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Concern's
Knowledge
Quarterly
Review

KNOWLEDGE MATTERS

DRC WASH Consortium: experiences
and learning



CONCERN
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**Any contributions, ideas or topics for future issues of knowledge matters.
Contact the editorial team on email: knowledgematters@concern.net**

The views expressed are the author's and do not necessarily coincide with those of Concern Worldwide or its partners.

Knowledge Matters basics

Knowledge Matters offers practice-relevant analysis relating to the development and humanitarian work of Concern Worldwide. It provides a forum for staff and partners to exchange ideas and experiences. The publication is committed to encouraging high quality analysis in the understanding of Concern's work. Concern staff and partners document their ideas and experiences through articles. Articles are very short – 500 – 1,500 words. Usually you only have space to make two or three interesting points. Here are some tips on writing a short feature article:

- Start by imagining your audience – a Concern colleague. Why are they interested – why do they want to read what you have to say? When you identify what your most important point is, say it straight away, in the title or first sentence.
- What can others learn from your story? Focus on this. Remember to back up your story with evidence. This can be got from evaluations.
- It's easier to get people reading if you start with the human perspective – mentioning real people and real-life events. (You don't have to give names).
- Use short sentences. Use Concern's style guide to help you.
- Keep paragraphs to a maximum of six lines long.
- Use clear language. Many of the readers of Knowledge Matters are non-native English speakers, so think carefully about using idioms or colloquial language that might not be easily understood by others.
- Always avoid assuming too high a level of knowledge of the topic you are writing about, on the part of the reader.
- Use active sentences ('we held a workshop' not 'a workshop was held by us')
- Use short and clear expressions.
- Keep your title short - no more than eight words.
- Where necessary use photos to accompany the narrative but ensure that you follow the Dochas Code of Conduct on Images and Messages.

Cover image: Mande Kibawa and Mukalayi Muvumbu, administrator of the WASH Management Committee of the Mande village (territory of Manono, Tanganyika), at the water pump constructed with the support of Concern Worldwide within the framework of the DRC WASH Consortium Photo: Catherine Trautes / Concern Worldwide, July 2016.

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From the Issue editor

Welcome to the latest issue of Knowledge Matters from Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Started in 2013 and ending in March 2019, the DRC WASH Consortium is a rural WASH project financed by UK Aid and led by Concern Worldwide. The project was specifically designed to respond to sustainability concerns of the context of rural DRC which was characterised by some of the highest failure rates of water infrastructure in the region and by similarly alarming trends in sanitation.

In working towards sustainable WASH outcomes, the Consortium has worked intensively with communities, promoting ownership of sanitation and hygiene practices and raising awareness on the technical and financial follow up needed to maintain functional water supply infrastructure. While emphasizing that access to water remains a universal right, the Consortium has supported communities in the elaboration of cost recovery strategies to sustainably manage infrastructure after project exit and ensure water point functionality in the short to the long run: this has represented the core and the most distinctive aspect of the project, the so-called "Economic Approach". To reinforce results achieved within communities, the Consortium has also worked towards the establishment of an enabling environment for WASH outcomes, through the promotion of enhanced sector coordination and learning.

With over 650,000 people supported throughout seven provinces of the DRC and a timeframe of almost six years, the Consortium has represented an important component of the country programming and a significant share of the WASH portfolio for Concern as a whole. For this reason, we have continuously sought to capture, document and share lessons learned relevant to Concern and more broadly to WASH sector stakeholders in DRC and abroad. Notably, learning and knowledge sharing have represented one of the pillars of the Consortium's strategy, as a means to reinforce sustainability outcomes.

As we approached the end of the programme, the observation of the final results allowed us to carry out a more comprehensive analysis that is the basis of this issue of Knowledge Matters. The Consortium Coordination Unit, who authored the contents, drew these learnings from bilateral or multilateral consultations with Consortium members (senior management and implementing teams); past publications and research; in-depth analysis of project data and results; feedback of key stakeholders such as UK Aid in DRC and the independent evaluator; and also from the daily practice of managing a large and multifaceted INGO consortium in the complex context of the DRC.

This issue addresses the main pillars of the Consortium's strategy and approach as well as cross-cutting themes, highlighting how the Consortium has evolved over time and presenting key results and lessons learned. It represents a valuable opportunity to explain the project in depth and hopefully to expand the debate around the delivery of sustainable WASH services, in DRC and elsewhere in the world. For this, I would like to thank all my colleagues who have made this issue of Knowledge Matters a reality.

Maria Livia De Rubeis

The DRC WASH Consortium



By: Gian Melloni

The DRC WASH Consortium assisted over 600 rural communities in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) in 2013-2019 to achieve sustainable access to water, sanitation and hygiene services. Concern Worldwide was the lead agency in the Consortium which was funded by UK Aid.¹

A sustainability issue

Sustainability of rural water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) is a crucial issue in DRC. Rural water supplies tend to fall into a state of disrepair at alarmingly high rates soon after construction: this means that significant portions of the human, financial and technical resources invested in WASH risk failing to translate into durable results, and even more importantly, that significant portions of rural populations risk falling back to the use of unsafe water sources, with serious public health consequences. Rural sanitation also suffers from similar risks and consequences.

This is particularly concerning in a vast, poor and socio-politically unstable country like DRC, where rapid-onset crises compound chronic developmental issues.

A large-scale national programme of the DRC government exists to address the rural WASH issue, the 'National Programme for Healthy Schools and Villages' or PNEVA². PNEVA has developed a set of seven WASH "norms" for rural communities to achieve through a defined process. Villages that meet the seven norms gain a "Healthy Village" status, granted by local healthcare authorities. However, assessments that took place at the end of PNEVA phase 1 (2008-2012) found that high rates of "Healthy" villages had regressed to unsafe WASH behaviours and practices shortly after their certification. This highlights the issue of sustainability of results.³

¹ UK Aid and DFID (Department for International Development) are used interchangeably in this article.

² From the French acronym "Programme National Ecole et Village Assainis", meaning "National Programme for Healthy Schools and Villages". PNEVA receives substantial support from UNICEF and DFID / UK Aid: UNICEF mostly on the technical and operational side and DFID on the financial side. See PNEVA, 2018.

³ See for instance Aubriot, 2017.

A need to innovate

To solve this problem, DFID decided to support PNEVA with a more agile actor that would share the same high-level goal of accompanying rural communities towards the Healthy Village status, but using innovative approaches for greater sustainability of WASH results. This gave rise to the partnership between DFID and Concern Worldwide in DRC and to the DRC WASH Consortium⁴.

The architecture of the Consortium had some distinct but interconnected pillars. In the first place, the Consortium aimed to develop and implement approaches that fostered sustainable community-based rural water, sanitation and hygiene. To reinforce this, the Consortium also aimed to improve sector coordination and to produce and disseminate evidence for more sustainable rural WASH. Likewise, the Consortium aimed to involve local players as much as possible – not only healthcare services but also decentralised local authorities, the private sector and others. Therefore, far from being a stand-alone initiative, the Consortium was a complementary initiative to PNEVA with an ambitious mission towards innovation, WASH sustainability, coordination and knowledge management.

DFID included the Consortium project in its DRC 2013 WASH business case, that is, in DFID's development WASH funding cycle for DRC. Beside the Consortium, DFID financed UNICEF for PNEVA (the largest funding share), Oxfam for an urban sanitation marketing pilot project and Mercy Corps for urban water supply.⁵

The Consortium: what, where and how

The DRC WASH Consortium, in order to live up to its ambitious objectives, needed to achieve sizable scale and to provide cutting edge expertise. It is for these reasons that Concern joined forces with likeminded actors that also had strong background in DRC or in WASH: Action Against Hunger (ACF), ACTED, Catholic Relief Services (CRS) and Solidarités International. After a preparatory phase, the Consortium launched in July 2013.



The Consortium was a complementary initiative to PNEVA with an ambitious mission towards innovation, WASH sustainability, coordination and knowledge management.

⁴ Concern Worldwide (lead), Action Against Hunger/ Action Contre La Faim (ACF), ACTED, Catholic Relief Services (CRS) and Solidarités International.

⁵ DFID, 2013.

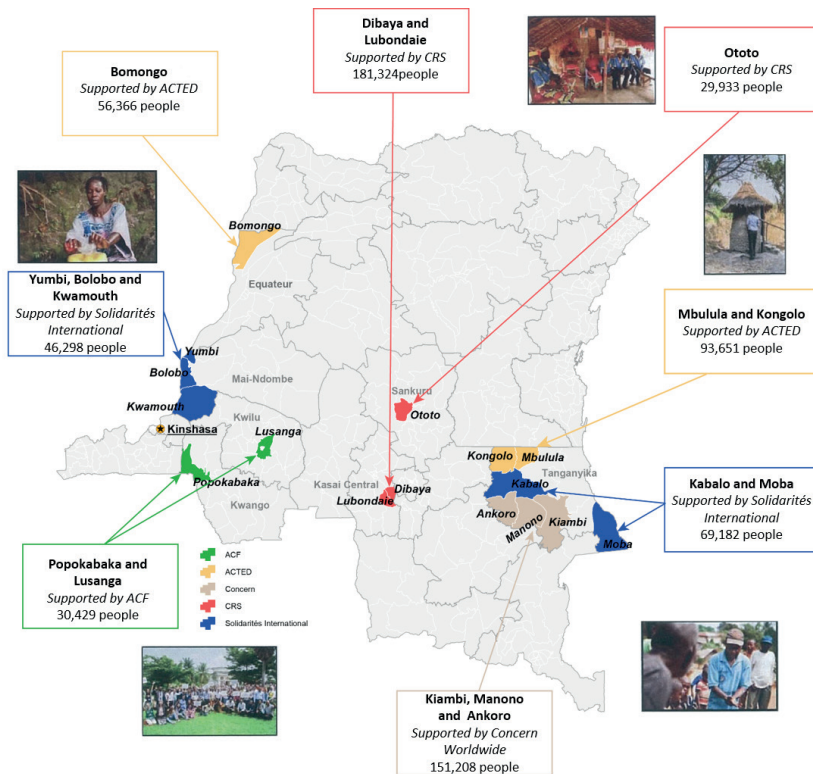


FIGURE 1 Population supported by the DRC WASH Consortium by Health Zone and agency

The project reached over 650,000 people across 16 rural Health Zones in seven provinces:

Provinces	Communities	Population	Water points
Kwango	14	8,162	19
Kwilu	25	22,267	17
Sankuru	28	29,933	37
Mai-Ndombe	37	46,298	51
Equateur	41	56,366	89
Kasai Central	191	181,324	198
Tanganyika	276	314,041	399
Total	612	658,391	810
Based on provisional data as of February 2019.			

