

Section 2.0: Designing a system strengthening programme and measuring change

This section describes how focus districts were selected. It sets out the different tools and approaches that were used to understand the system and identify barriers to sustainability, inclusion and scale. It also details how change is being measured during programme implementation. A process of adaptive management has been used throughout the programme to refine approaches in response to contextual changes and challenges arising along the way. Lessons have been documented and shared.

2.1 Selecting focus districts

Target rural districts and urban centres were agreed with national and provincial government at the outset of the programme. The primary criteria for area selection was based on the number of poor and marginalised people lacking access to basic water supply, sanitation and hygiene, coupled with national or provincial government preferences dictating where the programme should focus.

The SusWASH programme is focused on the following rural districts and urban centres:

Country	Town, district, region and province	Context	Estimated population
Cambodia	Rolea Bier, Samakki Meanchey Districts and Kampong Chhnang Province	Rural, slightly remote, stable (no recent social unrest)	108,193 (Rolea Bier District) 78,203 (Samakki Meanchey District) 530,000 (Kampong Chhnang Province)
Ethiopia	Gololcha Woreda (District), East Bale Zone, Oromia Region	Remote rural and small town (some political tension impacting on movement)	127,183 (Gololcha Woreda) 37.3 million (Oromia Region)
Pakistan	Thatta District, Sindh Province	Rural	979,817 (Thatta District) 47.89 million (Sindh Province)
Uganda	Greater Kampala Metropolitan Area (GKMA)	Urban, stable (no recent social unrest)	4,000,000

Details about the characteristics of these districts appear in the specific country sections.

2.2 Understanding the WASH system

The first year of the SusWASH programme was dedicated to analysing the strengths and weaknesses of the WASH system, identifying leverage points, building new partnerships, and setting up processes for learning and adaptation. Efforts were guided by WaterAid country programme (CP) strategies and significant stakeholder engagement through participatory workshops at district and provincial levels, focus group discussions and key informant interviews. WaterAid staff co-designedⁱⁱ the programme with government, civil society and private sector stakeholders, agreeing a common vision and work plan, building local ownership for realisation of programme outcomes.ⁱⁱⁱ This concerted time and effort to establish new local partnerships, build trust, understand the context and co-design interventions was a critical precursor for sustainability, forming a solid foundation for implementation in subsequent years.

The participatory tools and approaches used to analyse the strength of the WASH system and inform the design of the SusWASH programme^{iv} varied in each country. Some of the tools included:

- **Political economy analysis^v** to understand how a country's history, politics, interests and power relationships drive decision making. Actors, factors, leverage points and actions that could accelerate progress at national and sub-national levels are mapped out. WaterAid CP strategies feature this kind of analysis^{vi} and a dedicated study was done in Cambodia.
- **Willing and able assessments.** This tool helps to assess the willingness and ability of different actors to ensure WASH is delivered and sustained to all people. In workshops,

a grid comprising four quadrants is placed on the floor. The four quadrants are marked with 'willing and able', 'willing but unable', 'unwilling but able' and 'unwilling and unable'. Participants position themselves in the quadrant that they feel is most relevant to the context they are working in, thereby building consensus and informing the balance between efforts that seek to build institutional capacity and those that seek to strengthen accountability and empower people to demand better services. This exercise was undertaken in all countries and generated rich qualitative information about the barriers different stakeholders face in fulfilling their WASH-related roles and responsibilities.

- **Barrier analysis** to understand the social, financial, environmental, institutional, legal, capacity and technical barriers driving poor WASH sustainability and marginalisation. This was undertaken during the SusWASH inception phase with all countries as a means of facilitating deeper discussion beyond superficial symptoms of poor sustainability and marginalisation. There is often no single root cause or barrier identified when this analysis is done.
- **Building block assessments** were undertaken in all countries to assess the strength of different components of the WASH system. In some instances, this assessment was conducted separately for water and sanitation sub-sectors. A variation of the tool applies a gender lens to all building blocks to understand the extent to which gender equality is considered and addressed in the system.^{vii} Since the start of the SusWASH programme in 2017, 'strong government leadership', 'active and empowered people and communities',

ii. For more details about the process of designing the SusWASH programme, read this blog. Available at: washmatters.wateraid.org/blog/taps-and-toilets-arent-enough-designing-wash-programmes-that-strengthen-the-system (accessed 29 Jul 2020).

