

Learning Synthesis Report

Lessons from the
SusWASH Programme
in Cambodia



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Measuring WASH Systems Change through Participatory Building Block Assessments



WaterAid

Executive Summary

WaterAid seeks to improve the sustainability and inclusion of water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services and behaviours by engaging with and strengthening WASH systems. WaterAid’s approach to strengthening the system involves a process of convening actors together to analyse the system and its context, implement strategic activities to overcome the barriers to sustainability and inclusion, and reflect and learn together about how WASH services can be improved. One key component of WaterAid’s analysis and monitoring of change in WASH systems is the use of tools based on WaterAid’s conceptualisation of ‘system building blocks’.

Over five years (2017-2022), the WaterAid Cambodia team has been implementing the [SusWASH programme](#) to strengthen WASH systems in Kampong Chhnang Province. We have used repeated annual participatory assessments of the WASH system building blocks (Figure i), together with government and non-government actors, to build sector understanding of systems thinking, identify and collaborate on sector priorities, monitor improvements in the local system and learn together about how to strengthen the WASH system. This report presents results from three case studies in Kampong Chhnang, and WaterAid Cambodia’s learning about the use of building block assessments. It specifically seeks to answer two learning questions:

1. What are the value, and limitations, of building block assessments for monitoring systems change?
2. How can building block assessments be conducted to maximise their usefulness?

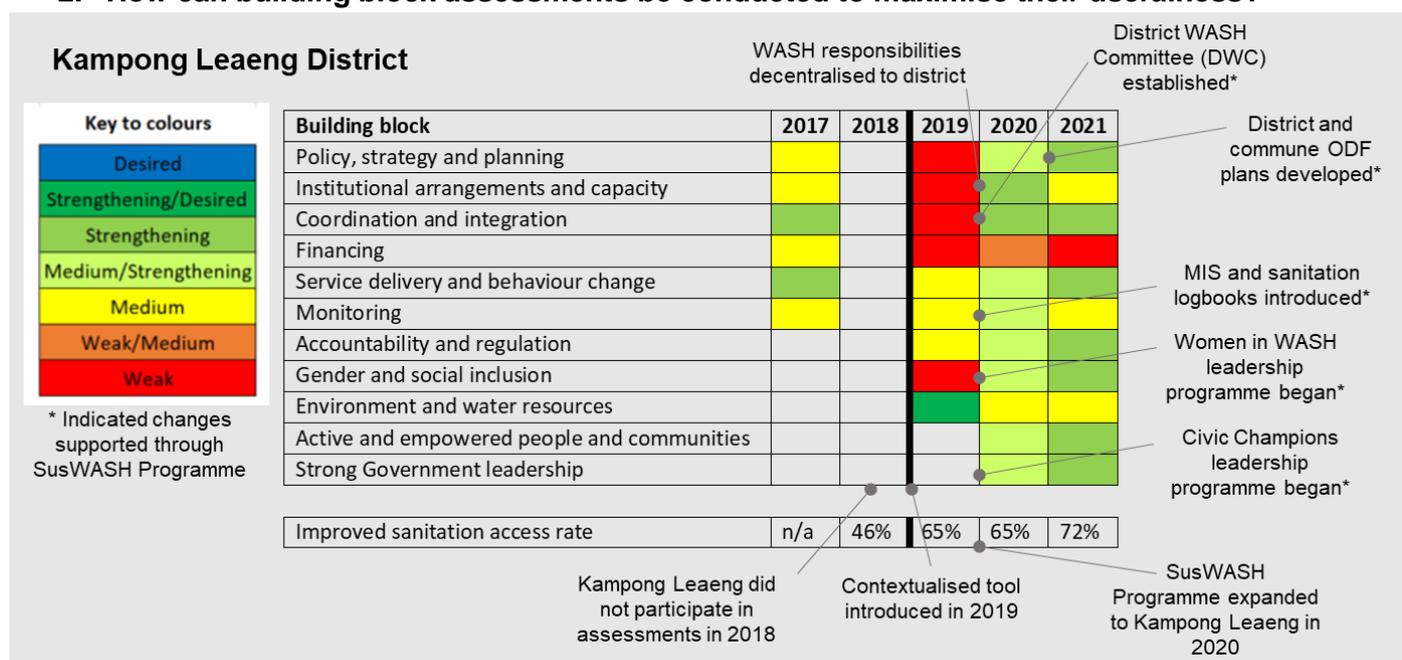


Figure i – Annotated results from Kampong Leaug District Building Block assessment.

After conducting five annual participatory building block assessments at provincial and district level in Kampong Chhnang Province, the WaterAid Cambodia team have learnt the following:

- **Participatory building block assessments add significant value to systems strengthening programming.** Annual reflections and discussions among sector actors provide a rhythm for iterations of action planning, reflection and adaptation. Convening diverse actors – such as government, rights groups, and private sector – to reflect together, is a powerful way of strengthening the relationships that make up the system. Involving rights groups and representatives of people who experience marginalisation (while considering Do No Harm principles) can contribute to building their agency and meaningful participation in the actions that emerge from the discussions.
- **Participatory building block assessments can help to introduce the concept of systems to actors who are less familiar with thinking in this way.** Building blocks of the system help to make the intangible ideas of a system’s functions more tangible (though simplified and siloed) and can provide a useful framework for building shared understanding of the needs and priorities for collaboration in order to improve various functions and components of the system.
- **Multi-year comparison of building block assessments over time can help to demonstrate changes in the system over time and contribute to evidence of the impact of systems strengthening programmes, but should be complemented by evidence from other monitoring sources.** Longitudinal comparisons which bring together the results from building block assessments with qualitative evidence of programme activities and other context changes, as well as quantitative evidence of service improvement can add depth to the narrative of a programme’s impact. However, the complex and non-linear nature of systems and challenges in determining causality and attribution to any one actor, factor or intervention mean building block assessments should be complemented by monitoring evidence from other sources such as interviews, capacity assessments and document reviews for monitoring programme impact.
- **Participatory building block assessments do not provide a standalone measure of overall system strength but can be strengthened by drawing on other sources of evidence.** While longitudinal comparison of the assessment results can help to visualise change occurring within the system over time, they do not provide a good measure of system strength at a point in time, because:
 - The results are very subjective. Participant understanding and knowledge of systems concepts, individuals’ and groups’ motives and interests, and the workshop format are just some of the factors which can affect how the building blocks are rated.

- Individual building block assessments do not necessarily reflect the functioning of the whole system.
- Building block descriptions are more likely to reflect whether a system function is being performed rather than the quality of its performance.
- Sensitive elements of the WASH system, such as relationships (both formal and informal), individuals' use of political influence to progress/prevent change in the WASH system, are not well captured in the building block framework.
- There is a question of whose vision for the system is embodied in the building block framework, which was introduced to local actors and defined by WaterAid. Co-defining the vision for the sector and co-developing the building block framework with multiple actors' may help empower and build ownership among actors.

Complementing the building block assessment results with evidence from other sources such as interviews with key actors in the context, surveys, capacity assessments, and desk reviews of policies and sector plans, strategies and working group meeting minutes can help to provide more rigorous and objective evidence on specific indicators to measure overall system strength.

The above lessons learnt indicate that there is significant value in including regular participatory building block assessments in WASH systems strengthening programming, but there are also many limitations in how the results can be used for monitoring. Based on this experience, WaterAid Cambodia recommends other organisations considering using building block assessments as part of their programme design, reflection and monitoring include:

1. **Contextualise the tool as much as possible and get the wording right.** Detailed descriptions can lead to more in-depth discussions. Aligning the descriptions with local terminology, core competencies and translations can help engage participants more meaningfully. Ensure that equity and inclusion considerations relevant to the context are integrated throughout.
2. **Consider co-developing the tool with governmental and non-governmental actors.** Once sector actors understand their system better, involving them in tool development could build their ownership of the framework.
3. **Update the building blocks descriptions as the context and understanding of local 'good practice' changes.** It is better to forgo comparability in results from year-to-year (which should be done carefully due to the subjective assessment nature) than to be tied to poorly contextualised tools.

4. **Involve diverse actors in the participatory assessment process.** Making the assessment process participatory and inclusive, with representatives of rights groups and service users, brings more complete insights and promotes collective understanding of the system.
5. **Complement the participatory assessment process with a rigorous review of evidence and documentation.** Drawing on other sources of evidence can complement, overcome and explain some of the subjectivity in the participatory assessments.
6. **Take good notes of building block assessment discussions.** The assessment results are most meaningful when they are justified by notes from the assessment discussion. Voice recording and video interviews can also capture these insights.
7. **Allow sufficient time for discussion and documentation.** Anticipating long discussions can allow time to build consensus, commitment and action plans.
8. **Host separate discussions with each district/area where possible.** Including participants from just one district can encourage more open discussion, reduce biases and provide opportunities for in-depth mentoring between facilitators and participants and among participants themselves. Averaging or aggregating of results across multiple districts or at a provincial level should also be avoided.
9. **Avoid showing the previous years' result before completing the assessment.** Doing so can influence the results of the current assessment or narrow the discussion too into what changes have been observed rather than the current state of the sector system.
10. **Consider assessing a subset of prioritised building blocks.** Rather than feeling obligated to assess all building blocks each time, consider the sector's priorities and how the assessment can generate the most value.

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I. Introduction

Ensuring that water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services are available to everyone, and that services and safe WASH behaviours are sustainable over time, requires a strong WASH system. WaterAid seeks to improve the sustainability and inclusion of WASH services by engaging with and strengthening the WASH system: all the actors (people and institutions), factors (social, economic, political, environmental, and technological) and the interactions between them that influence WASH systems. WaterAid’s approach to strengthening the system involves a process of convening actors together to analyse the system and its context, implement strategic activities to overcome the barriers to sustainability and inclusion, and reflect and learn together about how WASH services can be improved. One key component of WaterAid’s analysis and monitoring of change in WASH systems is the use of tools based on WaterAid’s conceptualisation of ‘system building blocks’ (Figure 1).

