Uganda
Evidence driving action

Context
WASH in HCF has been an advocacy objective for WaterAid Uganda since 2016, with an aim to shift the national narrative following the 2019 WHA resolution. The strategy was to generate evidence for WASH in HCF to inform government policy and standardisation of services – and work to improve awareness of the problem and attract powerful champions to drive forward national access.

WaterAid Uganda prioritised the strengthening of data and monitoring to uphold quality standards for WASH in HCF. However, a lack of WASH service levels baseline data and context-specific guidance to inform these changes hindered progress.

Barriers
The main barriers to progress on WASH in HCF were:

- **Absence of reporting and data.** A lack of clear information on gaps in service levels and weaknesses in management and financing of WASH facilities was a major barrier to moving the WASH in HCF agenda forward. This lack of data from Kampala and beyond hindered effective progress on improving access.

- **Lack of context-specific national standards** for quality WASH in HCF across Uganda.
Approach

WaterAid Uganda implemented a data gathering process for WASH in HCF in 2018 – which covered a large area to assist the MoH with data-based planning – and used this to engage and influence actors and decision makers. The initial assessment identified the actors, factors, gaps and relationships in the provision of WASH in HCF.

By 2020, and upon registering COVID-19 cases in Uganda, WaterAid initiated an assessment of WASH in HCF status in border towns; these towns were earmarked as critical to control the spread of the virus in Uganda. Following this, in partnership with UNICEF, WaterAid Uganda supported the MoH to conduct a nation-wide assessment of WASH in HCF using the mWater tool, to build a comprehensive picture of the baseline data.

The data highlighted an urgent need for political leadership to drive the scale up of WASH in HCF services. WaterAid used the global WASH days to engage high level political players to support the development of the national guidelines for WASH in HCF. In partnership with UNICEF, WaterAid Uganda then supported the MoH to develop and follow through approval of the WASH in HCF national guidelines. This was achieved by facilitating national and regional consultation meetings and providing technical assistance to support the development of the guidelines.

Evidence of change

There has been an initial commitment set out in national guidelines to increase resource allocation of water and sanitation, and preventive and promotive healthcare by 30%. This resource allocation comes from the Primary Health Care budget that goes to the HCF from the Central Ministry of Health.

Despite this success, the promised funds are not being allocated to WASH at facility level. WaterAid Uganda is working with local partners to highlight this challenge and help facility managers to plan and use this funding to improve WASH in HCF. The findings from the WASH in HCF assessment triggered discussions between the MoH, UNICEF and other WASH development partners around the development of national guidelines for WASH in HCF. This included establishing a National Task Team drawn from MoH, Ministry for Water and Environment, WaterAid, UNICEF and USAID to spearhead the development of the guidelines.

National standards and guidelines for WASH in HCF have been developed and validated by stakeholders. Once these are approved by the MoH the focus will shift to roll-out and uptake. The leadership of the MoH and involvement of Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA) on conducting the WASH in HCF assessment helped to ensure that the evidence gathered through the process then informed the content of the national guidelines. The guidelines will help to set a standard for WASH in HCF and make provisions for ensuring their adequate O&M.

Key lessons

Catalysing change in WASH in HCF was achieved in a number of ways:

- **Capacity building:** Building the capacity of line ministries, departments and agencies to lead the advocacy and evidence generation work is important to ensure ownership of the data and sustainability of actions. By situating the work within government mandated institutions and working in the background, WaterAid Uganda was able to support government ownership.
Flexibility: Initially only planned for the Greater Kampala metropolitan area, flexibility on expanding the WASH in HCF assessment in partnership with other stakeholders led to a longer process – but meant that the results were owned and actioned by the sector.

Build diverse partnerships: Working in partnership with academia, technical people, policy makers, and political allies helped to strengthen collective voice. Emory and Makerere universities strengthened the credibility and rigour of the findings – and WaterAid provided the technical capacity and expertise. The MoH was able to scale up the assessment and use the results to support policy and guideline development. Political allies had the power to ensure the new standards and guidelines were adopted.

Securing early ownership of data and engagement: Engaging stakeholders at all stages of the process helped gather support from decision makers. Presenting the evidence in a simple and target-audience appropriate format was instrumental in triggering a sense of urgency at the different levels of administration, including national and decentralised administrative units.

Ensuring quality in data collection and strategic dissemination: WaterAid Uganda used the data generated to publish rigorous evidence on the status of WASH in HCF, with a focus on maternal, newborn and child health outcomes (MNCH). Publishing studies in peer reviewed journals enhanced the credibility of the evidence and framing it around MNCH outcomes increased engagement with the findings.

Conclusions and recommendations

Evidence and data are key catalysts for change. WaterAid Uganda nurtured broad ownership of the evidence gathering process between ministry, political and academic champions from the start – establishing a diverse group of actors and decision makers with the right mix of skills and power.

Garnering the buy-in to the concept prior to collecting data enabled the diverse stakeholders to recognise their contribution to the journey, which further increased their commitment. Co-creating the study with all target stakeholders required a longer process than collecting data alone. Working in this way was more effective than publishing the results of the assessment and then looking for engagement and uptake of scale results. Engaging decision makers with the power to influence WASH meant that WaterAid Uganda was able to ensure that national policy and guidance was driven by evidence. WaterAid Uganda recommends:

Decision makers should establish collective plans and actions to close WASH related service gaps.

WASH and HCF actors should collaborate to generate evidence, leverage respective skills, and enhance ownership and commitment to act on the findings.