The Consortium applied a step-by-step process in its work with communities, from early contacts and need-assessments with local authorities; to engaging with the communities and explaining their pro-active role in the process; to intensive community awareness-raising and mobilisation; to construction of safe water sources; to completion and exit. The process, articulated into 12 steps (described in the article ‘The 12-Step Approach’), lasted about two years per community and included six months of light-touch follow-up.⁶

At the core of the 12-Step process are the “PAFIs”⁷, or Small Important Doable Actions (outlined in the article “Community mobilisation for WASH outcomes”). These are community-driven actions people undertake with capacity support from the Consortium, but without any material or financial assistance. For instance, the Consortium did not build household-level toilets or provide construction materials, but raised community awareness on the importance of proper sanitation and demonstrated construction techniques based on locally available expertise and materials for community members to adopt and replicate.

The PAFI methodology covered mainly sanitation and hygiene. However, constructing water sources (mainly point-of-use boreholes and springs) without any direct external support would have surpassed the technical and financial capacities of rural communities. Therefore there was a need for a different strategy for water services. The Consortium’s approach to water supply drew inspiration from the Life-Cycle Costs methodology⁸ and was branded the “Economic Approach”.

The core idea of the Economic Approach was that rural communities are not passive beneficiaries but rather customers of water services who, in order to have reliable access to water, pay for the costs of keeping their water sources in good condition. The Consortium worked very closely with community-level WASH Management Committees to strengthen their capacities, in addition to helping them to identify mechanisms to meet water point life-cycle costs without overburdening community households’ finances. The Consortium used specific indicators for communities to forecast costs and to plan how to sustain those costs over time.

These methodological approaches did not come immediately – they required background research and ongoing adjustments. The Consortium carried out action research and small-scale piloting to define and test its methodologies, in an effort to develop evidence-based WASH programming. Likewise, the Consortium put special emphasis on documenting successful (and less successful) practices from the field, sharing those learnings with WASH sector stakeholders in DRC and abroad, and promoting debate from a perspective of sector coordination and innovation. This was possible because of the Consortium’s rather robust and complex monitoring and evaluation system.

Gathering learnings after five years of project

This issue of Knowledge Matters gathers key learnings on several aspects of what the Consortium accomplished over its duration from 2013-2019.

⁶ During the six months of light-touch follow-up, Consortium field teams do not carry out systematic community-level activities. They rather liaise with local institutions for them to provide support to the communities and they occasionally provide troubleshooting if needed.

⁷ From the French acronym “Petites Actions Faisables et Importantes”.

⁸ Fonseca et al, 2011.

The Consortium Coordination Unit, who authored the contents, drew these learnings from bilateral or multilateral consultations with Consortium members (senior management and implementing teams); past publications and research; in-depth analysis of project data and results; feedback of key stakeholders such as DFID in DRC and the independent evaluator; and also from the daily practice of managing a large and multifaceted INGO consortium in the complex context of the DRC.

The articles of this issue first describe the Consortium itself ('The DRC WASH Consortium internal governance'), then the approaches used ('The 12-Step approach, 'The Economic Approach of the DRC WASH Consortium', 'Community mobilisation for WASH outcomes'), major results ('Evaluating the results through a vulnerability lens', 'Gender equity in the DRC WASH Consortium', 'Did the Consortium represent good Value for Money?', 'Piloting WASH sector decentralisation in DRC') and concludes with an article outlining the challenges and successes of the Consortium's advocacy efforts ('Influencing the WASH sector through learning and advocacy').

In line with the Consortium's vision, all articles strive to provide evidence-based information, analyses and recommendations, aiming to contribute to the wider sector debate.

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The DRC WASH Consortium internal governance



By: **Gian Melloni and Maria Livia De Rubeis**

When we present the DRC WASH Consortium to colleagues or to other stakeholders, they often ask: “How does it work? How do you manage a machine with so many moving parts?”

The Consortium was launched in 2013 mainly upon the initiative of the Country Directors of the five member agencies. At that point, there was a need to match those strong working relationships and high degrees of personal trust with solid tools to govern the relations between the lead agency (Concern) and the member agencies. It was, very importantly, a matter of ensuring accountability to each other, to our beneficiaries, to our donor and to the broader WASH sector.

At that time, the scale of the Consortium was a relative novelty for Concern. Although the organisation was joining more and more consortia, this was among its first initiatives as the consortium lead in a grant of this proportion. This meant that organisational learning happened throughout the project and the ways of working of the DRC WASH Consortium evolved over time.

This is why, now that the Consortium has come to an end, we have reflected on the effectiveness of the Consortium’s internal governance, on the changes that occurred over time and on whether those changes have enhanced the Consortium’s performance. We have done so through debate within the Consortium Coordination Unit (CCU) and with senior representatives and focal points of Concern and of the other member agencies.

The Consortium “constitution”: the Governance Agreement

To keep the Consortium together over time, to remain compliant with donor regulations and to ensure project delivery as per budget, timeline and qualitative and quantitative targets, the five international NGOs implementing field activities (Concern with Action Contre la Faim, ACTED, Catholic Relief Services and Solidarités International) required sound, reliable and responsive leadership.

As the DRC WASH Consortium was not a legal entity independently from its member agencies (similar to other NGO consortia), certain specific contractual documents were required to underpin its governance: the Governance Agreement between the five Consortium agencies, the Funder Agreement between the donor DFID (UK Aid) and the lead agency Concern, and the Sub-grant Agreements between Concern and each of the other Consortium agencies.

The Governance Agreement is what we sometimes call our “constitution”. It spells out the commitments, roles and responsibilities of the Consortium members, with an emphasis on the role of Concern as lead agency and on the Consortium governance mechanisms. The Governance Agreement is independent from any specific donor or grant – it rather lays the basis for the Consortium members to work together under Concern’s leadership.

The Governance Agreement also established the Consortium’s governance bodies: the Governance Board, the Consortium Coordination Unit (CCU) and the Technical Working Groups. The Board was comprised of one senior representative per member agency and of the Consortium Director and set the strategic direction of the Consortium. The CCU managed the Consortium agencies and interfaced externally with the donor and other stakeholders and internally with Concern as a whole. In addition to the Consortium Director, the CCU included a Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) and Reporting Manager, a Communication, Advocacy and Learning Manager and a Finance and Compliance Manager. The two Technical Working Groups (on programme and on finance/ systems) were made up of a focal point per agency which the CCU chaired. They were the forums to discuss all operational issues, directions and planning. The Board and the Technical Working Groups met quarterly, or as needed.

The Funder Agreement and the Sub-grant Agreements

The Funder Agreement is in our case the Accountable Grant Agreement between our donor (DFID/ UK Aid) and Concern. It specifies the Consortium’s finance and programme targets and its duration. Importantly, it also details the donor regulations with which Concern and the Consortium as a whole must comply throughout the project period.

The Sub-grant Agreements translate the terms of the Funder Agreement into bilateral arrangements between Concern as lead agency and each other Consortium member. Each Consortium member has ‘its’ programme targets and budget, while the general rules remain the same across the board. Each Consortium member responds to Concern as the lead agency.

The Governance, Funder and Sub-grant Agreements represent the reference documents for strategic decision making. They are the backbone of the Consortium’s internal governance.

What has changed over time?

Some changes in the way the Consortium governed itself were relatively minor and have been reflected in small adjustments in the Consortium governance documents.

For instance, the CCU team setup has varied over time: at the start it included a person in charge of M&E and programme quality; that role subsequently changed to Deputy Director; and eventually it reverted back to M&E and reporting. We did so to respond to evolving priorities of the CCU and the Consortium. The Consortium’s governance documents reflect this change.

Some other changes are linked to more ‘relational’ aspects or to organisational culture, and they aren’t necessarily reflected in our governance documents: primarily the interplay of the Board and the CCU. Initially there was the expectation that the Board ‘takes the lead’ in the Consortium, by providing constant, detailed and well-informed guidance to the Consortium as a

whole. The idea was that the Board 'is' the Consortium, and that other bodies such as the CCU and the Technical Working Groups enact the Board's plan and decisions. The CCU was initially expected to act as a sort of secretariat that helps translate the Board's decisions into practice and reports back to the Board.

This setup has never fully come into being. Early in the project¹ it was already clear that the Board members (mostly Country Directors of the Consortium agencies) did not have the time, the specific knowledge or even the interest to play such a strong directive role within the Consortium. Conversely, the CCU had the resources to develop detailed expertise on the Consortium (four full-time international staff), and has turned out to be the best-placed coordination body to make informed decisions and to follow up on those decisions with the Consortium agencies.