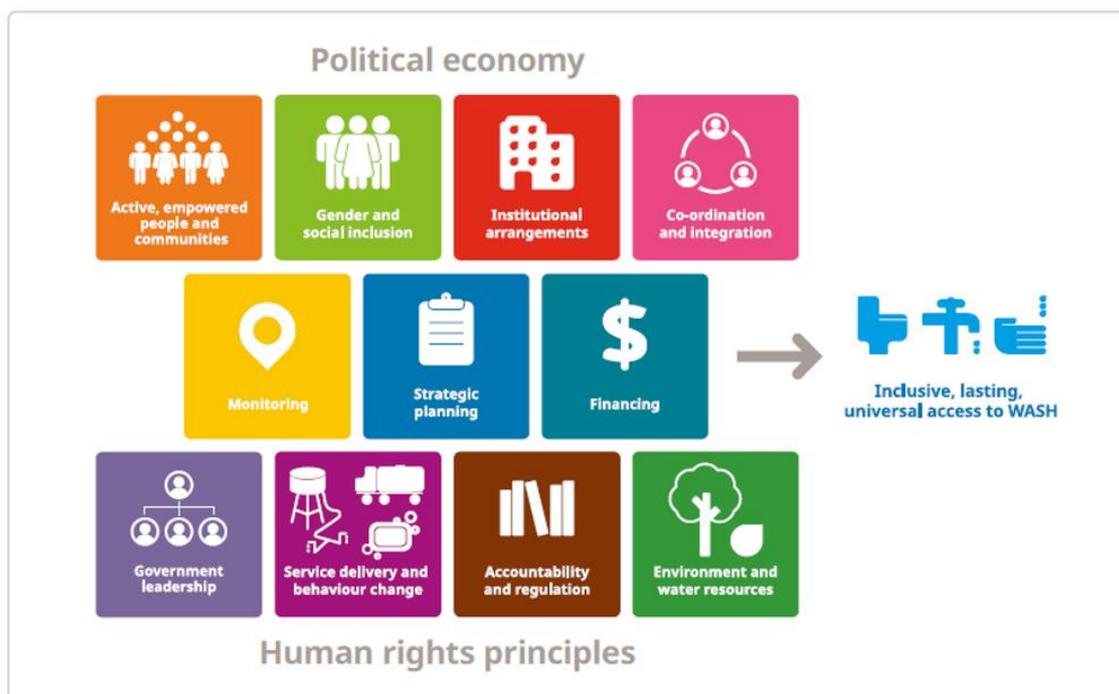


Figure 1 – WASH system building blocks, contextualised within the political economy and supported by human rights principles. (WaterAid)

Over the five years (2017-2022) of the H&M Foundation-funded [SusWASH programme](#) WaterAid has been learning about how to practically strengthen WASH systems. During this time, WaterAid Cambodia has engaged WASH sector actors in Kampong Chhnang Province in analysis and continuous improvement of the WASH system by facilitating annual participatory building block assessments to collectively identify priority areas of collaboration.

WaterAid's framework for 'system building blocks' is just one of many developed by multilateral institutions and international non-government organisations (NGO)s since the building blocks of a health system were first documented by the World Health Organisation (2007). This learning note does not seek to critique or promote any particular articulation of building blocks but to demonstrate the results of applying them in participatory practice and the lessons learned from the practice of participatory building block assessments in the SusWASH programme in Cambodia. WaterAid acknowledges that assessments of building blocks, as one approach to a system-wide factor assessment, are not a panacea for monitoring change within a system, and need to be complemented by other monitoring approaches (World Health Organisation 2007; WaterAid 2019; Hollander 2020). Further, WaterAid Cambodia does not purport to have perfected the use of building block assessments. Nevertheless, five-years into an ongoing learning journey on how to strengthen WASH systems, WaterAid feel there are lessons to be shared about how building block assessments have made a useful contribution to tracking change in the WASH system in Cambodia, understanding the contribution the SusWASH programme has made to strengthening the WASH system in Cambodia, and in programme design and adaptation more broadly.

WaterAid Cambodia used a case study approach over a period of five-years of participatory building block assessments. This approach testing and assessing indicators of system strength within three case studies over time, and comparing between these three case studies to draw out lessons and recommendations for future practice. This report summarises WaterAid Cambodia's learning and specifically seeks to answer two learning questions:

- 1. What are the value, and limitations, of building block assessments for monitoring systems change?**
- 2. How can building block assessments be conducted to maximise their usefulness?**

II. Background: Five Years of Evolution in Participatory Building Block Assessments

As part of the SusWASH programme start-up and context analysis in 2017, WaterAid Cambodia used a WaterAid tool, developed globally, to facilitate analysis and reflection among provincial and district WASH actors in Kampong Chhnang province on six WASH system building blocks: coordination, strategic planning, financing, institutional arrangements, service delivery and monitoring. The assessment involved groups of participants discussing the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges of each building block before reading descriptions of each building block at a range of progressively stronger 'states' and identifying which description best reflected that building block in their context (Figure 2), and to generate

ideas for actions which actors could undertake to improve the situation. The results of these assessments were used to design WaterAid’s interventions at Provincial level and at District level in two districts: Rolea Bier and Samakki Meanchey.

	Emergency WASH	Fragile but strengthening	Transitional	Desired – all actors using District systems
Coordination	Humanitarian actors coordinated through WASH Cluster by UNICEF – no one working on long term development	No coordination of agencies	Geographical coordination of agencies within the district	Agencies aligned behind comprehensive district level strategy/policy
Strategic planning	OCHA Humanitarian Action Plan or government relief plans, no development plan	Plan responding to donor priorities – sustainability not addressed	Plan in place to extend services but not to sustain them	Credible plan to deliver sustained universal access.
Financing	Emergency spending directly through NGOs and UN Agencies	No fiscal decentralized spending. Donor spending on District Plan (“On Plan”) – not covering lifecycle costs	Fiscal decentralization and donor spending on capital costs. “On Budget” but not covering lifecycle costs.	Full fiscal decentralization, external support agencies channel funds through District accounts (“On Treasury”). Lifecycle costs matched to sources of finance.

Figure 2 – Extract from general/global WaterAid building block assessment tool. See Appendix A for full tool

One year later, in 2018, WaterAid reconvened provincial and district WASH sector actors to reflect again on the same six building blocks to assess change. After discussing the many positive changes achieved together during the first 12 months, WaterAid expected to see this reflected by building blocks moving to higher states in the assessment exercise. However, when completing the building block assessment again, some of the groups selected the same building block state and many selected lower states which indicated deterioration.

Follow up discussions and reflections among the WaterAid staff facilitating the discussion groups indicated that these results likely occurred for two reasons:

- a) Participants had grown in their understanding of the functions of the WASH system and were more aware of the need for improvement¹; and
- b) The assessment tool was too generic and the progress-markers in the tool were not specific enough to the Cambodia context to capture the changes which participants had identified.

A revised tool, contextualised to the Cambodia context was subsequently developed and used in 2019, 2020 and 2021 to repeat the exercise (Figure 3). The building blocks were revised in line with WaterAid’s global framework of the building blocks of the WASH system (Figure 1), including changes to the descriptions and additions of building blocks for accountability and regulation, gender and social inclusion (GSI), and environment and water resources in 2019, and active and empowered people and communities, and government leadership in 2020. In 2020 WaterAid’s programming activities were scaled from just two

¹ In a related journal paper WaterAid identified positive progress in terms of participants’ capacity and mindset towards their roles as a key positive outcome from the participatory building block assessments (Kimbugwe et al. 2022), but this greater awareness complicates longitudinal results comparison.

districts to providing (more limited) support to all seven districts and one municipality in the province, with the Provincial Department of Rural Development (PDRD) and Rolea Bier and Samakki Meanchey districts acting as exemplars, role models, and mentors to the other districts.

Building Block	Weak	Medium	Strengthening	Desired – all actors using sub-national sector systems
 Sector Coordination and integration	PTWG exists on paper but inactive District WASH committees do not exist CCWC exists but does not prioritise WASH	PTWG meet irregularly but limited ongoing commitment and department representatives are not consistent District WASH committee exists on paper but limited activity and engagement by commune and district authorities.	PTWG meet regularly and is skilfully led by secretariat District WASH committee meets regularly. Information sharing is good between actors within PTWG and District WASH committee but the two groups don't share	Agencies aligned behind comprehensive government-led strategy and there is strong communication flows between governmental levels
 Strategic planning	PAP exists but is not well known or understood Districts do not have a WASH plan or targets	PAP is known by sector actors. PAP focuses on extending services but not clear plan to sustain services Districts have a plan for WASH but it is not well integrated into district and commune planning process	Government-led PAP and district plans are in place and all relevant departments, NGOs and private sector know about it. The WASH plans are partly integrated with district and commune investment and development planning	Province and district have a realistic plan to deliver sustained universal access, which is supported by non-government actors and by stated actors
 Financing	Finance for WASH is mostly from MRD/PDRD and NGOs. Some funding is available through MOI but budget and acquittal process is unclear. Funding does not follow any government strategic plan.	Decentralised funding is available through relevant national government and some communes and districts allocate funding to WASH. Financing only for new infrastructure (not for operations and maintenance)	PDRD, Districts, communes and other actors allocate spending aligned with district WASH plan. Lifecycle costs are known and documented but only budgeted by private service providers.	Full fiscal decentralization, external support agencies channel funds through District accounts ("On Treasury"). Lifecycle costs matched to sources of finance.

