being used effectively as platforms for learning.

The root causes include over-burdening of country programme staff, limited non-engineering expertise and insufficient boundary setting by WaterAid, both regionally and globally. While commending country programme staff for their significant achievements to date, a tendency to expand progressively into an increasingly wide project portfolio should not remain checked only by available funds and human resources.

The review observed that WaterAid Rwanda's partners act mainly as contracted implementers and there are opportunities to use their skills more effectively, providing targeted capacity building support and encouraging innovation so they become part of a broader-based approach to project implementation that is built on problem solving and learning. Lastly, staff and office facilities are over-stretched and this may affect productivity and programme quality.

Recommendations

Develop a focussed country programme strategy: With guidance from London and the region, a country strategy should be developed as a reference framework defining the value WaterAid Rwanda seeks to add to the WASH sector. It should be outcome-oriented and precise, reducing the diversity of the country programme's work and concentrating on fewer priorities with greater depth.

Increased equity and inclusion guidance: There is a need to adopt a stronger framework for equity and inclusion and rights-based approaches, for which practical guidance is needed.

Expand sector performance monitoring: WaterAid Rwanda should engage in monitoring policy priorities, budget analysis and financial tracking, benefit incidence studies and influencing the design of tariff structures. Elements of this work could be sub-contracted to research institutions.

Form a Water Point Mapping Group: To ensure that ongoing water point mapping initiatives are compatible, WaterAid Rwanda should initiate a technical working group on this theme.

Develop stronger learning and communications around service delivery work: All service delivery work should be viewed as a learning and influencing opportunity, with WaterAid Rwanda positioning itself as a facilitator of innovations and solutions, not only a provider of services.

Strengthen inter-organisational learning: WaterAid Rwanda should lead a process of experience, exchange and learning from the practical experiences of NGOs in the WASH sector, via the WASH thematic group of the international non-governmental (NGO) forum.

Stay focussed on Bugesera: A continued focus on Bugesera District is proposed for service delivery and innovation, given the many challenges and opportunities it still offers.

Look back before moving forward: Further hardware installation should be put on hold, pending a review of existing projects to clarify management and maintenance modalities.

Select areas of thematic focus: Suggestions for focus include rainwater harvesting and privatised water supply models. The eco-shop concept is deemed too complex at this stage.

Innovate and add more value, especially in hygiene promotion: In hygiene promotion work there is a need to critically monitor impacts on behaviour and health, and to bring the experiences of WaterAid globally to bear, to improve the current government-led approach.

Consider cost-sharing for all infrastructure: Cost-sharing should be considered for all new investments in water and sanitation, to help address ownership and management issues.

Establish more clearly the role of the regional desk: Clearer advice is required on the role of the regional desk, especially the balance between support, advice and compliance.

Expand human resources capacity in the district-wide programme: Although a slow pace of country programme growth is suggested, in which existing resources are used to better effect. Therefore, recruitment of additional staff member is proposed to support the district-wide programme.

Adopt managerial separation of the programme sub-components: Staff should assume clearer responsibility for independently managing the country programme's two strands of work.

Relocate and expand the country office: A larger office is suggested, or a formalised lease agreement for the existing premises.