This has resulted in a gradual role shift, whereby the CCU has taken on many of the Board's initial attributions, acting as a directorate and not a secretariat. For its part, the Board has ended up ratifying decisions the CCU puts forward in conjunction with the Concern Country Director, and has very rarely demanded the CCU to implement decisions originating from the Board itself. The Board meets about every quarter, and the Consortium Director de facto plans and chairs those meetings.

This role shift generated the occasional complaint among some Board members, especially earlier on. But in recent years the Consortium agencies' senior representatives have increasingly valued the directive role of the CCU, acknowledging that the Board does not run detailed follow-up of the Consortium, whilst the CCU has the time and the expertise to do so. Board members have also appreciated that this stronger role of the CCU has relieved the Board from the burden of hard talks and difficult decisions at critical times. They have recognised that this management setup ensures consistent and effective Consortium leadership through appropriate and timely decision making.

What have we learned?

A clear lesson is that the vision and leadership of the CCU is crucial in a consortium of the scope and structure of the DRC WASH Consortium.

In this kind of consortia, the CCU (or equivalent body) should be given wider responsibilities on paper and not only in practice. In the same way, it is essential that the lead agency Country Director and the Consortium Director are on the same wavelength and speak with one voice. All this ensures effectiveness of the action, consistent leadership, and protects the lead agency from financial and reputational risks.

Something that emerged quite frequently, was also the tension between establishing a friendly and informal working environment with the Consortium agencies and holding them accountable when needed. In this sense, sometimes an organisational culture that favours peer-to-peer relations over hierarchical relations (such as it tends to be among international NGOs) risks to weaken the accountability of consortium members towards the consortium lead. Consortium

¹ See for instance Jones, 2016.

leads should therefore consider strategies to keep consortium members thoroughly accountable throughout the project duration, for instance by establishing measures for members that do not comply with agreed rules or that underperform.

However, these general principles notwithstanding, we shouldn't forget that all consortia are different. Budget, duration, members, country and nature of the project (and type of donor arrangement, e.g. a grant vs. a contract) necessarily influence the way a consortium governs itself. In one consortium the CCU may play the protagonist role, while in another that role may be the Board's. One consortium lead may need to apply a thoroughly 'transactional' governance style, while another may adopt slightly more decentralised or 'dispersed' leadership modalities.

Organisational guidelines used when designing consortia should cater for these different needs and should allow the consortium to choose the appropriate model on a case-by-case basis. The foundational agreements of any consortium should accurately reflect the governance philosophy chosen.

Irrespective of the leadership model adopted, a consortium lead agency should always be ready to hold the other consortium agencies accountable, and should always have at its disposal the contractual instruments to do so, in order to make its leadership effective and the project performing.

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The 12-Step approach



By: Maria Livia De Rubeis and Gian Melloni

Introduction

To promote sustainable community management of water points, the DRC WASH Consortium designed and applied an approach made up of 12 steps, which builds on community awareness and ownership of basic sanitation and hygiene practices, as well as on community willingness to take charge of the technical and financial management of water supply infrastructure. The process is designed to be applied over 24 months: 18 months of direct implementation and six months of light-touch follow up.

How does it work?

The 12 steps encompass the entire project cycle, from community targeting to monitoring after the end of activities. The approach relies on community mobilisation to ensure that, after the conclusion of the project, communities can leverage their own resources for the upkeep of water, sanitation and hygiene services and practices.

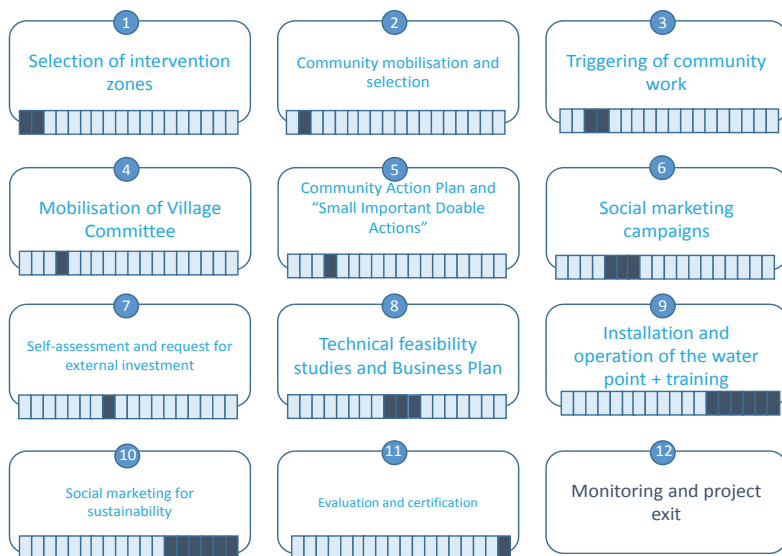


Figure 1: The 12-Step approach: sequence and timing

The process begins by working with institutions and building engagement in the programme. The Consortium member agencies identify intervention areas jointly with local government health offices. This joint initiative seeks to maximise the involvement of the local government health offices in supporting targeted communities during and after project implementation. Mobilisation campaigns reach out to communities in the selected areas for them to understand the programme and decide whether to engage with it. The critical message passed from this very early stage is that external investment in water infrastructure is conditional on communities adopting improved hygiene and sanitation practices (PAFIs¹) and agreeing to cover the costs of water service management in the long run.

In the villages, the Consortium builds on existing community skills and resources to foster behaviour change and to create the demand for improved WASH services. The Consortium identifies and trains community outreach volunteers (“ReCos” in French) to raise awareness on the PAFIs and to follow-up on their implementation.² The Consortium helps communities elect WASH committees and develops their capacities in water point financial and technical management.

Each community defines an Action Plan as a roadmap for the implementation of PAFIs, clarifying objectives, timelines, monitoring indicators and roles and responsibilities within the community. ReCos and committees mobilise communities around the Action Plan, through social marketing campaigns in households, neighbourhoods and schools, working towards a community self-evaluation at Step 7. This is a critical moment in the process, when communities that have reached their objectives can request resource investment by the Consortium for the construction of water infrastructure.

In-depth technical and financial feasibility studies inform the decision on investment: this is the choice of the type of water source the Consortium will build in a certain village and depends on hydrogeological factors as well as on community preferences. It is at this stage that community capacity and willingness to pay are assessed and measured against the short, medium and long-term costs of water supply infrastructure management, in order to determine water service tariffs and start payments. This forms the core of the community’s Business Plan for maintaining the water infrastructure.

A second social marketing campaign is conducted after infrastructure construction: this is critical to have communities continue the PAFIs and appraise the importance of water payments to ensure the sustainability of the water point after project end and certification as “Healthy Village”³. Following this, WASH management committees, ReCos and local authorities, in their respective roles, remain in charge of following up on communities. Light-touch support from Consortium continues for six more months, to help during the transition period.

1. From the French acronym “Petites Actions Faisables et Importantes”, meaning “Small Important Doable Actions”.

2. ReCos operate under the formal responsibility of local government healthcare services. Even though the Consortium provides WASH capacity development to ReCos, their tasks cover also non-WASH activities that pertain to public health, such as vaccination campaigns.

3. Consortium-supported villages are certified under the National Rural WASH Programme “Healthy Schools and Villages” or PNEVA, financed by UK Aid with the technical support of UNICEF. Certification is awarded by local government health offices according to national standards.

While implementing the project, the Consortium found that the duration of the whole 12-Step process or of some of its components varied in different communities depending on context-specific factors. For example, community characteristics (e.g. community size or engagement level) or operational aspects (e.g. the number of communities targeted at the same time or procurement lead time) sometimes caused an expansion of some of the steps. Consortium field teams often counterbalanced this by accelerating the final steps of the process⁴.

Successes of the approach

One of the fundamental assumptions of UK Aid's business case for the Consortium was that "improving knowledge and skills relating to the delivery of WASH services through training leads to better accountability between stakeholders and empowers users to seek better quality in the delivery of that service"⁵. This was reflected in the 12 steps, with the PAFIs as a means to build experiential linkages between hygiene and sanitation behaviour change and improved health outcomes, and through trainings of committees on WASH services management.

The 12-Step approach implementation confirmed UK Aid's assumption, as the Consortium independent evaluation⁶ found. "This approach was highly effective in creating user demand for WASH services, fostering community ownership, and likely prepared water users for the financial demands of paying for improved water services." The approach built up strong community support, fostering programme ownership and engagement.

A critical factor against which we want to measure the success of this approach is certainly sustainability outcomes. Data collected through post-endline surveys, six months after the project exited from communities, is very encouraging, as confirmed by the project's independent evaluation. Likewise, data the Consortium collected in mid-2018 in a sample of communities who had completed Consortium activities two years previously showed that communities had maintained their engagement in managing their WASH practices and services well beyond the end of the project. Eighty-nine percent of water points were still functional and in-use, and community Action Plans were in place in 87 percent of the cases. WASH committees were still operational for all but one of the surveyed water points.



This approach was highly effective in creating user demand for WASH services, fostering community ownership, and likely prepared water users for the financial demands of paying for improved water services.

⁴ No less than three months are nevertheless reserved to water point construction and operation and concomitant social marketing campaigns.

⁵ See DFID, 2013.

⁶ See Rinck et al, 2018.

Overcoming challenges: fine-tuning the process

The 12-step approach was designed at the onset of the programme and tested throughout its whole duration, going through several adjustments before reaching the current outline. Yet, this process couldn't entirely capture the complexity and variety of experiences in the field. Consortium member agencies were often confronted with challenges that required deviations from the 12-step timeline, mostly at the time of construction of water infrastructure and at the start of household payment collection.