Figure 3 – Extract from WaterAid Cambodia contextualised building block summary tool. See Appendix B for full tool

In 2021, restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic required changes to the assessment process by hosting smaller workshops in each district rather than gathering districts together. This provided further opportunities to reflect on and improve the assessment process. The assessment process and tools used over the five years are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1 – Evolution of building block assessments conducted in the SusWASH programme in Cambodia

Year	Description of assessment process	Building block tool used
2017	Two separate assessment workshops: one with Rolea Bier district and representatives from 13 communes, and one at provincial level involving provincial department representatives and representatives of six districts and one municipality (provincial assessment results reflect the average of provincial government, district governments, and NGOs).	General/global WaterAid building block tool (Figure 2).
2018	One assessment workshop at provincial level involving representatives of provincial departments and two districts: Rolea Bier and Samakki Meanchey.	General/global WaterAid building block tool (Figure 2).
2019	One assessment workshop involving representatives of provincial departments, seven districts and one municipality. Assessment conducted at district level only and provincial summary determined as average of all district results.	Contextualised WaterAid Cambodia building block tool (Figure 3)
2020	One assessment workshop at provincial level involving representatives of provincial departments, seven districts and one municipality.	Contextualised WaterAid Cambodia building block tool (Figure 3)
2021	Nine separate assessment workshops, eight at district level involving representatives of one district / municipality and its respective communes and one at provincial level involving provincial departments.	Contextualised WaterAid Cambodia building block tool (Figure 3)

III. Building Block Assessment Results and Discussion

Building Block Assessment Results

The following figures present visual summaries of the results of five years' building block assessments, annotated with significant changes in the context observed by assessment participants, in three case-studies; at the provincial level in Kampong Chhnang (Figure 4) and in two districts: Rolea Bier (Figure 5), which was a SusWASH programming area from 2017, and Kampong Leaeng (Figure 6), which was part of a province-wide expansion of the SusWASH Programme in 2020. Sanitation access data from the Provincial Department of Rural Development is also provided for years for which it is available. Detailed notes from the assessments can be found in Appendix C to E.

Kampong Chhnang Province

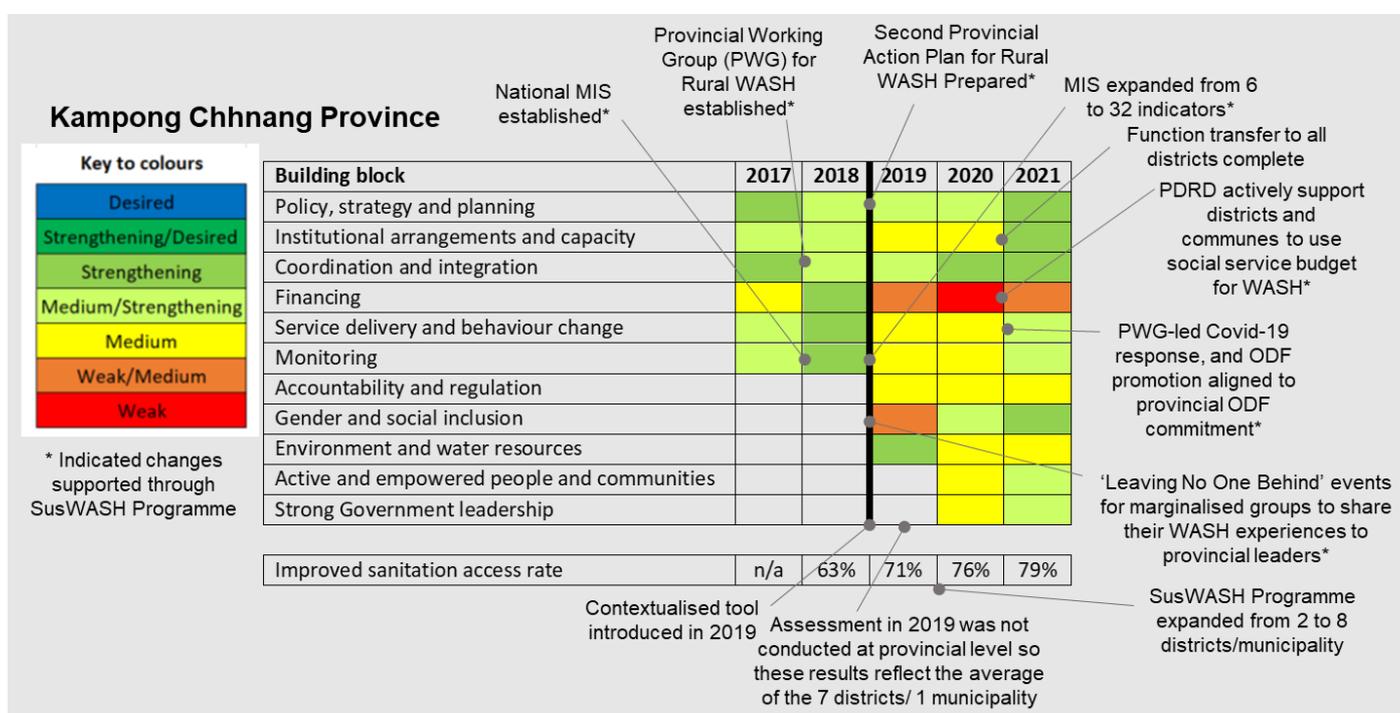


Figure 4 – Annotated results from Kampong Chhnang Province Building Block assessment. See Appendix C for full results

The building blocks assessment at Provincial level from 2019-21 (Figure 4) indicate the most significant improvements have been in the building blocks of institutional arrangements and capacity, and GSI. Financing has consistently been one of the weakest building blocks. During the five years that SusWASH has engaged with the Kampong Chhnang Provincial WASH sector significant changes have included the establishment of the Provincial Working Group (PWG) for rural WASH to coordinate provincial WASH efforts, decentralisation and clarification of WASH responsibilities to district level, the roll-out and evolution

of the Management Information System (MIS) for Rural WASH, and the development of the second Provincial WASH Action Plan.

There does not appear to be a strong alignment between the significant changes observed and the ratings given by participants in the Provincial level assessment. While some building block ratings progressed in line with the significant events mentioned, such as the decentralisation of WASH functions to districts and the establishment of the MIS, other significant changes did not correspond with building blocks progressing from one state to another, such as the creation of the second Provincial Action Plan for WASH or the establishment of the PWG. Sanitation access has been increasing steadily across Kampong Chhnang province, reaching 79% in 2021 compared to 63% in 2018.

Rolea Bier District

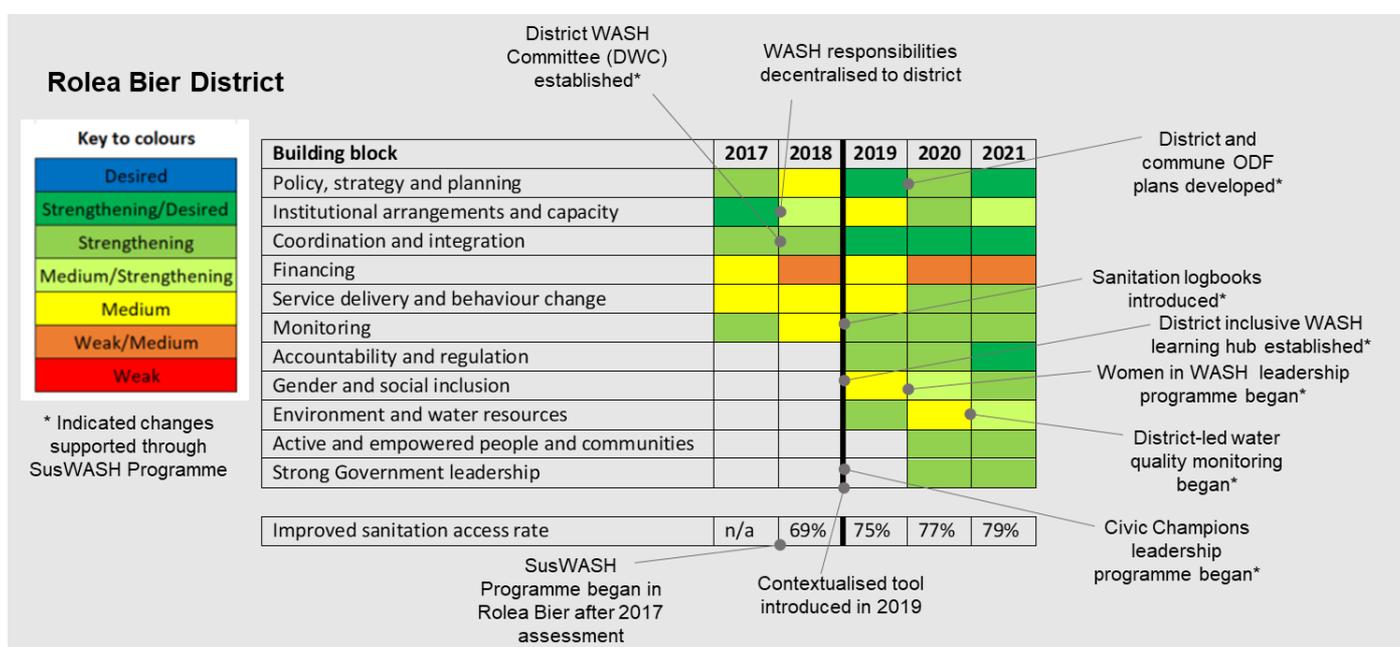


Figure 5 – Annotated results from Rolea Bier District Building Block assessment. See Appendix D for full results

WaterAid began supporting Rolea Bier district after the 2017 context analysis. The generally negative progress noted in building block ratings given in 2018 (Figure 5) was one of the reasons the WaterAid Cambodia team decided to revise the tools used for the building block assessment. For example, comments relating to the improved coordination by the District WASH Committee (DWC), roll-out of a district-wide WASH assessment and small improvement in WASH finance allocation indicated progress while the corresponding building blocks of coordination, monitoring and financing stayed constant or regressed in their assessment results. With a deeper understanding of their WASH responsibilities, and

WASH in general, local actors appeared to have a greater appreciation of the many aspects of the system that needed improvement and therefore scored the building blocks much more critically.