iii. In some instances, WaterAid was the only NGO/civil society actor working in the district (e.g. in Gololcha woreda, Ethiopia). In this case, primary partners/collaborators were district administration and relevant district offices.

iv. See WaterAid's *Sector Strengthening Programme Design Toolkit* for full details of tools used. Available at: washmatters.wateraid.org/publications/sector-strengthening-programme-design-toolkit (accessed 16 Sep 2020). This toolkit is under review and an updated version will be available online soon.

v. WaterAid's Political Economy Analysis Toolkit is available to download (see Sector Strategy Tool for details): Available at: washmatters.wateraid.org/sites/g/files/jkxooof256/files/PEA%20complete%20toolkit.pdf (accessed 29 Jul 2020).

vi. In some instances country teams had already undertaken a PEA as part of their CP strategy development. In these cases, country teams used their existing PEA to inform their project design.

vii. WaterAid's *Practical guidance to address gender equality while strengthening water, sanitation and hygiene systems* is available to download at: washmatters.wateraid.org/publications/practical-guidance-gender-equality-strengthening-water-sanitation-hygiene-systems (accessed 22 Sep 2020).

'accountability and regulation', 'environment and water resources' and 'gender and social inclusion' have all been added. As the tool has evolved, it has been used to guide discussions about system change throughout the programme.

- **Marginalisation and power analysis** to identify the people within a community who face barriers accessing WASH was carried out in Cambodia. This analysis is most effectively done in collaboration with civil society organisations (CSOs) that represent marginalised people, e.g. disabled people's organisations (DPO) or women's groups.
- **Stakeholder/partnership mapping**^{viii} to identify suitable partners and establish which dimensions of the WASH system are already being tackled by others to avoid duplication, strengthen collaborative efforts and clarify the added value of the programme.
- **Hygiene formative research** to understand drivers and motivations of people's behaviours based on cultural norms, interests and aspirations.

- **'WhoDoesWATer' game** to assess the roles and responsibilities of those involved in the operation, maintenance and management of water services and identify gaps in delivery models. The tool was also adapted to cover sanitation services.
- **Service level assessments**, either using secondary source data, primary data collection or as part of broader studies, were undertaken in all countries, but not necessarily at the beginning of the programme.

The majority of these tools have been applied in participatory workshops involving both government and non-government actors. With strong facilitation, these highly visual tools create vibrant debate about the strengths and weaknesses of the WASH system and where investment is needed. The interactive nature of these tools encourages people to be up on their feet, discussing in small groups, and presenting viewpoints for further debate. The tools can be used in remote rural areas with limited power supplies. Bringing stakeholders together to discuss these barriers helps to build a common understanding of challenges and how they might be overcome with collective and coordinated efforts.



- **Workshop participants assess the strength of the WASH system from a gender perspective in Kampong Chhnang Province, Cambodia.**

viii. WaterAid Partnerships in Practice Toolkits are available to download at: washmatters.wateraid.org/publications/partnerships-in-practice-tools (accessed 29 Jul 2020).

2.3 Learning and adaptive management

Learning how change happens is central to system strengthening. A global function responsible for facilitating reflection, learning and adaptation was budgeted for at the beginning of the programme. Several mechanisms were set-up to generate, capture and share learning as well as to facilitate course correction (see Box 1).

The practical application of system strengthening requires openness and an ability to adapt to change along the way. As in any complex system there are always blockages and challenges that cannot be foreseen until programme implementation is underway.

Changes in political leadership, staff changes at national and local government levels, in municipalities, civil society groups, partner organisations and within WaterAid itself mean that new relationships have to be formed on a continuous basis. Political instability, new government regulations, social unrest, disasters and global pandemics lead to significant delays.