While these adaptations were never formalized and happened on an as-needed basis, they generated a fruitful debate among the Consortium's agencies and with the Consortium Coordination Unit. Some changes to the sequence and durations of the steps were proposed based on the implementing experience, which we captured in the diagram below.

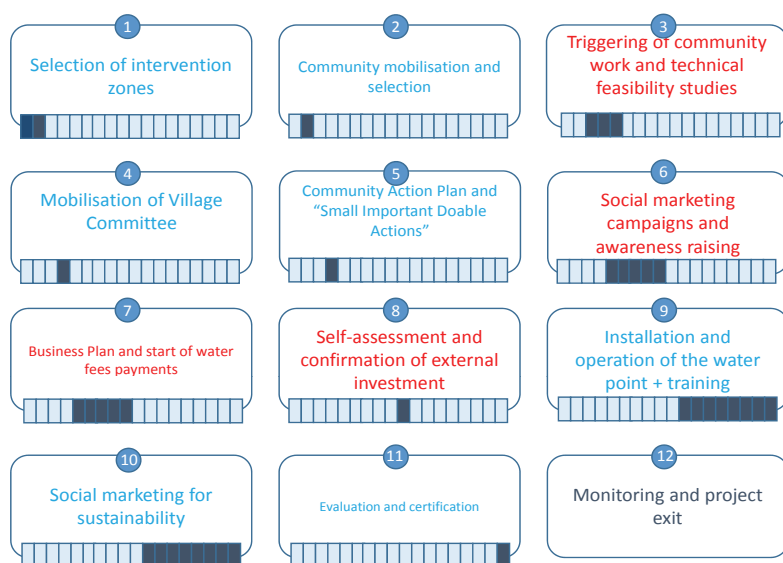


Figure 2: The 12-Step approach: a revised timeframe

A widespread opinion among the Consortium's programme staff is that better financial sustainability results would be achievable with more extended support on financial planning and management. The suggestion is that both the time when communities prepare their business plans and the time when they start water payments should happen earlier, instead of waiting until water infrastructure is in place. This would indicatively result in a gain of four extra months of support by Consortium field teams to WASH committees to raise awareness on the importance of payments.

Starting payments before building infrastructure would also help communities better estimate their revenue levels and would allow them to begin revenue generating activities for their water point ahead of construction. When the infrastructure was completed, well-established payment collection mechanisms would be already in place, reducing the risk of back-sliding after project end.

Bringing forward the development of the business plan would also require that technical feasibility studies, to identify the type of water point to construct, should be carried out earlier in the process, right at the onset of the project. This would in turn be a significant operational advantage, given that procurement procedures for water point construction (e.g. purchase and delivery of equipment and materials) could start earlier. However, such revision of the timeline would risk compromising the logic of the programme, which advises that no decision on water infrastructure is made before communities reach their behaviour change targets. Some Consortium agencies tried potential solutions to this, such as waiting for communities to achieve their targets before presenting the outcome of technical studies. This was done to avoid interfering with the behaviour change and community ownership processes.

Experience also highlighted the importance of sustaining hygiene and sanitation promotion up until water point installation, in parallel with other project activities, instead of carrying out two distinct marketing campaigns. However, while prolonging the awareness-raising component could reinforce community adoption of behaviour change, cost considerations would also need to be taken into account.

The Consortium also discussed a more drastic hypothetical change to the 12-Step process: constructing water points at earlier stages of community engagement and behaviour change. This would be justified by the argument that communities would feel more motivated if they received a water point as soon as community mobilisation starts, instead of waiting about a year. Also, communities would start using and managing their water points (including water payment mechanisms) when the Consortium staff are still active in the community carrying out other aspects of the project such as sanitation and hygiene activities.

This suggestion raises several questions such as:

- Would early water point construction hinder community-led behaviour change build-up?
- Would this come at the cost of sustainability and community ownership?

The challenge would be to still work towards community-driven behaviour change and ownership of good WASH practices, while having more time to provide support to the community on water point management while the water point is in operation.

What have we learned?

Development projects like the DRC WASH Consortium that have a focus on long-term sustainability require intensive support to be given to WASH management committees and to communities in general. Overall, it seems that the 12-Step approach developed was appropriate to the context and was an efficient use of the project's resources. Although it appears that the amount of time dedicated to training and awareness raising in villages before construction of water points was relatively high, the results six and 24 months after project end point to better adherence over time to safe WASH practices and improved services.

Future rural WASH projects considering this approach could also benefit from certain adjustments, in particular on the timing of Business Plan design and the start of water payments, in order to provide communities with extended support and follow-up on their

financial management activities. While the Consortium's financial sustainability results are encouraging, with two thirds of supported communities having attained self-sufficiency⁷, this could be a means to ensure even more communities reach their cost recovery objectives in the short, medium and long term.

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⁷ Nilsson, 2018.

The Economic Approach of the DRC WASH Consortium



By: Gian Melloni and Kristina Nilsson

Sustainability of water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services is a critical issue in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Various studies found that in DRC between 41 percent and 67 percent of rural drinking water supplies are in a state of disrepair¹. Such high ratio of water point failure implies that a significant proportion of the financial, human and technical investments in WASH runs the risk of not translating into durable results. Even more crucially, a significant proportion of rural populations fall back to the use of unsafe water sources, with serious public health consequences. Poor conditions of rural water supplies are fundamentally due to lack of long-term planning and resourcing for operation and maintenance.

Achieving financial sustainability

Against this backdrop, since its inception the Consortium has put strong emphasis on sustainability and in particular on financial sustainability of WASH. Our approach draws inspiration from the Life-Cycle Costs methodology, developed by the research centre IRC WASH through the project WASHcost². The Life-Cycle Costs approach allows the systematic quantification of the long-term costs of water and sanitation. Its general principle is that infrastructure work (construction) is only one component of the overall cost of WASH services, and that systematically characterising and forecasting those costs over time, and working towards the capacity to meet them, critically fosters durability of services.

How does this translate into practice?

We have branded our adaptation of Life-Cycle Costs to the reality of rural DRC the “Economic Approach”. The core assumption of the Economic Approach is that rural populations are not passive recipients of aid but customers of water services who commit to contributing to the costs of their drinking water points over time in order to obtain specific levels of service (these levels are explained in the next section of this article). In this framework, we emphasise with the communities that keeping water infrastructure in good condition has some specific technical and administrative costs communities need to take charge of if they aim to achieve truly sustainable water supply.

Key actors of water management in the Consortium are the village WASH management committees. We work very closely with them in each community to strengthen their technical

1. Kleemeier, 2010.

2. IRC WASH, <https://www.ircwash.org/washcost>.

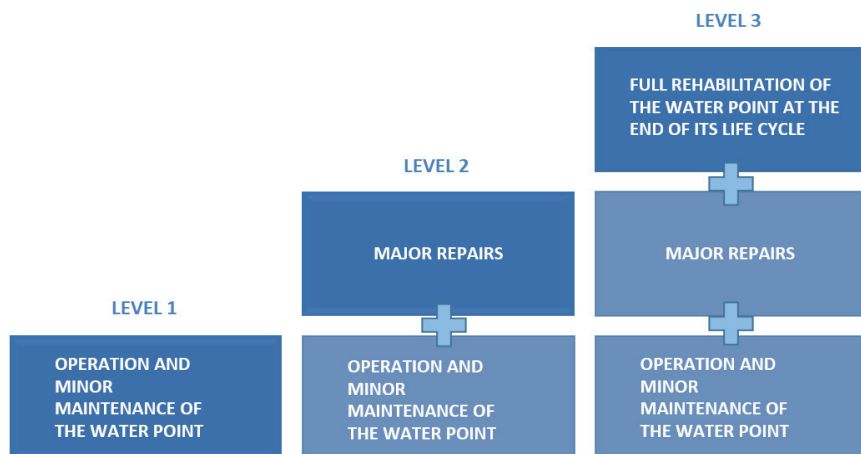
and managerial capacities, thanks to detailed training and support throughout the process. Likewise, we focus on context-specific revenue-generating activities that committees can put in place to meet water point management expenses without overburdening household finances.



These results suggest that the Economic Approach had a tangible positive impact on sustainable access to drinking water over time.

Three levels of sustainability

We use quantitative indicators to model water point management costs over time and to allow communities to assess their own ability to sustain those costs. We have identified three progressive levels of community-level success in covering those costs, as shown below:



The objective of our Economic Approach is to enable communities to raise sufficient funds to achieve Level 1 as a minimum, so that they can autonomously operate and maintain their water points at least in the shorter-medium term. The most committed communities manage to reach Levels 2 and 3 and therefore are able to achieve potential sustainability in the longer term.

Our approach caters for the recurring expenses committees incur as water service providers: purely technical aspects such as the price of spare parts but also running expenses, e.g. for committees meetings or for fee collection. However, unlike the Life-Cycle Costs approach, and with an eye on the limited resources available to rural communities in DRC, we do not expect communities to meet capital expenditure (the initial investment) or expenditure on direct support (the cost of supporting local stakeholders). This is a summary of the similarities and differences between the Life-Cycle Cost approach and our Economic Approach³:

³ For further details on the Life-Cycle Cost categories, see Fonseca 2011.

LIFE-CYCLE COSTS TERMINOLOGY	LIFE-CYCLE COSTS DESCRIPTION	ADAPTED INTO THE APPROACH OF THE DRC WASH CONSORTIUM
Operating and minor maintenance expenditure (OpEx)	Expenditure on labour and materials needed for routine maintenance which is needed to keep systems running, but does not include major repairs.	Level 1 costs
Capital maintenance expenditure (CapManEx)	Renewal, replacement, and rehabilitation costs which go beyond routine maintenance	Level 2 costs
		Level 3 costs
Expenditure on direct support (ExpDS)	Costs of ongoing support to users and local stakeholders, for example on local government or district support staff.	These costs are not included in estimates for what communities need to pay.
Capital expenditure (CapEx)	Expenditure on physical infrastructure construction or extension and on accompanying 'software' such as capacity building	These costs are covered by project funds as an initial investment in safe water services in rural communities: mostly in the form of wells or boreholes with handpumps and protected springs.