Since 2019, the most significant improvements in WASH system building blocks noted in Rolea Bier were in GSI, which likely reflects the relative focus of the SusWASH program on strengthening GSI through gender dialogues and women’s leadership and the establishment of an inclusive WASH learning hub. Positive trends were also seen in service delivery and behaviour change, and accountability and regulation. Coordination and integration was consistently assessed as the strongest building block which corresponds with the strong functioning of the DWC, while financing was most consistently assessed as weakest, reflecting the ongoing challenges all districts face in financing WASH in a context where functions for WASH have been transferred to the districts but fiscal decentralisation is still limited. Change in several building blocks including institutional arrangements and capacity, policy, strategy and planning, and environment and water resources has been variable. Sanitation access has been increasing steadily in Rolea Bier, reaching 79% in 2021 compared to 69% in 2018. Since 2019 logbooks have been used in every village and reported through commune and district WASH meetings.

Kampong Leaeng District

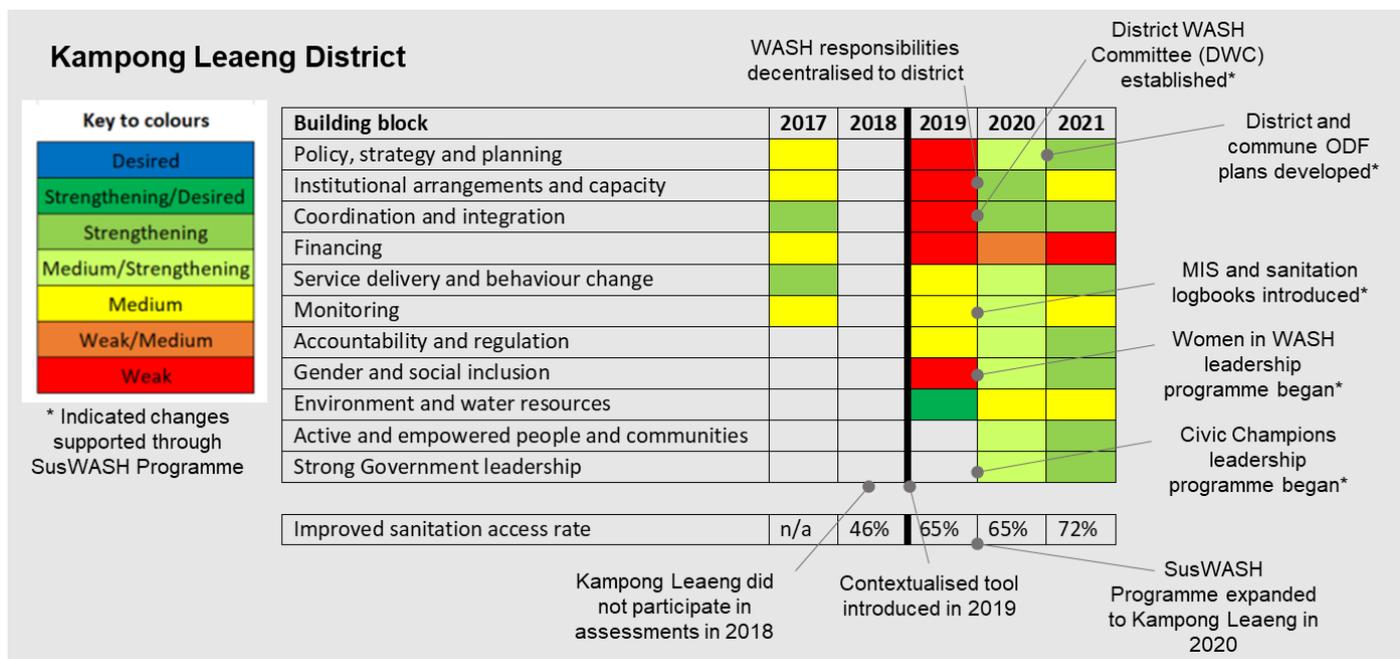


Figure 6 – Annotated results from Kampong Leaeng District Building Block assessment. See Appendix E for full results

WaterAid began supporting Kampong Leaeng district in 2020.² Since then the district participants' assessments of the building blocks (Figure 6) indicate significant improvement in many building blocks, especially policy strategy and planning, institutional arrangements and capacity, coordination and integration, service delivery and behaviour change and GSI. These changes correspond strongly with significant events in the district WASH system – development of ODF plans, decentralisation of WASH responsibilities, creation of a DWC and its leadership of systematic behaviour change promotion, and training and discussion about gender and the needs of marginalised groups. As with other districts and the provincial level, WASH financing remains the weakest building block. Sanitation access has also been increasing in Kampong Leaeng, though prior to 2020 there was not a consistent district-wide logbook system to collect this information.

Notes on reading/interpreting the results

The three longitudinal case studies appear to present evidence that participants observed strengthening in the building blocks of the Kampong Chhnang WASH system over the five years of the SusWASH Programme. The strength of this evidence is improved by considering the context of significant changes occurring (included as annotations in figures above and in full text in the appendices), and the improvement in access to sanitation in the programming areas.

There are several caveats with which these results should be interpreted:

- The ratings themselves are subjective (see section on limitations) and should be interpreted within the annotations provided. We observed that the building block ratings based on the descriptions in the tools (Appendix A-B) in some instances do not match the justifications provided in the groups' notes (Appendix C-E).
- The introduction of the new contextualised tool means comparability between the results of 2017-18 and the results of 2019-20 should be avoided. The contextualised tool appears to have improved both the alignment between discussion notes and participants' assessment results as well as improving the detail in the note-taking (see Appendices).
- As system strengthening is premised on stronger systems leading to more sustainable and equitable services, the results should also be considered alongside the WASH service access. In Kampong Chhnang the best data available as a proxy indicator for services is sanitation access rates. While the sanitation rates have increased along with the building block ratings (and in some

² Kampong Leaeng participated in the provincial-level discussions and reflected on the building blocks in their district as part of the 2017 assessment but WaterAid did not begin actively supporting Kampong Leaeng district until 2020.

cases ahead of it), it is hard to draw a causal link for many reasons, two of which include: these increasing trends are Cambodia-wide; and there is an inherent dilemma that the reliability of government WASH data is often limited without the system strengthening interventions that establish processes for monitoring, validating and reporting service data. In Kampong Chhnang sanitation logbooks have been progressively rolled out since 2018, and since 2020 are being routinely used for reporting progress towards ODF targets at most commune, district and province WASH meetings.

- The discussion and results will vary based on the boundaries (such as geographical boundaries, or considerations of which actors are/are not part of the WASH system) placed on ‘the system’ when it being discussed. We have learnt that averaging results between different contexts, such as between provincial and district levels or between multiple districts, as was done for the provincial results from 2017 and 2019, should therefore be avoided. This is based on two observations:
 - Averages mask significant difference and variation. When we produced the 2019 provincial level assessment as the average of seven districts and one municipality it masked the significant difference between Rolea Bier and Samakki Meanchey and the districts which were not yet part of the SusWASH programme (such as Kampong Leaeng).
 - Systems look different and may perform differently at different levels: for example the role of government in service delivery differs at provincial level compared to district or commune level, or the capacity to manage data and monitoring was notably higher among provincial staff than district staff.
- Finally, the names of the different ‘states’ changed between the two assessment tools used, but also varied in how they were used in Khmer in workshop results and in English in reporting, reflecting changes in the building block framework WaterAid uses at a global level and also improvements in translation. For the purposes of this comparison we have assumed that the scales are commensurate since in all years we have used four increasing ‘states’ of the building blocks and consistent colours (notwithstanding that this report has coloured the desired state blue for easier differentiation).

What the results tell us about WASH system strengthening

The visual results of these building block assessments over time have taught us a number of lessons about WASH system strengthening, which support other documented observations about change in complex systems:

- **Change in WASH systems can take a long time.** Some aspects of the system can take a long time to understand and shift (WaterAid, 2020). This is especially true of underlying attitudes and norms which determine who makes decisions and how, particularly to do with issues around gender and social inclusion which are entrenched in social and cultural ways of thinking. It is also true of more tangible but highly political aspects of the system such as the flow of resources and information.
- **Change in WASH systems can also happen rapidly.** When people, activities and priorities align and the timing is right, the system can change rapidly. “Sometimes identifying and shifting a key lever sets the whole system in motion towards a more desirable end state” (Foster-Fishman et al., 2007). In the example of Kampong Leaeng decentralisation reform, an appetite for change among district leaders and WaterAid’s expansion of programming support coincided to change the way the WASH system functioned rapidly.
- **External factors can have a significant impact on the system.** During the past five years, decisions, actions and changes in context outside Kampong Chhnang had major impacts on how the WASH system in the province functioned. Examples include national decentralisation reforms which shifted responsibilities for rural WASH from the province to the district level, and the COVID-19 pandemic which changed sector priorities and ways of working.
- **The WASH system’s performance is different than the sum of building block performance.** What systems literature refers to as emergence, the idea that ‘a system emerges from the interactions of individual units’ (Marion, 1999), is sometimes used to explain how a group is stronger/smarter than the sum of its individual members. In the above results we can consider that they tell a different story when considered building block by building block rather than as a group. For example, the generally positive trend across most building blocks might create an impression that the system’s performance has dramatically improved, whereas in reality many discussions each year highlighted the pervasive challenges of financing which limit the overall impact of the positive gains in other components on the ultimate objective of improved WASH service provision. As another example, the progress observed in the gender and social inclusion building block in each district appears promising but the detailed comments in appendix indicate that GSI is often a weak aspects within other building blocks such as limited opportunities for women in leadership.
- **Change in WASH systems is not linear, and often unpredictable** (Ramalingam et al., 2008; WaterAid, 2019). Linked closely to the three points above, the results show that strengthening a system is not a predictable progression but one characterised by progress in some aspects accompanied by a sense of stagnation or even deterioration in others aspects. Anecdotally, weak

political interest in WASH at a provincial level limited coordination and planning for years but unexpected changes in leadership in 2019 and 2020 and national pressure led to many changes observable in the 2020-21 results. Further, the interconnected and interdependent nature of the building blocks means that when ‘breakthroughs’ occur in bottlenecks in one aspect of the system they may prompt unpredictable changes in other components. Functional decentralisation of responsibilities and clearer roles for districts in WASH led to perceived improvements in service delivery and accountability though the sanitation access rate did not necessarily reflect this. Conversely, the limited ability of districts to fulfil their decentralised mandate exaggerated known challenges in complex financing and accounting processes and limited budgets and reinforced negative perceptions of the finance building block.