Service delivery models, capacity strengthening plans and influencing strategies thought to be relevant at the beginning of a project may not be effective as time progresses, so completely new plans and strategies must be devised to respond to new challenges.

Adaptive management helps to design, implement and monitor programmes that are able to respond to unforeseen events. It involves maintaining a focus on fixed outcomes, but being flexible in relation to the change pathways required to achieve them, as well as activities and outputs. It involves ongoing engagement with the context where implementation takes place and regularly reviewing, reflecting and re-planning to accommodate challenges arising. Adaptive management emphasises learning as a means of better understanding the systems we seek to influence – through trying new approaches, failing and adapting. It requires willingness to adjust programmes in response to new learning.

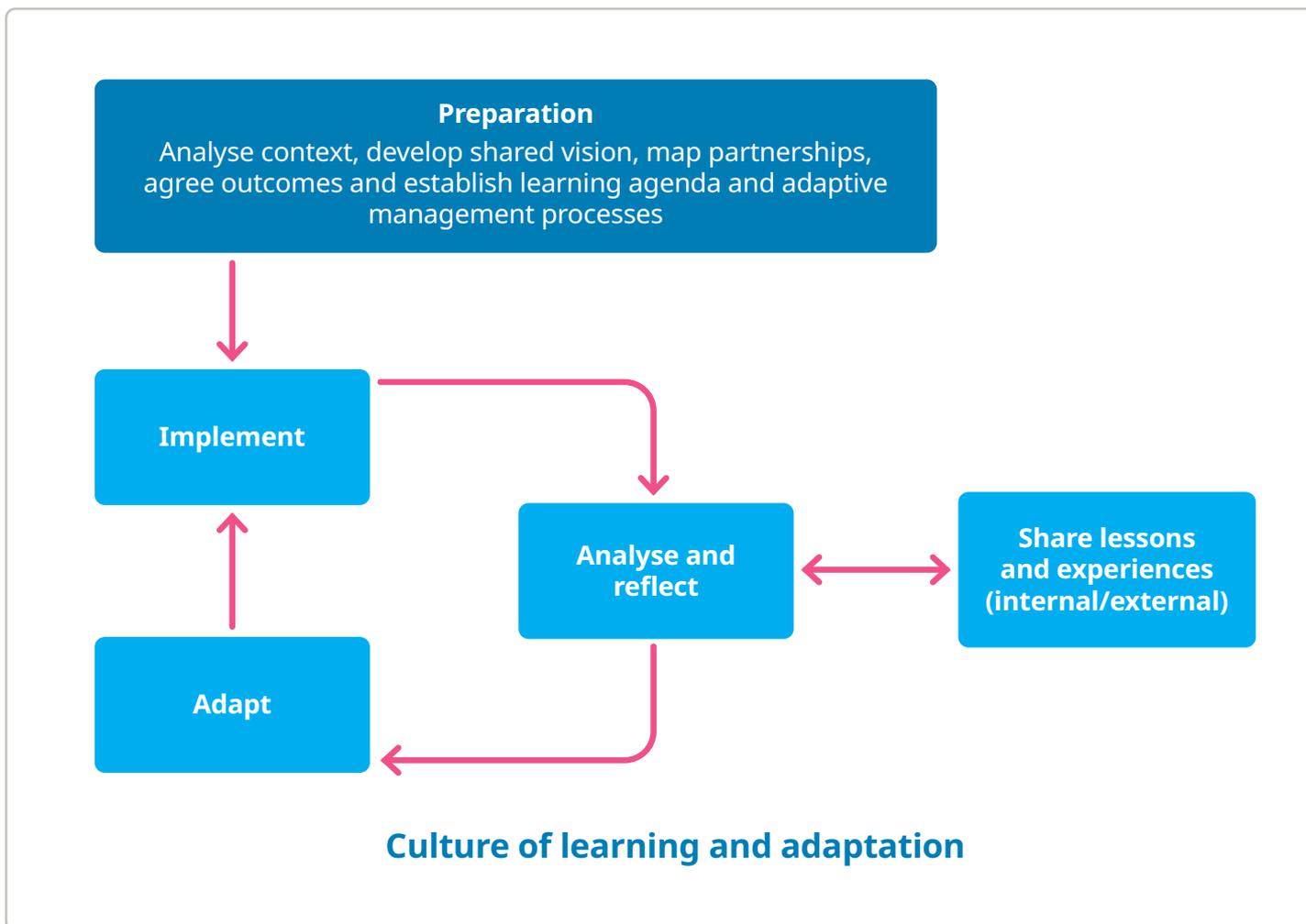
Box 1: Activities facilitated by the global learning function to generate, capture and share learning