Community ownership

Within the general architecture outlined above, the Economic Approach allows each community, with the assistance of the Consortium, to define the modalities of its contribution to water services - such as a monthly flat fee per household, payment by volume of water collected, revenue-generating activities or a blend of these.

In a typical modality of revenue-generating activities, the community starts household contributions before the water point requires maintenance or repairs and the committee therefore gathers a small capital. The committee, in agreement with the community at large, invests (part of) this capital to buy small livestock that are kept by various families in the village. When the time comes e.g. the need arises to purchase a hand pump spare part, the committee sells some livestock at the market and uses the proceeds to procure the needed spare part. These sales can also generate some 'surplus', which remains at the committee's disposal for water point management.

The Consortium raises community awareness that, even though water management has costs, access to drinking water is a right for all. Communities put in place mechanisms adapted to the local needs ensuring that the whole population, including the most vulnerable people, achieve access to safe drinking water. Most communities do this by granting exemptions from water fees to the most vulnerable individuals, households or groups.

Does the Economic Approach work?

The Consortium measures the three levels of sustainability through monitoring and evaluation surveys. After a relatively gradual onset of project activities, more and more data on the Economic Approach results have been available from 2016 onwards. Therefore we have started seeking evidence-based answers to a critical two-fold question: to what extent does the Economic Approach actually work? And: what factors hinder or support its success? In order to find answers,

we analysed data from 237 endline M&E surveys and 140 post-endline surveys from 2016 to early 2018, which represent a substantial subset of the Consortium communities.⁴

Project endline surveys, collected in communities at completion of activities, show that 50 percent of committees are able to achieve a sufficient degree of financial self-sufficiency (Level 1), and 17 percent are able to reach beyond that and achieve Levels 2 or 3. The communities not achieving Level 1 still have active committees that manage functioning water points, and their vast majority (91 percent) enact cost-recovery mechanisms. Post-endline data, collected in communities six months after completion of activities, confirm the same trend. The percentage scores between endline and post-endline are similar.

	Not able to reach Level 1	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Endline stage (n=237)	33%	50%	14%	3%
Post-endline stage (n=140)	28%	56%	10%	6%

Considering the challenges of the rural DRC environment, the novelty of the approach and the conditions of extreme poverty of the communities where we operate, this shows that the core assumptions of the Economic Approach are valid and the approach generally works.

Corroborating this conclusion, a survey the Consortium conducted in a community sample where the project activities had ended two years previously showed that 99 percent of water points were still managed by WASH management committees, and 89 percent were still operational and functioning at the time of the survey. Seventy-three percent of water points had community financing mechanisms still in place. In the context of DRC's often poor durability of rural water sources,⁵ these results suggest that the Economic Approach had a tangible positive impact on sustainable access to drinking water over time.

What are the success factors?

Against this backdrop, the Economic Approach, as all innovative models, can be fine-tuned and further improved. The conditions in which this approach was particularly effective were firstly identified. In order to do so, we isolated various factors and analysed them in the light of the sustainability Levels (1, 2 or 3) reached by the communities.

We found that not all factors are relevant in this sense. For instance, the different types of water point (mostly boreholes with hand pump or protected springs) present no notable variations in success rates. Likewise, the number of committee members (mostly between six and ten) or the ratio of women in the committee (mostly between 20 and 50 percent) do not seem to correlate with a trend of either higher or lower success under the Economic Approach.

Community size looks more relevant: fewer villages with less than 500 people reached Level 1 or above, while communities with populations around or above 1,000 have been more likely to reach higher levels. This suggests the Economic Approach has stronger potential in slightly larger villages than in the very small ones.

⁴ Jones 2016, Nilsson 2018, Melloni 2018.

⁵ Kleemeier 2010.

However, some other factors are even more decisive. Communities that raise finances for water point management through a blend of household contributions and committee revenue-generating activities⁶ represent the majority of the Consortium communities. Those communities have high success rate: 83 percent of them reach at least Level 1. This means revenue-generating activities are a winning solution to foster financial viability.

Likewise, analysing vulnerability offers significant insights. The vast majority of communities (280/377) that exempt vulnerable individuals, households or groups from water fees reached financial self-sufficiency (at least Level 1) in 76 percent of cases. This is an important finding in light of pro-poor and needs-based principles of development: aiming for equitable and inclusive access isn't at odds with the principle of paying for water or with the goal of sustainable WASH access.

Community management of water points tends typically to happen on a voluntary basis. However, a minority of communities (56/377) opted to provide some of their committee members with regular remuneration. Of these semi-professionalised committees, 82 percent were able to reach at least Level 1 of financial self-sufficiency. Although this is a small minority, their success suggests that some form of semi-professional management can be more effective than simple volunteerism.

Communities that carried out specific practices that the Consortium promoted with the committees (such as the use of basic accounting books and meeting regularly with minute keeping) also showed higher success in reaching sustainability Levels 1, 2 or 3. This suggests that these practices encourage sustainable community-based water supply management.

Modelling the 'ideal' community

On the basis of the evidence above, we can model an 'ideal' community for the Economic Approach to succeed. This model is not intended to be used as a checklist to exclude communities that don't fit each criteria, but rather act as a guide to indicate communities that this approach would particularly suit.

This ideal community requires a certain 'critical mass' of potential water service users. In the rural DRC context this meant there were at least 1,000 inhabitants. The ideal community embraces the principle that safe water has costs and commits to meeting those costs. This is done not only via household contributions but also through revenue-generating activities, implying the community trusts the WASH management committee's transparency and management skills.

Likewise, the ideal community recognises the workload some committee members face to carry out their duties and accords them regular compensation, typically for guarding the water point, for carrying out repairs or for collecting household fees. However, this community is also aware that not all inhabitants can afford to pay for water, and enacts measures to relieve the most vulnerable parts of the population from water fees. Revenue-generating activities also serve this purpose.

The WASH management committee of the ideal community meets regularly, keeps minutes of these meetings, and records all revenue and expenditure in accounting books.

⁶ Some examples of revenue-generating activities undertaken by communities were rearing animals, opening a small pharmacy, sale and resale of agricultural products and community gardens.

While community cohesiveness and healthy local leadership dynamics play a strong role, the 'ideal' community for the Economic Approach is not necessarily wealthier. In fact, the communities the Consortium assists all belong to isolated rural areas with largely absent public services and low income levels (subsistence agriculture is by far the main source of income). This means that the Economic Approach is suitable to target the poorest and most vulnerable communities for which it is Concern's mandate to target.

What have we learned?

We can conclude that the core assumptions of the Consortium's Economic Approach appear valid. The vast majority of communities where the approach was implemented were able to increase their capacity to achieve self-sufficiency in community-based water supply.

We have learned that rural communities in DRC are willing to invest to overcome challenges and can develop the capacities to manage sustainable water services. Community-based water management in DRC is yielding good results, provided that development actors invest in the right kind of approach. The Economic Approach can play this role, and the success factors described above can help further refine it to reach even better results.

More generally, the Consortium has shown that adopting the Life-Cycle Cost approach or variations thereof is feasible even in a fragile context like rural DRC and increases the chances of local communities to gain sustainable access to WASH services. Therefore development actors, even in fragile contexts, can successfully design and implement WASH interventions to focus on longer-term services and not only on short-term achievements. As there is no conflict between focusing on extreme poverty and enacting sustainability orientated life-cycle costing, policy makers can balance water service payments by users with pro-poor and inclusive policies without jeopardising financial viability.

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Community mobilisation for WASH outcomes



By: Kristina Nilsson

In promoting sustainable improvements to water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services in the rural Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), the Consortium first worked with communities on improving their hygiene and sanitation behaviours and practices. The approach focused specifically on actions based on the existing resources within the community, in line with the Consortium's objectives of maximising sustainability and self-sufficiency. These activities were called "*Petites Actions Faisables et Importantes*" or PAFIs - "Small Important Doable Actions".

Why Small Important Doable Actions for sanitation and hygiene?

Many improvements to community sanitation and hygiene practices can be achieved with awareness-raising campaigns, community planning, and small changes to the routine actions of individuals within a community. Through awareness-raising work, the Consortium promoted these ideas: Small Important Doable Actions are actions entirely within the existing capabilities of communities, which they can take on without external support, and which are practices that support better community health through improved sanitation and hygiene.

This approach is cost-efficient as it is mainly achieved through awareness-raising and mobilisation work with communities. The approach also avoids the sustainability risks of infrastructure developed with external funding, as these low- or no-cost activities are well within the capacities of communities to continue long after the project ends. In these ways, the approach is in line with best practices from approaches such as Community Led Total Sanitation and sanitation marketing.¹

Small Important Doable Actions at household level

Keeping a clean kitchen, transporting and storing water in clean containers, hand washing at critical times, proper disposal of household waste, and using a latrine are all examples of Small Important Doable Actions which can be done at household level. To support their implementation, communities developed action plans for adopting these Small Important Doable Actions.

¹ Concern Worldwide, 2016, page 8.