- **There is no one correct entry point to strengthen the system, but some points seem to be more (or less) effective in some contexts.** In all of the districts where WaterAid engaged in Kampong Chhnang, an early entry point was to inspire or facilitate the district to create a coordination committee. This initially emerged organically from an exchange visit we arranged to take the Rolea Bier and Samakki Meanchey leaders to visit the first Open Defecation Free (ODF) district in Cambodia, Banteay Meas, and the discussions the leaders held with their district peers. The committees and their regular meetings provided the structure through which many of the other changes occurred in each of the districts, providing a leverage point that changed information flows, feedback loops and the distribution of decision-making power (Meadows, 1999). However, the creation of the Provincial equivalent to DWCs, the PWG, which was prompted by national government decree and which WaterAid also supported, was not a comparable catalyst for change, due to different roles, responsibilities, leadership and power structures at provincial level.

IV. What are the value, and limitations, of building block assessments for monitoring of systems strengthening?

In reflecting on what the value and limitations of the assessments have been, we have considered four aspects of their usefulness for monitoring.

As a tool to measure overall system strength

When supported by qualitative evidence of context changes, and quantitative evidence of service improvement, consecutive building block assessments do help to visualise system change. However, WaterAid Cambodia feels they do not provide a standalone approach for measuring overall system strength, for several reasons:

- **The assessment results are very subjective.** There are many reasons for this.
 - Two groups presented with the same information/situation may provide a different rating making comparison problematic between districts or years where different participants were involved.
 - Even adding or removing one outspoken participant from a group may be enough to shift the groups' discussion results.
 - Participants may have competing individual or group motives for rating their district's performance more weakly or strongly.
 - Participants' understanding, awareness and confidence to discuss systems concepts, may influence the perceived strength of building blocks. As identified in the Rolea Bier example, improved understanding of system building blocks led to detailed qualitative reflections about progress but lower ratings, perhaps indicating realisation of how much more effort was needed. Confidence to critically discuss and apply abstract concepts like coordination, inclusion and leadership appears to have changed over time³ and so the building block assessment results could be interpreted as a reflection of participant knowledge and confidence as much as of changes within the building blocks.
 - In 2021 when districts hosted separate workshops due to COVID-19 restrictions, the WaterAid Cambodia team observed that the dynamics of the discussion were very different to previous years:
 - More district and commune participants were able to participate than the smaller group of delegates to the provincial workshop, which added more perspectives and more evidence-based discussion such as verification from communes about the allocation of budget or engagement with community through public forums;
 - The participants felt more confident to share honestly among their colleagues, especially on sensitive issues like inter-staff relationships, financial issues and the aspects of their work plans that they had not completed.
- **The individual building blocks assessments do not necessarily reflect the functioning of the whole system** (WaterAid, 2019; Hollander, 2020). The abovementioned idea of emergence (the whole is different to the sum of its parts) means that while the changes in each building block can give an indication of how components of the system are changing, it would be misleading to assess

³ A survey conducted with provincial and district staff in July 2021 indicated that most participants felt they had a stronger capacity to understand and evaluate WASH sector needs because of their engagement with the SusWASH Programme.

the performance of the whole system by summing or averaging of the building block results. This is highlighted further when comparing the sanitation access rates with the building block assessments; the largest jumps in sanitation access in all three cases were reported between 2018 and 2019, which predates the apparent improvements in system building block assessments in Kampong Leang and most other districts in the province (though this may also reflect reliability issues in the sanitation data prior to the establishment of the systematic province-wide sanitation monitoring).

- **Building block descriptions are more likely to reflect whether a system function is being performed rather than the quality of its performance** (WaterAid, 2019). It is relatively easy to say that because a Provincial Working Group (PWG) exists, coordination has improved. However, in Kampong Chhnang it took several years and a change in leadership before the PWG coordinated the sector regularly and effectively. Qualitative metrics such as effectiveness, meaningfulness of participation and empowerment, transparency and accountability are not easily captured without more detailed discussion and documentation.
- **Factors of more sensitive nature are not well captured in the building block framework.** WaterAid's experience in Kampong Chhnang has highlighted the importance of political and relational factors of the system to how the system functions, factors which may be sensitive to discuss and are not well assessed in the building block assessment. For example, the building blocks do not reflect the improved connections and communication between actors (both inter-governmental, as well as between government and NGOs and private sector) who operated more in isolation prior to 2017. Similarly, leadership changes at provincial level in 2019 and 2020 led to greater political will for WASH which undoubtedly influenced how other actors prioritised WASH efforts, but these were not explicitly named in the assessments.
- **There is a question of whose vision for the system is embodied in the building block framework.** In both the initial global tool and the contextualised tool, the descriptions for the building blocks at each state were written by WaterAid. These were based on WaterAid's observations and experience of the context but do not necessarily reflect the vision or intended future direction of other Kampong Chhnang WASH sector actors. Co-developing the framework with the participants would have been nearly impossible in 2017 due to the limited experience of participants in thinking about WASH systems and limited exposure to different systems in other contexts. However, future iterations of assessments and tools would benefit from a more empowering co-development process.

Identifying and assessing indicators for overall system strength (such as levels of collaboration and interconnectedness between actors, accountability and responsiveness of service providers to service

users, and satisfaction of service users) could be informed by the results of the participatory building block assessments. However this kind of monitoring should be complemented by evidence from other sources such as interviews with key sector actors, service level and satisfaction surveys, capacity assessments and desk reviews of policies and sector plans, strategies or working group meeting minutes. Presenting the longitudinal results with annotations and supporting evidence of change in service levels, as in this report, is one way of doing this.

As a tool to measure programme impact

When presented side-by-side with key activities and changes in the context of Kampong Chhnang, the building block assessment does provide evidence of the impact of WaterAid's SusWASH Programme.

The qualitative descriptions of assessment participants acknowledge and highlight the usefulness of many of the activities and changes supported through the programme, as shown in the annotations. These include, but are not limited to: establishment of DWCs, roll-out and use of monitoring processes to measure sanitation progress, leadership development programmes, and growing focus on supporting services for marginalised groups. They also provide clear documentation that later government-led changes built on the results of initially WaterAid-supported activities such as the DWCs using the results of the sanitation monitoring to develop district ODF plans.

As mentioned above, the complex, non-linear and unpredictable nature of WASH systems, and the influence of external context factors mean that care must be taken not to attribute changes in the system to WaterAid's programming. WaterAid has been conscious that even the changes in which are relatively easy to identify our contribution, such as the establishment of coordination, monitoring or feedback mechanisms are not attributable solely to our activities; without the leadership and action of district and provincial authorities and communities these changes would not have occurred or been sustained. WaterAid can only be considered to have contributed to such changes in the system and care should be taken not to claim more credit than is due.

The building block assessments were not the only monitoring tool used to measure the impact of the SusWASH programme in Cambodia. A separate Theory of Change was developed, and later adapted, which articulates intended outcomes and intermediate outcomes of the programme. This Theory of Change was based on and complemented by the building block assessments, but with more targeted focus on the priorities which WaterAid felt able to contribute to. Ongoing monitoring of the Theory of Change drew on the building block assessment discussions but also included regular reflections and WaterAid staff

observations from events, interviews, and surveys. Such an approach was able to respond to some of the qualitative challenges, and attribution/contribution challenges mentioned above.

As a tool for programme design, reflection and adaptation

The greatest contribution the building block assessments made to the SusWASH Programme in Cambodia was to provide an annual rhythm of iterative planning, reflection and adaptation. While regular reflections were held on the effectiveness of specific activities, and the WASH sector took on its own quarterly and monthly review cycles at provincial and district level respectively, the annual building block assessment workshops were the primary occasion at which the entire WASH sector in the province or district reflected comprehensively together on how they were performing across a range of functions. Many actions and changes to the activities and priorities of WaterAid and other actors emerged from these annual events; for example the 2018 assessment prompted the provincial department to roll-out a province-wide sanitation monitoring system and the 2019 assessment discussions formed the basis for WaterAid's programming pivot to expand support to all districts in the province. The annual deeper-dive discussions also helped to keep various actors updated of developments and changes in the context pertaining to WASH.

The building block assessment was just one part of these reflection workshops and discussions about strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and priority actions within each building block, as well as activities to share lessons learnt and review political willingness among key WASH actors. It would be possible to establish a productive reflection cycle without the use of building block assessments, but the assessment did provide a useful means of consolidating and documenting these broader discussions.

As a means of building systems thinking among sector actors

When the SusWASH Programme began in Kampong Chhnang, the context analysis indicated that most actors focused on just one specific activity or function for WASH, such as an NGO strengthening sanitation markets, private sector actors providing piped water, or a lone district officer bearing the responsibility for monitoring government water and sanitation progress across the entire district. Talking about the WASH sector system was a new way for an NGO to engage in the province, as most previous NGO programmes were focused on constructing infrastructure and direct service provision. The first explanation of the building blocks was met with a degree of confusion about such intangible concepts as 'institutional arrangements' and 'strategy' and individuals' ability to locate themselves and their organisation's role within

them. These concepts become more familiar with repeated exposure and experience,⁴ and this is seen in the depth of discussion and note-taking emerging from many building block assessments in the later years of the programme.

The building blocks provide a (simplified) lens through which provincial and district actors can consider the otherwise intangible system and to discuss and compare its various functions and components. Some districts fixed the building block assessment on the wall of their office to remind them of the various aspects of their WASH roles. Repeated use of the building block assessments built a collective understanding of the status of different components of the system and priorities for change. Without this collective understanding and a shared framework for discussion, collaboration on multi-stakeholder efforts such as joint-planning, monitoring systems, and accountability mechanisms between district authorities and community members from marginalised would have been much harder to progress, if at all. However, a shift towards systems thinking among the Kampong Chhnang sector was not necessarily dependent on use of building blocks and their assessments; national sector priorities such as the development of the MIS and a nationally-implemented more participatory process for developing the second phase of Provincial Action Plans for Rural WASH may have shifted the attention of provincial and district actors in this direction anyway, but there are indications from WaterAid's engagement in other provinces that the Kampong Chhnang sector is further advanced than most others in thinking about how the system contributes to sustainable and inclusive services.