Internal:

- Monthly cross-country learning calls
- Monthly global-CP support calls
- Ad hoc global-CP support visits
- Annual global learning workshops
- Online learning and discussion platform
- Online knowledge management and information database
- Internal webinars and cross-departmental meetings
- CP-CP learning exchanges
- Quarterly newsletter

External:

- Sharing with sector platforms and networks
- Sharing at global sector conferences
- Production of short films
- Production of the SusWASH webpage
- Production of the global learning report
- Production of blogs



● **Figure 4: The cycle of adaptive management and learning.**

Adaptive management requires flexibility within donor reporting frameworks and programme budgets. It also requires flexibility in WaterAid’s organisational planning, procurement and budgeting processes. More specifically, this way of working requires a structured process for continuous monitoring, reflection, learning and adaptation at both country and global levels. This has been led in SusWASH through a global learning and adaptive management function. This global function has supported country teams to review and adapt programme plans in response to changing contexts. It has also facilitated knowledge sharing and reflection on lessons learned.

Furthermore, it has provided technical support on specific areas of the WASH system, including methods to measure system change. This function is not only required to achieve programme objectives but also to maintain effective and clear communications with the donor about changes and progress to date. Donor flexibility and commitment to financing this function has been a key enabler of the adaptive management approach applied within SusWASH.

Box 2: Example indicators used to measure change

- Government demonstrate greater commitment and leadership for WASH.
- Increased budget for WASH, particularly capital maintenance costs.
- Government and service providers use WASH data to inform their decision making.
- Communities actively engage with user feedback mechanisms (particularly women and marginalised people).
- Concerns raised by communities are addressed by service authorities/providers in a timely manner.
- District plans incorporate full life-cycle cost components.
- MIS uses harmonised indicators aligned to the WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme (JMP).

- **Zainab, 35, and her husband, Tamachi, sitting with their daughter, Sana, on a pakha they made in the village of Tamachi Mallah, Union Council Doomani, District Thatta, Province Sindh, Pakistan, May 2018.**

2.4 Measuring change

A shift in focus towards system change requires a change in the way we measure change/success. The SusWASH programme has led WaterAid to develop an organisational system change measurement framework. This is being developed with support from the Osprey Foundation and is being piloted by the SusWASH CPs. It continues to evolve and will be reviewed and adapted with the aim of rolling it out to all WaterAid CPs in 2021.

The framework loosely builds on the building block assessment but enables recording of information that details interactions and leverage points, so we can capture how the system is functioning. Updating the framework involves five steps: steps 1 and 2 record the characteristics of the district or province where work is targeted, including the strength of each system building block. In step 3, priority weaknesses are recorded along with planned approaches and partnerships needed to resolve them. Step 3 also involves definition of context-specific, time-bound short-, medium- and long-term outcomes. Example indicators to measure change are listed in Box 2. Steps 4 and 5 involve recording progress against indicators, setbacks and lessons learned. While the framework focuses largely on progress made at the city/district/provincial level, efforts and progress made at higher levels can also be recorded.

We have found that transitions between one building block state and another take significant time. It is therefore necessary to look for evidence of change as a lead indicator along the way. In SusWASH, we define evidence of change as positive or negative results that are indicative of progress towards outcomes. These are not necessarily transitions from one building block state to another.



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