We can see that the promotion of these Small Important Doable Actions has led to the adoption of some of these behaviours, using project results as of mid-2018:

Small Important Doable Actions	Before:	After:
A handwashing station set up near their latrine with soap and ash	2 percent of households	52 percent of households
A hygienic improved sanitation facility (latrine)	35 percent of households	71 percent of households
A system to properly dispose of their household waste	27 percent of households	76 percent of households
Transport and store water in a hygienic manner, reducing contamination risks	(not available)	76 percent of households
	<i>Source: Project sample baseline data</i>	<i>Source: Project results as of mid-2018</i>

During the course of the project, communities conducted four self-evaluations to assess their progress in adopting these Small Important Doable Actions against their community action plans. These self-assessments helped build community understanding of how they are progressing in adopting the roles and responsibilities needed to improve and maintain good WASH practices, and guided them in adapting and improving their community action plans to further improve their WASH practices.



Figure 1: An example of the PAFI (Small, important, doable actions) promoted by the DRC WASH Consortium programme. Kitchen utensils should be washed and put on a draining rack. Village Mande, Manono, Tanganyika. July 2016.

The community interest in sanitation and hygiene issues seemed to come from improved knowledge on the importance of these actions from a perspective of improved health. The independent evaluation of the Consortium in 2018 found that “community members...expressed enthusiasm for [Small Important Doable Actions] and significant awareness of linkages between improved hygiene and sanitation and decreased incidence of diseases based on experience.”²

Small Important Doable Actions at community level

The Consortium mobilisation staff worked hand in hand with local actors to promote the Small Important Doable Actions: WASH management committees were elected and trained as part of the Consortium activities, and Community Outreach volunteers (Relais Communautaires or ReCos in French) which are part of the public health system in rural DRC were also provided with training on WASH. These local actors facilitated awareness-raising sessions about good sanitation and hygiene practices, identified and promoted locally appropriate Small Important Doable Actions, led mobilisation activities and community events like football matches and clean household contests, and visited households to reinforce these messages and offer support and encouragement. The Consortium mobilisation staff also reinforced the idea that these WASH management committees and Community Outreach Volunteers could continue to promote and support households in these actions after the project end.

End-line data from mid-2018 showed that 78 percent of Community Outreach Volunteers self-evaluated as having adequate WASH knowledge, capacity, and level of activity, and 86 percent of WASH management committees self-evaluated as having the capacities to manage their roles and responsibilities effectively.

What is especially encouraging is that the roles of these local actors seemed to show signs of continuing after the project end. Data from mid-2018 showed that 84 percent of Community Outreach Volunteers were continuing to conduct regular mobilisation activities including both household visits and mass awareness-raising events six months after the end of project activities. Another study in a sample of communities where Consortium activities had ended two years prior showed that 82 percent of WASH management committees self-evaluated as having adequate community mobilisation capacities. These are very promising results, showing that the reinforcement of Small Important Doable Actions can continue, and further sustain these important sanitation and health measures in communities, even after project activities have ended.



The Small Important Doable Actions approach was highly effective in creating user demand for WASH services, fostering community ownership, and likely prepared water users for the financial demands of paying for improved water services.

² Rinck et al, 2018, page 22.

Community mobilisation and sustaining water services

The Small Important Doable Actions approach mirrors the Consortium's Economic Approach, which emphasises that communities need to be as self-reliant as possible in sustaining their WASH services. While an initial analysis of project data does not show strong links between the adoption of Small Important Doable Actions and success in the Economic Approach for financial self-sufficiency in maintaining a water point, this was noted qualitatively by the third-party evaluators, who found that the Small Important Doable Actions approach "was highly effective in creating user demand for WASH services, fostering community ownership, and likely prepared water users for the financial demands of paying for improved water services."³

What did we learn?

This approach of Small Important Doable Actions has brought important improvements to sanitation and hygiene practices in the Consortium's intervention communities. This is particularly encouraging in rural DRC, a fragile country where humanitarian interventions sometimes risk creating aid-dependency in local communities. This approach sought to build long-term community leadership with minimal external support, and promoted behaviour change as central to improved health outcomes. This strong result was confirmed by local government health officials, who have linked Consortium activities with increased adoption of good sanitation and hygiene practices.⁴

By building individual knowledge of sanitation and hygiene through awareness-raising activities, by using local actors to promote locally-appropriate Small Important Doable Actions, and by reinforcing self-sufficiency and the importance of sustaining these changes, this approach has helped to prepare over 650,000 people in rural DRC to establish and maintain improved sanitation and hygiene behaviours.

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These are very promising results, showing that the reinforcement of Small Important Doable Actions can continue, and further sustain these important sanitation and health measures in communities, even after project activities have ended.

³ Rinck et al, 2018, page 66.

⁴ Rinck et al, 2018, page 39.

Evaluating results through a vulnerability lens



By: Maria Livia De Rubeis and Kristina Nilsson

Introduction

Throughout the project, we have sought to evaluate to what extent the DRC WASH Consortium's model is appropriate to the fragile context of rural DRC and is inclusive of vulnerable people and communities. As we now approach the project's end (March 2019), an important question is whether the Consortium's results are equitably distributed across the population strata that we supported and across different communities.

Profiling the Consortium's communities

The DRC WASH Consortium supported 612 communities across seven provinces of DRC, in some of the most remote rural areas of the country. While there was a relatively large variation in the size of these communities, with populations ranging from around 400 to more than 2,000, the typical size was of around 1,000 people with the average household composed of 7.5 members. Children under five years of age accounted for on average 22 percent of a community's population and pregnant and lactating women (PLW) for seven percent. Individuals unable to work due to advanced age, chronic illness or disability made up two percent of the average community population.

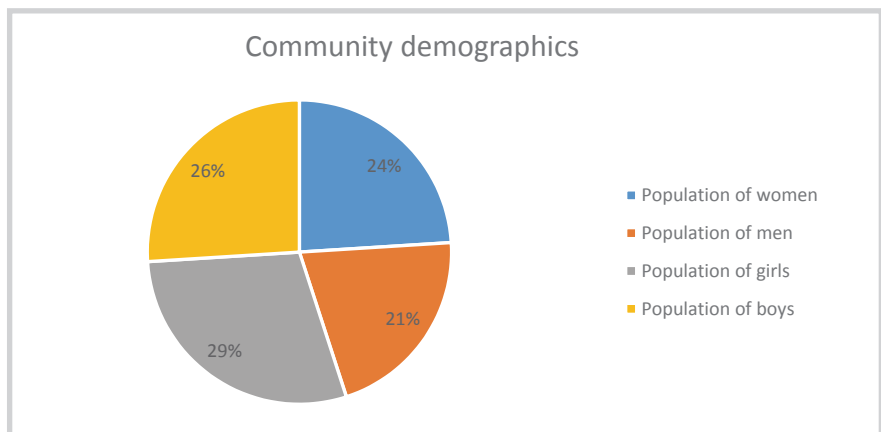


Figure 1 Average demographics in Consortium communities, broken down by men, women, boys and girls

Generally, the Consortium-assisted populations are extremely poor and largely reliant on subsistence agriculture, with 76 percent indicating agriculture as the household's primary income source. Fishing, small commercial activities and public sector work jointly accounted for almost all the rest of income sources. About 0.4 percent of households reported no source of income.

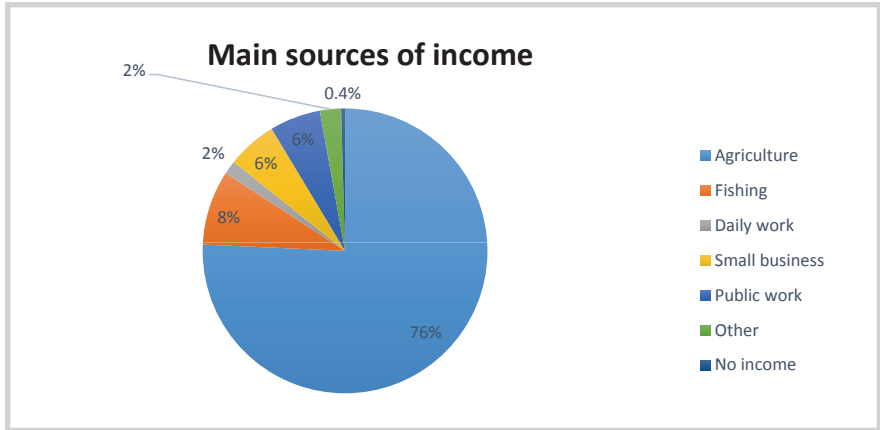


Figure 2: Main sources of income in Consortium communities

Most of the households reported medical treatment and agricultural or livestock inputs as their main expenditure items, followed by education which represented the main type of expenditure for 15 percent of the population.

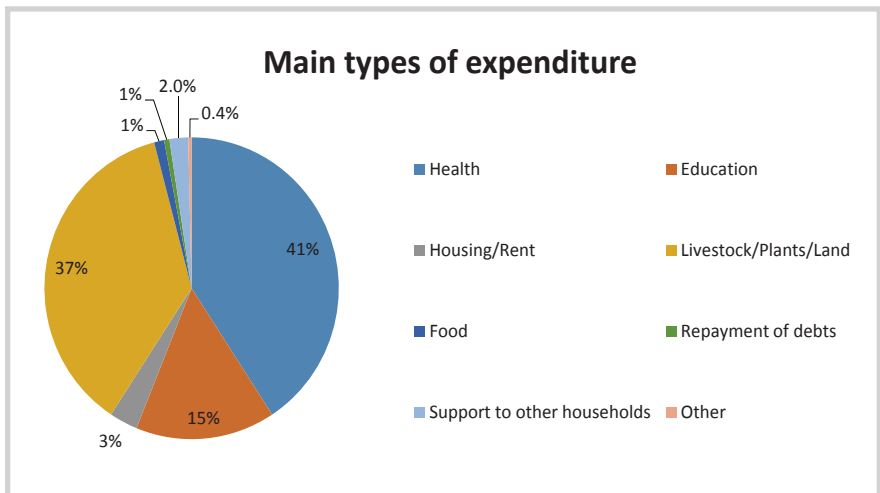


Figure 3 Main types of expenditure in Consortium communities

Inclusiveness of the Economic Approach¹

In early 2018 we carried out analysis to evaluate to what extent measures adopted by the Consortium to promote inclusiveness were compatible with the programme's financial sustainability objectives. Specifically, we looked into the potential impact on community sustainability outcomes of water fees exemptions and of differentiating revenue streams for water point management.