It must also be noted that introducing and mainstreaming system thinking based on categorising the system into building block components or functions may ultimately limit or skew the sector understanding of the system in an unhelpful way. It may be difficult for provincial actors who have only analysed the system as building blocks to conceive the WASH system as a whole (which is different than the sum of its parts; Ramalingam et al., 2008), even though the results themselves highlight the interrelated and mutually reinforcing nature of these components. And if building blocks are introduced as the only way of modelling a system this may devalue the useful perspectives obtained from other system analyses, for example social network analysis of the WASH system as a network of co-dependent actors influenced by their various incentives, motivations and constraints (McNicholl, 2020).

⁴ A survey conducted with provincial and district staff in July 2021 indicated that most participants felt they had a stronger capacity to understand and evaluate WASH sector needs because of their engagement with the SusWASH Programme.

V. Recommendations: How can building block assessments be conducted to maximise their usefulness?

The above lessons learnt indicate that there is significant value in including participatory building block assessments in WASH systems strengthening programming, but there are also many limitations in how the results can be used for monitoring. The following section summarises WaterAid Cambodia's recommendations for other country teams planning to use building block assessment tools in order to maximise their effective use as a discussion, analysis, planning and monitoring tool.

Recommendations for the building block tool itself

- 1. Contextualise the tool as much as possible and get the wording right.** While adding detailed building block descriptions at each state means discussions take longer, the descriptions prompt more in-depth discussion and generate more useful insights. If translating the tools to a local language take special care to check terminology aligns with local sector norms and preferences. Have the tool reviewed by key sector actors before finalising it. Ensure that equity and inclusion considerations relevant to the context are integrated throughout.
- 2. Consider co-developing the tool.** Once sector actors have a strong enough understanding of the WASH system co-developing the descriptions for the tool can help to build ownership of the framework and ensure that the vision and direction of others beyond WaterAid are reflected in the descriptions.
- 3. Update the building block descriptions as the context and understanding of local 'good practice' changes.** Update the tool as the context changes or the understanding of the context matures. While comparison between results of different versions of the tool is not recommended, comparison between years should already be done with care due to the subjective nature of the assessment. Further, it is likely that building block descriptions that do not reflect the context will produce results that are harder to reconcile with the results of other years or districts.

Recommendations for the practical use of tools and workshop format

- 4. Involve diverse actors in the participatory assessment process.** Making the assessment process participatory and inclusive brings a variety of perspectives and insights about the situation to provide a more complete understanding. It also promotes a collective understanding of the WASH system, creation of shared plans and priorities and inter-actor comparison and competition to inspire action. Involving rights groups and representatives of people who experience

marginalisation (considering Do No Harm principles) can contribute to building their agency and meaningful involvement in the actions that emerge from the discussions.

5. **Complement the participatory assessment process with a rigorous review of evidence and documentation.** Spending some time to collate, analyse and present evidence from existing policies, reports and experience against each of the can add evidence and rigour to the assessment approach. Sharing and discussing findings from such a review can complement and overcome, or at least explain some of the subjectivity in the results from the participatory assessments.
6. **Take good notes of building block assessment discussions.** The assessment results are most meaningful when they are justified by notes from the assessment discussion. Voice recording and video interviews can also capture these insights.
7. **Allow sufficient time for discussion and documentation.** Capitalise on efforts to gather a range of actors by allowing additional time to discuss issues and encourage agreement and public commitment on priority actions moving forward.
8. **Host separate discussions with each district/area.** As mentioned above, an assessment including participants from only one district can encourage more honest and open discussion and reduce biases. While more time-intensive it also offer more chance for capacity building and mentoring between WaterAid staff and participants, and between participants themselves. Averaging or aggregating of results across multiple districts or at a provincial level should also be avoided as they mask difference and variation and because systems perform differently at different administrative levels.
9. **Avoid showing the previous years' result before the assessment.** Assessments conducted independently and with comparison to previous years after the discussion encourages reflection on the current state of each building block and avoids narrowing the discussion too quickly into what changes have been observed.
10. **Consider assessing a subset of prioritised building blocks.** Rather than feeling obligated to assess all building blocks each time, align with current sector priorities to optimise value from the assessments. In practice many of the discussions touch on issues and aspects relevant to various building blocks

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VIII. Appendices

Appendix A – General/global WaterAid building block assessment tool

	Emergency WASH	Fragile but strengthening	Transitional	Desired – all actors using District systems
Coordination	Humanitarian actors coordinated through WASH Cluster by UNICEF – no one working on long term development	No coordination of agencies	Geographical coordination of agencies within the district	Agencies aligned behind comprehensive district level strategy/policy
Strategic planning	OCHA Humanitarian Action Plan or government relief plans, no development plan	Plan responding to donor priorities – sustainability not addressed	Plan in place to extend services but not to sustain them	Credible plan to deliver sustained universal access.
Financing	Emergency spending directly through NGOs and UN Agencies	No fiscal decentralized spending. Donor spending on District Plan (“On Plan”) – not covering lifecycle costs	Fiscal decentralization and donor spending on capital costs. “On Budget” but not covering lifecycle costs.	Full fiscal decentralization, external support agencies channel funds through District accounts (“On Treasury”). Lifecycle costs matched to sources of finance.
Institutional Arrangements	Focus on saving lives by providing access rather than on building life-saving institutions	Institutions exist on paper but not functional or accountable to citizens. Overlapping, unclear roles and responsibilities	Partially functional institutions with weak capacity and accountability to citizens. Roles and responsibilities not fully clear	All necessary institutions and capacities are in place with clear roles and responsibilities eg regulator, health, education, HR, IT systems. Full accountability to citizens
Service delivery	Ad hoc emergency interventions	Fragmented project interventions, multiple missions, and reporting systems. No post implementation support.	District authorities and agencies mainly focused on extending coverage. Weak post implementation support.	Both coverage and post implementation support to all users fully addressed by duty bearer.
Monitoring	Through WASH cluster and to donors	No common monitoring or review process	Common sector targets and multi-stakeholder monitoring but no aggregated reporting	Government owned, regularly updated monitoring process feeding into strategic planning.

Appendix B – Contextualised building block summary tool

Building Block	Weak	Medium	Strengthening	Desired – all actors using sub-national sector systems
 <p>Gender and Social Inclusion</p>	Interventions are reinforcing gender stereotypes in WASH activities and/or putting women and girls at risk through lack of consultations with women and girls and lack of understanding on provincial context of gender equality	Women are physically represented in decision-making activities and sex and age disaggregated data (SAAD) is a requirement for programmatic interventions for all institutional arrangements	Women are actively involved in decision-making activities, and sex and age disaggregated data (SAAD) is a requirement for all institutional arrangements including analysis	Women are in leadership positions involving decision-making responsibilities for WASH services
 <p>Sector Coordination and Integration</p>	PTWG exists on paper but inactive District WASH committees do not exist CCWC exists but does not prioritise WASH	PTWG meet irregularly but limited ongoing commitment and department representatives are not consistent District WASH committee exists on paper but limited activity and engagement by commune and district authorities.	PTWG meet regularly and is skilfully led by secretariat District WASH committee meets regularly. Information sharing is good between actors within PTWG and District WASH committee but the two groups don't share	Agencies aligned behind comprehensive government-led strategy and there is strong communication flows between governmental levels
 <p>Strategic planning</p>	PAP exists but is not well known or understood Districts do not have a WASH plan or targets	PAP is known by sector actors. PAP focuses on extending services but not clear plan to sustain services Districts have a plan for WASH but it is not well integrated into district and commune planning process	Government-led PAP and district plans are in place and all relevant departments, NGOs and private sector know about it. The WASH plans are partly integrated with district and commune investment and development planning	Province and district have a realistic plan to deliver sustained universal access, which is supported by non-government actors and by stated actors
 <p>Financing</p>	Finance for WASH is mostly from MRD/PDRD and NGOs. Some funding is available through MOI but budget and acquittal process is unclear. Funding does not follow any government strategic plan.	Decentralised funding is available through relevant national government and some communes and districts allocate funding to WASH. Financing only for new infrastructure (not for operations and maintenance)	PDRD, Districts, communes and other actors allocate spending aligned with district WASH plan. Lifecycle costs are known and documented but only budgeted by private service providers.	Full fiscal decentralization, external support agencies channel funds through District accounts ("On Treasury"). Lifecycle costs matched to sources of finance.