The Consortium encouraged communities to identify strategies that would allow cost recovery without excluding any groups or individuals from water services. Indeed, most communities developed and applied their own criteria to identify vulnerable people and set up inclusion mechanisms, such as exemptions from water fees. At the community level, the Consortium emphasised the importance of creating revenue streams for water point management through revenue generating activities, in addition to, rather than alternative to, water fee payments. This aimed to promote financial sustainability even in the presence of less favourable combined economic status, combining inclusiveness and sustainability objectives. These strategies were shown not to compromise sustainability results, with communities adopting them being equally or more successful in achieving sustainability targets than those who did not².

In late 2018, when most programme data were at our disposal, we attempted to gauge more comprehensively the suitability of the Consortium's Economic Approach in communities that were potentially vulnerable. To do so, we classified the Consortium-assisted communities according to demographic information which might denote vulnerability: proportion of children under 18; proportion of children under five; proportion of people unable to work due to advanced age, chronic illness or disability; proportion of pregnant and lactating women (PLW); and proportion of adult women³. We also investigated household composition, specifically household size and the ratio of woman-headed households. We sorted communities into population quintiles according to the prevalence of each of those categories, and subsequently we analysed the highest and lowest quintiles of each category through the lenses of the Consortium's Economic Approach.

The table below displays the average prevalence by quintile⁴ of five demographic groups.

	Lowest quintile	2nd quintile	3rd quintile	4th quintile	Highest quintile
Children under 18	44%	52%	55%	58%	64%
Children under 5	14%	19%	22%	25%	29%
PLW	2%	5%	8%	9%	12%
Adult women	18%	21%	23%	26%	31%
Women-led households	4%	14%	23%	35%	55%

Figure 4 Average percentage values of five demographic groups in community quintiles

1. See Melloni, 2018.

2. See Nilsson, 2018.

3. Higher ratios of adult women within a community may correspond with lower ratios of men

4. Quintiles were calculated according to prevalence of each demographic group and therefore differ in size and composition across variables.

By doing so, in each of the analysed instances we found no clear differences in communities' success under the Economic Approach: communities seemed to reach degrees of water point financial sustainability irrespective of their demographic composition. This suggests that these potential vulnerabilities are not detrimental to attain financial sustainability, and/or that coping mechanisms are in place at the village level to counterbalance these.

In addition to demographic categories, we also assessed the effectiveness of the Consortium's Economic Approach by analysing communities by economic status: main income sources and types of spending. Also in this case, no clear trends emerged. Both communities that reached sustainability and communities that did not, displayed similar income sources and spending characteristics. Even the minority of communities having households who declared no income (5.6% of the population on average in those communities), did not seem to be disadvantaged in attaining sustainability under the Economic Approach.

These findings suggest that the Consortium's Economic Approach succeeded to adequately support communities displaying different demographic and economic patterns. As such, we are confident in recommending the Economic Approach as appropriate to use while considering different community vulnerabilities.

PAFIs: a suitable approach for everyone?

In working with communities to identify and take on Small Important Doable Actions (or PAFIs⁵) to improve their sanitation and hygiene practices, the Consortium promoted solutions that would allow communities to achieve sanitation and hygiene results inclusively. The concept of PAFIs itself builds on the idea that change is achievable within a community's own resources, regardless of its general socio-economic status, thanks to low-cost and low-tech solutions based primarily on behaviour change.

To assess the effectiveness of the Consortium's PAFIs approach with respect to vulnerability, we applied the same methodology used to evaluate success under the Economic Approach. We classified our intervention communities according to demographic and economic information, we sorted communities into quintiles and we then assessed the achievement of hygiene and sanitation practices.

Some hygiene and sanitation aspects (such as the adoption of safe water storage, knowledge of critical moments for handwashing and knowledge of disease transmission routes) did not seem to be influenced by any of the variables analysed. On the other hand, some trends emerged in other categories. The table below shows the prevalence of six demographic variables in the lowest and in the highest population quintiles by community⁶, and shows the performance of those quintiles under four hygiene and sanitation indicators. The table displays only relevant results or trends, i.e. figures that seem to denote a correlation between demographic variables and indicators.

⁵ From the French acronym "Petites Actions Faisables et Importantes". The Consortium developed the PAFIs approach mostly addressing sanitation and hygiene activities.

⁶ Quintiles were calculated according to prevalence of each demographic group and therefore differ in size and composition across variables.

The figures in green indicate that higher prevalence of a given demographic group correlated with higher results. The figures in red indicate that higher prevalence of a given demographic group correlated with lower results. Grey cells indicate we didn't find any trends.

Community demographic variables			Sanitation and hygiene indicators			
Definition	Prevalence		Correct handwashing demonstration	Presence of hygienic toilet	Presence of handwashing station	Hygienic waste disposal
Percentage of adult women	lowest quintile	18%	81%	77%		67%
	highest quintile	31%	60%	64%		80%
Percentage of PLW	lowest quintile	2%	57%	59%		
	highest quintile	12%	78%	84%		
Percentage of children under 18	lowest quintile	44%	60%	64%		
	highest quintile	64%	79%	77%		
Percentage of children under 5	lowest quintile	14%	66%	69%		
	highest quintile	29%	78%	80%		
Average household size	lowest quintile	5.6				82%
	highest quintile	9.7				70%
Percentage of women-led households	lowest quintile	4%			36%	
	highest quintile	55% [7]			51%	

Table 1 Sanitation and hygiene indicator trends observed for the highest and lowest quintiles of community demographic variables

As the table shows, some demographic variables matched with lower success rates:

- Communities with the highest proportions of adult women could demonstrate correct handwashing practices less often than average and were less likely to have a household latrine.
- Communities with larger household sizes were less successful in enacting hygienic household waste disposal.

Some other variables appear to match with higher take up of good practices:

- Communities with highest proportions of PLW or of children under five or under 18 showed higher access rates to household latrines than average. They also demonstrated better handwashing practices.
- Communities with the most PLW were more likely to practice correct household waste disposal.
- Communities with the most women-headed households⁷ more often put in place handwashing stations.



These findings suggest that the Consortium's Economic Approach succeeded to adequately support communities displaying different demographic and economic patterns.

⁷. Anecdotal evidence suggests the high proportion of women-headed households (54 percent) in the top quintile communities may be linked to relatively 'flexible' interpretations of the household and of its boundaries in rural DRC settings, for instance in the case of divorce or polygamy. It also wasn't stated whether female-headedness would be temporary (e.g. if men were out in the fields during the harvest season) or a permanent condition.

The data consistently points out that the approach was equally appropriate for demographically diverse communities. Results indicate that communities with the highest prevalence of potentially vulnerable groups were overall able to adopt PAFIs at least as often as the average. In some cases, they even outperformed allegedly less vulnerable communities. Indeed, demographic variables that may initially be perceived as vulnerabilities might actually represent enabling factors of good hygiene and sanitation practices, such as in the case of high prevalence of PLW. Alternatively, these demographic variables may not be present in the Consortium communities in high enough amounts to have detrimental effects. It could also be the case that the PAFIs approach, combined with community-level mechanisms to cope with potential vulnerabilities, in fact adapts well to a wide range of demographics. As such, we are confident in recommending the PAFI approach as appropriate to use while considering different community vulnerabilities.

What have we learned?

When assessing Consortium communities under the Economic Approach (water services financial sustainability), it emerged that communities reached different performance levels irrespective of their demographic composition or economic status. When assessing communities through the lens of hygiene and sanitation practices or PAFIs, it emerged that some variables had negative impact and other variables had positive impact.

Overall, when working with communities on sustainable water, sanitation and hygiene, it is crucial to be aware of any potential or actual vulnerabilities. However, coping mechanisms may exist to support vulnerable groups or individuals. The research did not show that the Consortium's Economic Approach or PAFIs were inappropriate for communities that had different types of vulnerabilities.

More generally, approaches designed to enhance sustainability of results through increased community engagement and ownership do not need to be at odds with inclusiveness considerations. Development actors can accompany communities in identifying their own strategies to address vulnerability. The occurrence of individual and community-level vulnerabilities should not prevent the adoption of long term sustainability goals. Even in contexts of poverty and isolation (such as in most of the communities with which the DRC WASH Consortium worked), development actors should not underestimate communities' coping mechanisms, self-reliance and ability to achieve remarkable results.

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Gender equity in the DRC

WASH Consortium



By: Gian Melloni

Not an easy context

The Democratic Republic of the Congo ranks at the bottom of the Human Development Index (HDI) for gender inequality: the Gender Inequality Index, which reflects gender-based inequalities in reproductive health, empowerment and economic activity, is at 0.652 (ranked 152 out of 160 countries indexed).¹ In addition, gender-based violence remains widespread particularly in conflict-affected provinces in eastern DRC.²

This quite grim picture influences the roles, responsibilities and tasks of girls and women in water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH). A recent study reported that girls and boys take care of above 80 percent of household water collection in rural areas, and girls' workload is 1.5 times higher than boys'. About half of the population surveyed did not see this imbalance of tasks as gender inequality.³

The Consortium's approach to gender

These type of considerations were part of the Consortium's design in 2013. Concern and DFID's (UK Aid) approach was to mainstream gender as a crosscutting theme for the Consortium and not to set it as a stand-alone focus area. In other words, the Consortium assumed the generally confirmed notion that improved WASH access brings about benefits for girls and women if their needs and perspectives are integrated in how activities are designed, implemented and monitored. For instance, generally girls and women spend shorter time fetching water if water sources are easily reachable (and therefore have more time at their disposal for other activities), and they are less prone to unsafe sanitation practices if they have access to toilets that ensure privacy and safety. In this sense, the Consortium carried out gender-sensitive rather than gender-specific WASH interventions.