Building Block	Weak	Medium	Strengthening	Desired – all actors using sub-national sector systems
 <p>Institutional</p>	<p>Roles and responsibilities for WASH exist at provincial level but are unclear or well known.</p> <p>Decentralisation, where it has happened, has confused roles at the district and commune levels.</p>	<p>Roles and responsibilities for WASH are understood by relevant government staff but not often followed, usually due to inadequate capacity. There are no performance plans or reviews.</p> <p>Decentralisation, where it has happened, has clarified roles and led to greater WASH involvement at district and commune levels.</p>	<p>Roles and responsibilities are clearly understood and regularly updated.</p> <p>There is some form of performance monitoring and identification of capacity needs but no plan to build capacity.</p>	<p>All necessary institutions and capacities are in place with clear roles and responsibilities eg regulator, health, education, HR, IT systems, core competency and qualifications.</p>
 <p>Accountability and regulation</p>	<p>There are no accountability feedback mechanisms (ISAF) for WASH.</p>	<p>There are no accountability feedback mechanisms (ISAF) for WASH.</p>	<p>Accountability feedback mechanisms such as ISAF mention WASH in institutions but don't include community WASH.</p>	<p>Full accountability to citizens through ISAF.</p>
 <p>Service delivery and behaviour change</p>	<p>Fragmented project interventions, multiple missions, and reporting systems.</p> <p>No post implementation support.</p>	<p>District authorities and agencies mainly focused on extending coverage. Some NGOs and private sector coordinate with government but not yet aligned with PAP. Some areas do not have any active service providers. Standards/ guidelines for service delivery exist but are not always followed.</p> <p>Weak post implementation support (e.g. water supply maintenance or latrine emptying).</p>	<p>All actors in the province are working towards achieving the PAP targets. New actors consult with PTWG and districts to avoid duplicating programs and clashing approaches.</p> <p>Service delivery considers the most marginalised.</p> <p>There is some post implementation support (e.g. water supply maintenance or latrine emptying).</p>	<p>Provincial and district authorities are leading government, private sector and NGOs to expand quality services to all people in line with their strategic plans.</p> <p>Service providers from government and private sector are providing timely post-implementation service support.</p>

Building Block	Weak	Medium	Strengthening	Desired – all actors using sub-national sector systems
 Monitoring	<p>Fragmented and duplicative monitoring processes, usually based on donor requirements.</p> <p>No MIS.</p>	<p>Some harmonisation of monitoring indicators and systems. Not all actors share data.</p> <p>No plan for monitoring from village through to province.</p> <p>Government plan includes targets but many indicators still lack clear monitoring processes.</p>	<p>Government-owned MIS aligning with PAP exists but is not regularly updated.</p> <p>Many actors align with government indicators but some WASH programs are still not reported through district or PDRD.</p>	<p>Government owned, regularly updated monitoring process feeding into strategic planning.</p>
 Environment and Water Resources	<p>No water resource protection or management policies exist.</p> <p>No understanding of threats to water resources.</p>	<p>Water resource protection and management policies exist but are not implemented. Threats to water resources are poorly understood. No monitoring of water resources.</p>	<p>Water resource protection and management policies exist but are poorly implemented. Threats to water resources are well understood but not responded to in plans. Monitoring is weak.</p>	<p>Water resource protection and management policies are implemented and there is coordinated management across sectors. Threats to water resources are monitored and inform resilience planning.</p>

Appendix C – Kampong Chhnang Province building block assessment results

Building block	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Policy, strategy and planning	<p>WASH is integrated as part of commune investment program but could be higher priority. Strategic planning skills seen as good. Limited implementation or follow up of the plans that exist. WASH strategic plans are not well aligned with community needs.</p>	<p>PDRD has specific plan but don't implement it. The implementation is not aligned with community's priorities.</p>	<p>Only some (2-3) districts have a WASH plan. Plans that exist are integrated into commune/district investment plan.</p>	<p>Province has plan for rural WASH but it is not fully implemented. Only some integration of GSI into action plans. Some districts have been supported to develop ODF plans and integrate them into commune/district investment plans</p>	<p>PWG, PDRD and some districts have specific plans for ODF by 2023. PDRD led the process of district ODF verification. Inclusive guideline used for new infrastructure.</p>
Institutional arrangements and capacity	<p>Governance structures are clear but roles and responsibilities are unclear. Staff capacity to fulfil roles is limited.</p>	<p>Management structure exists but responsibilities are unclear. Capacity in</p>	<p>Some districts have received function transfer for WASH and have capacity development plan for district/communes.</p>	<p>Functions have been decentralised but technical support responsibilities are not clear between national/provincial/district. Some districts and communes have limited capacity in WASH data management and planning. No specific plans or budgets for developing</p>	<p>All districts received decentralised functions. Some districts have revised structure and clearly defined roles and responsibilities for WASH committees. Capacity in time management and prioritisation still limited. Limited women's participation.</p>

Building block	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
		management and technical skills are still limited.	Other districts note limitations in skilled staff and poorly defined roles and responsibilities.	capacity at province/district/commune. Limited representation of women in leadership, partly due to limited number of women professionals.	
Coordination and integration	Regular meetings are held between technical departments and local authorities. Participation of other stakeholders in WASH coordination is limited. There is no plan for coordination.	Have coordination between other actors and sub-national authorities but it is still limited - the participants change month to month.	Good collaboration between stakeholders in districts with WASH committees only.	Provincial Technical Working Group for WASH has clearly defined roles and responsibilities. All districts and one town have been supported to create district WASH committees which coordinate with various departments, NGOs and women's groups/people with disabilities. Some committee roles are not well defined or understood. All coordination groups hold their planned monthly and quarterly meetings.	Province and districts have improved sector coordination and collaboration with key actors to deliver WASH services, including NGOs and private sector. PDRD support regular DWG meetings. All districts and city increased accountability and ownership in leading civic champion for leadership development. Capacity for identifying and mapping stakeholders to drive service improvement still needs to be improved.
Financing	Budget planning exists but there is insufficient funding and dependence on other non-government stakeholders for WASH finance. Community contributions are limited.	Limited budget for implementation and O&M.	There is no budget allocated for WASH. Districts say they do not understand the process to receive and allocate budget for WASH under decentralisation.	Districts and communes allocate annual budget for education and healthcare but limited for WASH. Budgets are not allocated to enable achievement of plans. Some districts and communes use budget for gender and women's empowerment, and promoting inclusive WASH.	Province and Districts improved capacity on coaching communes to allocate budget to WASH. Most communes have slightly increased budgets for WASH, some especially for marginalised households. Province and districts used cash transfer program to support sanitation for marginalised households. COVID-19 caused WASH finance to be redirected. Decentralised budget allocation and management still needs to be improved.
Service delivery and behaviour change	Activities such as community WASH promotion and extension of services are implemented according to plans. Limited follow up or post-implementation support. Service quality is poor.	Focus on activity implementation but limited monitoring and evaluation.	In the districts which have coordination committees, there is clear division of responsibilities for different services and support for community awareness raising and behaviour change. Other districts not limited ongoing service support, especially for post-implementation support where NGOs have delivered services.	WASH service coverage is increasing. PDRD, districts and communes provide WASH promotion and campaigns, including home visits and coaching to village focal points. Community gatherings have been conducted to collect information about WASH issues and needs. Some districts increasing piped water connection through collaboration between authorities and private sector. Support to institutional and household WASH for most marginalised during COVID-19. Guidelines on inclusive WASH, FSM and SCE are not well understood/implemented. Floating communities are still poorly serviced.	NGOs, ChinaAid and PDRD have supported water supply and treatment projects. All districts have coordinated household behaviour change promotion, including linking people with disabilities for sanitation subsidies. PDRD and some districts have applied inclusive guidelines for WASH in public facilities. Some communes have declared ODF. Waste management and open defecation remain challenges, especially in challenging environment areas. WASH services continue to miss particular underserved groups. Women are not fully empowered to lead service delivery.
Monitoring	Monitoring is project-based. Limited understanding on monitoring system, guidelines and forms. Limited mechanisms for reporting or sharing information.	Sector has shared goal for monitoring, but there is no mechanism for consolidated monitoring or reporting.	Districts which have coordination committee note regular monitoring and monthly follow up. Other districts have no data management systems or mechanisms for monitoring progress.	Some districts and communes use specific sanitation logbook to monitor progress. GSI indicators are included in investment plans and database. Coordination meetings are used as the reporting mechanism for monitoring and sharing to development partners. Some districts have limited capacity on WASH monitoring and data management.	All communes have used logbook and village mapping and updated progress through districts and PDRD. PDRD led monitoring process and used data for reporting ODF progress. District and city focal points for monitoring are clear. Gender and inclusion indicators are integrated into logbook. Some districts applied adaptive programming and monitoring cycles to adjust their monthly planning, monitoring and learning.

Building block	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
					While all districts applied the new MIS monitoring some are still weak in capacity to use the system.
Accountability and regulation			Feedback mechanisms were noted in the districts with WASH committees, but remain weak. Other districts note lack of participatory consultation with service users and no feedback between district/commune/community on WASH service priorities.	Community gatherings used to collect information on community's needs. Private sector operators implement their services according to national procedures but not fully compliant with licencing procedures. Provinces, districts and communes don't have specific effective platforms for citizen engagement and feedback. Some decentralised districts don't fulfil their roles and responsibilities	Districts and province have raised some awareness among community on behaviour change and commune safety guidelines. All districts/city held public forum for promoting accountability in social services, including WASH. Ongoing lack of effective feedback mechanisms for users at provincial and district levels. Some water operators' services does not meet user demands.
Gender and social inclusion			Districts with WASH coordination committees have strong GSI understanding. Other districts have limited understanding or awareness.	Some district promote inclusive WASH in monthly and quarterly meetings and public forums. Women participate in coordination committees and decision-making but meaningful participation could still be improved. Private sector water operators provided discounts and support to poor households. Districts and communes mobilise budgets to support marginalised groups' access to sanitation.	Some districts promote women to decision-making. Inclusive guideline used for new infrastructure and promoted in some institutions but commitment to budget for and apply inclusive guideline implementation is still limited. Some (increasing number of) women participating in planning, budgeting and decision making but limited meaningful participation at all levels. Limited space and understanding on human right to water and sanitation at all levels among civil society, community and marginalised groups.
Environment and water resources			Only one district noted a plan on water resources. Other districts either have limited knowledge or depend on NGO environmental programs.	There is no strategic plan for water resource protection and management. Water quality monitoring and testing is limited. PDRD and some districts promote community water safety plans and support O&M of hand pumps.	Limited understanding on water resource management. No district action plans for WRM. Some districts have not rolled out water safety planning and water quality monitoring remains a big problem.
Active and empowered people and communities				Marginalised groups still face challenges with accessibility and affordability. Some participation of women and marginalised groups representatives in sector coordination and decision-making. Limited space and understanding on human right to water and sanitation among most stakeholders and community. District and commune committee play active role promoting WASH services.	Some districts have regular meetings with most marginalised groups to discuss WASH services. Women still face discrimination in the sector. Still limited access to information on smart subsidies among marginalised groups. Some district have engaged most marginalised people to raise their voices to sector leaders.
Strong Government leadership				Province, districts have led civic champion program for local leadership development. PDRD, districts and communes work together for WASH planning and building local leaders' understanding on WASH. Women make up only about 25-30% of leadership roles and are not given space or support to take lead on decision-making.	Civic Champions leadership training continues to be applied and increasingly owned by government. Provincial governor, PDRD and district leaders are actively promoting ODF status. Districts and communes used their leadership to mobilise people for sanitation. More women taking roles in district WASH committees but could be more female leaders.

Appendix D – Rolea Bier District building block assessment results

Building Block	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Policy, strategy and planning	District and commune investment planning exists but WASH is not integrated into this in all communes.	There are concerns about the capacity to implement and sustain the current WASH action planning.	Developed district ODF plans.	District action plan developed incorporating gender and environment but not fully implemented. ODF integrated into district and some commune investment plans but not all communes have ODF plans.	ODF 2023 plans set and used in regular monitoring and planning. Sanitation and sage water plans integrated in district and commune plans. Weaknesses around funding and support to most marginalised groups
Institutional arrangements and capacity	Clear management structure but roles for WASH are not decentralised or managed by district. Roles and responsibilities for WASH not well understood at commune level.	Functional transfer from MRD on WASH. Staff don't perform their roles well, especially due to limited capacity and unclear understanding.	DWG has developed a capacity development plan for district and communes.	District working group/committee established and roles and responsibilities defined clearly. Committee organise leadership and WASH training to district and commune focal points. Women have some opportunities to contribute to decision-making but still limited in some communes.	District committee strengthening commune and village WASH working groups and women are actively leading this. Committee are running civic champions leadership training to communes capably. Committee led COVID-19 response and coordinated hygiene messaging. Frequent changes to committee structures is an issue and causing some communes/villages to function poorly. Committee are overburdened and do not have time to focus on WASH service delivery.
Coordination and integration	Monthly district-commune meetings but weak coordination with other stakeholders.	Created and began to run district WASH committee. Good cooperation with partners, NGOs and other stakeholders.	DWG conducts monthly coordination meetings with departments, NGOs, private sector and communes.	Monthly working group meetings review sanitation progress. District committee increased capacity to coordinate with national, sub-national government as well as NGOs and private sector. There is limited involvement of people with disabilities in the coordination.	Strengthened commune and village WASH coordination. Sector actors are being mobilised to implement WASH plans. There remains limited involvement of people with disabilities in the coordination.
Financing	Communes have budget planning process but not confident in process. Funding is sometimes transferred late. No specific WASH financing mentioned.	There is some budget for supporting WASH (promotion) but little budget for O&M.	Communes allocated some budget for improving WASH services. There is no budget for action plans.	Most funding to the sector comes from development partners. District and some communes used their budget to promote women in WASH. No specific budget for institutional capacity development.	WASH plan implementation is limited by lack of funding, especially to support most marginalised groups. Budget allocation does not meet the needs. District mobilised some additional funding from partners and political leaders to support marginalised households.
Service delivery and behaviour change	Role of district and commune in service delivery/behaviour change not well understood or implemented.	Began conducting hygiene behaviour change promotion but not extensively. Increasing WASH coverage.	Increasing WASH coverage, especially for sanitation. Clear division of responsibilities for different water service models.	Private water operators provide water in accordance with national principles but not yet meeting all licence terms. District and commune conducted commune outreach campaigns but limited in marginalised and challenging communities.	District and communes continue to promote WASH messaging in community, including in some marginalised communities but this is still limited. Accessible public toilets constructed at commune halls. WASH access is increasing.
Monitoring	District conduct project monitoring but not for service monitoring. Commune role in monitoring is poorly	Conducted baseline of WASH services. Regular field monitoring and coaching to commune authorities but not	Regular monthly monitoring by communes is being followed up by district.	District has logbook for regular monitoring of sanitation and water but some communes not yet using. Data on access for challenging environments and most marginalised communities is limited. Indicators for gender and environment are	Responsibilities for monitoring and data management clearly assigned and regular sanitation monitoring done on a monthly basis. Data on access for challenging environments and most marginalised communities remains limited. Some limitations around village mapping and monitoring

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Building Block	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
	understood and not regularly conducted.	much of a focus. Monitoring is not formally documented.		integrated into commune and district investment plans. Some commune capacity gaps on monitoring.	capacity at commune level, and district coaching to communes on monitoring is not working well.
Accountability and regulation			DWG meetings provide forum for feedback.	District and communes use public forums to exchange views, concerns and needs between authorities, community and private sector. Feedback responses and participation are not yet systematically recorded.	Roles and responsibilities are being disseminated.
Gender and social inclusion			Increasing understanding on GSI. Demonstration of inclusive and accessible toilets.	Beginning to focus on equity in WASH. No effective mechanism to support most marginalised people in their access to WASH. District supported marginalised households to construct latrines. More women participate in meetings but still limited in confidence to speak or express opinions.	All 13 communes met with representatives of marginalised groups through monthly meetings. Service delivery and COVID-19 response more targeted to marginalised groups. Women more actively participating and leading WASH decision-making at district level. District shared their gender training experience with other districts. Marginalised group-led dialogue and forums are still limited.
Environment and water resources			There is a plan in place (for water resources?)	District worked with PDRD for O&M of water points. No specific strategic plan for water resource protection or management. No water quality and quantity monitoring.	Improved government-led water quality monitoring. Improved waste management in some high-risk areas. No specific strategic plan for water resource protection or management.
Active and empowered people and communities				Conducted household WASH promotion. Limited space and understanding on human right to water and sanitation among most stakeholders and community.	Conducted household inclusive WASH promotion. Public forum and online promotion.
Strong Government leadership				District facilitated civic champion leadership program. Sector leaders are not providing full support or space for women to take leadership and decision-making roles.	District facilitated civic champion leadership program.

Appendix E – Kampong Leaing District building block assessment results

Building Block	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Policy, strategy and planning	Has flexible plan focused on poverty and WASH. Limited capacity to develop plans.		There is no WASH planning.	Some communes have action plans for WASH but not well implemented. ODF plans being developed.	Public health is being included in annual commune development plans but not well budgeted for. COVID-19 impacted ability to implement plans.
Institutional arrangements and capacity	Clear roles and responsibilities. Staff work ethic could be improved.		District have limited human resources. Skills gaps on coordination, facilitation and WASH.	District received some functions but not yet clear on roles. District and communes participating in civic champions leadership development. Limited capacity on many functions.	District training communes in leadership through civic champions.
Coordination and integration	Conduct monthly meetings (not specific to WASH).		No WASH coordination committee yet.	Created committee and hold monthly and quarterly coordination meetings but not yet well functioning. Increased coordination with national and subnational departments, NGOs and private sector. Engaged representatives of women and people with disabilities. Improved coordination between district and commune levels.	Clear structures and roles and responsibilities of committee, including women. Regular meetings to update progress and review ODF data. Good collaboration but limited number of local partners. Commune coordination is still weak in some places.
Financing	Commune and district budget plan exists. Limited financial management skills.		WASH budgets are not integrated into the district and commune investment plans. District is not clear about how to use WASH budget codes.	District and communes allocate budget for public services and for gender and women's capacity development and promoting inclusive WASH but not for WASH O&M. No budget for institutional capacity building.	Communes have limited budget allocation, and struggle with documenting expenditure and clearing documents. Some private companies supply sanitation material.
Service delivery and behaviour change			No dedicated team or budget to deliver WASH services.	Committee leading WASH behaviour change campaigns and mobilisation of private sector and community. Monthly and quarterly progress updates. WASH service is increasing. Improved cooperation between local authorities and private water operators. Inclusive WASH, FSM and SCE guidelines are poorly understood or implemented.	District and commune promote hygiene and sanitation and number of toilets is continually increasing. Focus on support to most marginalised. Most people don't value WASH among their own spending. Some communes facilitate community piped water projects but the water quality is not assured. Some communes report households shifting water consumption from surface water to improved sources. Women's participation and safe space in community WASH meetings remains limited. District mobilise province and national to support in aspects where they lack ability.
Monitoring			WASH progress reporting is not included into regular meeting agendas.	GSI indicators included in plans and database. Mechanisms for monitoring clearly understood and integrated into committee meetings. Data is reviewed and used to update plans and mobilise support. Some communes not yet clear on use of logbooks and general monitoring/data management capacity.	District regularly updating monitoring forms to provincial level. Clear focal point for monitoring.

Building Block	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Accountability and regulation			Commune do not use budgetary feedback mechanisms. Some NGOs facilitate feedback.	District and commune used public forum to share challenges, needs and strengthen relationships between community and private sector. Community gatherings used to gather priorities for planning. Community representatives included into district coordination meetings. No systematic process for recording and responding to community feedback.	Public forums held to understand local needs, feedback and challenges to inform planning. Consultation forums include reports, notes and participant lists. Challenges are being addressed and reflection meetings held to monitor progress.
Gender and social inclusion			Limited understanding on GSI concepts.	District provided some gender training. Tried to promote women in WASH committee but limited by small number of women among staff. Some women participate in decision-making, planning, budgeting and monitoring. Inclusive indicators integrated into monitoring. Some budget allocated to help marginalised groups build latrines.	COVID-19 response focused on marginalised groups. Village mapping identified sanitation status for people with disability, poor families, and widows. Commune focal points supporting payment-by-installment for poorest households.
Environment and water resources			There is clear regulation on environment.	District promoted community safety plans. No specific strategic plan for water resource protection or management. No water quality and quantity monitoring.	Collaboration with departments to measure water levels and dig ponds and developed plan to request additional water support for scarcity time. District awareness raising to communes on climate change impact.
Active and empowered people and communities				Some women or representatives participate in sector coordination. Communities receive WASH information through public forums and share their main challenges.	District/commune broadcast to community about right to access WASH services. Technology limitations for getting information to marginalised groups.
Strong Government leadership				District facilitate civic champions program for developing commune leadership. Women's roles in leadership are limited by (male) leaders not providing full support and space to promote them.	District civic champion training ongoing. District showing leadership on village mapping and pushing communes to allocate budget to WASH.