In the same way, the Consortium's results framework had just one gender-specific output indicator and no gender-specific outcomes, although it included sex/age data disaggregation whenever relevant. Similar approaches were also applied to the other rural WASH projects DFID (UK Aid) funded in DRC (the National Programme Healthy Schools and Villages, by UNICEF and the DRC government). Conversely, the urban WASH project in DFID's portfolio, Imagine

1. UNDP, 2018.

2. UN, 2018.

3. Kiyombo et al., 2018.

by Mercy Corps, embedded a substantial gender-specific component as part of its expected results.⁴ This distinction between *gender-specific* and *gender-sensitive* dimensions, overall and within DFID WASH portfolio in DRC, is crucial to understanding the way the Consortium addressed gender issues.⁵

Gender mainstreaming

Although the Consortium didn't have a stand-alone gender strategy, programme methodologies developed over time set out some core measures to take gender into account by mainstreaming recommendations across the project's several implementation tools and guidelines.

Typically, field teams consulted mixed sex groups and also women-only groups about water point placement and sanitation design, to ensure women felt safe and at ease using WASH infrastructure. Also, the Consortium organised community meetings with both men and women but also separate women-only consultations. The Consortium promoted women's inclusion in community-level decision making through their involvement in WASH Management Committees (WMCs, i.e. committees the Consortium helped set up in every village with the tasks of mobilising the community on hygiene and sanitation and of managing the water point), aiming to have women in at least one-third of WMC leadership roles, i.e. President, Vice-president, Secretary and Treasurer.



Figure 1 Members of the WASH Management Committee in Katchambuyu, Tanganyika, DRC. September 2017, photo by Kieran McConville.

The project did not assume a prescriptive or normative approach on girls' and women's inclusion: this was to keep the process as community-driven as possible, to foster ownership of community practices, and to avoid the pitfall of a 'tick-the-box' exercise. Therefore the Consortium focused on raising awareness of the importance and the potential of girls and women in WASH and in showing communities concrete inclusionary measures, but without

⁴ "The urban WASH component continues to have gender at the heart of its intervention, and aims at transformative change in the lives of women and girls". See DFID, 2018, page 10.

⁵ By "gender-sensitive", we mean programming that takes into due consideration and brings about benefits to all gender groups. By "gender-specific", we mean programming that targets specific gender groups with specific core objectives and activities.

imposing rigid sets of rules. This was in line with the overarching idea that genuine community understanding and ownership of good practices and behaviours would promote longer-term continuity of results. According to a gender review the Consortium ran in 2017, the women interviewed said they had a voice and were listened to. The study found that women Committee members were actively involved in decision-making.⁶

Results: gender in WASH

As mentioned above, the Consortium undertook gender-sensitive rather than gender-specific programming. Therefore, rather than planning outputs that focused on specific gender groups, the project tried to make sure the whole population would benefit from improved water, sanitation and hygiene across gender boundaries.

In this sense sex/age disaggregated M&E data were of interest, particularly data that captured answers from girls, boys, women and men separately. These data showed substantially balanced results among the different groups, with slightly better results among adults than among children. For instance, when asked about water-borne diseases, 85 percent of girls and 86 percent of boys were able to mention at least one transmission route and one prevention method, compared to 89 percent of women and 92 percent of men. However, not all results followed the exact same pattern: 70 percent of girls and 64 percent of boys were able to show proper handwashing technique, compared to 66 percent of women and 70 percent of men. Generally, differences across sex and age were quite slight.

Another relevant dimension is the composition of WASH Management Committees (WMCs). Each WMC is composed of about ten elected members, including four leadership roles of president, vice-president, treasurer and secretary. As mentioned above, the Consortium had a target of one-third female committee leaders, even though it didn't necessarily push communities to reach that particular threshold but rather let them define appropriate participation levels.

As of mid-2018, women held 30 percent of leading roles, with the following variations among different roles:

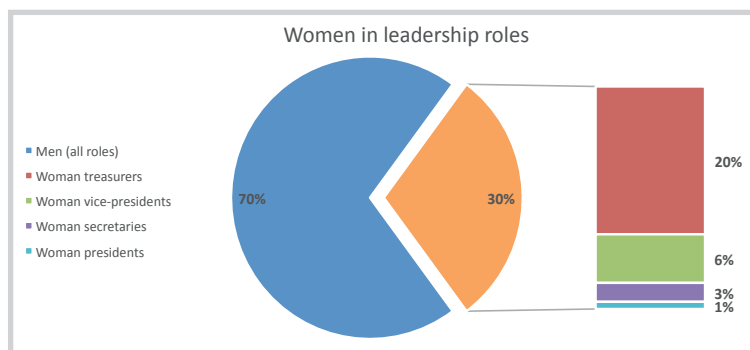


Figure 2
Breakdown of leadership roles in WASH Management Committees

⁶ Kilanga J-B., 2017.

The most frequent female leading role is clearly that of treasurer, at 20 percent (about 65 percent of woman leaders are treasurers), followed by vice-president, secretary and president.

Anecdotal evidence, confirmed in the gender review the Consortium carried out in early 2017⁷ and in the independent evaluation of the project in 2018⁸, suggests prevalence of women treasurers is not a coincidence. Indeed, it seems there is a widespread perception in rural DRC that women are more trustworthy than men in handling and managing money. This is a likely explanation of why women tend to become treasurers.

There are many possible interpretations of this. It may represent a limit to women's involvement in decision making, under the assumption that in some WMCs treasurers are little more than cashiers. It may also show the influence of cultural stereotypes over the roles women take up. When looking at women's participation in WMC lead roles overall, education may also play a part: some communities (and some Consortium field teams) emphasised the importance of being able to read and write to cover leadership roles within WMCs, which would represent a barrier for women who in rural settings tend to reach lower literacy and numeracy than men. However, in rural contexts where men and women traditionally hold separate social roles, the fact that women are prevalent as treasurers could represent a genuine acknowledgement of their skills and added value in water point management and generally in community life.

Linked to this, the overall female ratio in WMCs, including both lead positions and regular positions, is also about one-third. Importantly, when the Consortium surveyed a sample of villages where the Consortium's activities had ended at least two years earlier, it found that women still represented 33 percent of WMC members. This high level of continuity suggests that female participation has become ingrained in the way WMCs function and that it has the potential to last in the longer term.

Taking stock of gender results

Quantitative results show that the Consortium reached girls, boys, women and men quite equally. Likewise, the Consortium nearly achieved its target of one-third representation of women in WMC leadership roles, with an achievement of 30 percent against a target of 33 percent.

Female participation in WMCs appears sustainable over time: this is probably more relevant than the mere proportion of women in WMCs at the time of project implementation. From a sustainability perspective, adopting community-led approaches to female participation may be more effective than imposing predefined quotas. These conclusions are in line with the gender-sensitive rather than gender-specific Consortium's approach to inclusive WASH.

Conversely, the fact that the Consortium did not have any gender-specific objectives meant, in the words of the independent evaluator, that the project "was less successful in changing gender-related 'norms and perception in society', and women's roles largely continued to be based on existing perceptions, such as their role with regard to stewardship of money."⁹

⁷ Kilanga J-B., 2017.

⁸ Rinck et al, 2018.

⁹ Ibidem, p.54.

However, one should keep in mind the part gender plays in the architecture of development projects, and should apply different metrics to projects that have gender-specific objectives and to projects that adopt gender as a crosscutting theme but not an autonomous component.

These reflections on the difference between gender-sensitive and gender-specific objectives, and the fact that the DRC WASH Consortium did not have gender-specific objectives, helped us conclude that reaching “gender transformative results”¹⁰ in a WASH project requires a different set of commitments than reaching gender inclusive results. The theory of change of any project with gender-transformative ambitions should embed gender-specific objectives and components, which then become outputs and outcomes in the project’s result framework. That in turn translates into dedicated budgetary resources for gender in project design and activities. This is the kind of architecture that supports gender-specific results. Any development project should clarify from the start the type of gender objectives it seeks, and should develop a structure adequate to supports those.

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¹⁰. Ibidem, p.68.

Did the Consortium represent good Value for Money?



By Gian Melloni

Value for Money: what and why

The Value for Money (VfM) agenda of DFID / UK Aid is a framework developed in 2011 with the goal to “maximise the impact of each pound spent to improve poor people’s lives”¹. In general terms, DFID expects VfM to work as a guiding principle for DFID to award funds and for DFID’s implementing partners to use those funds appropriately. In this sense, VfM can be seen as a high-level accountability framework for DFID and its partners.

DFID understands VfM as a balance between distinct criteria:

- Economy: Buy inputs at appropriate quality and price.
- Efficiency: Project inputs translate into outputs.
- Effectiveness: Project outputs achieve the desired poverty reduction outcome.
 - Cost-effectiveness: Relative to the inputs, there is an impact on poverty reduction.
- DFID considers Equity as a fourth crosscutting criterion, with an emphasis on targeting girls and women and the poorest population strata.

Overall, in DFID’s intentions, the VfM agenda is to ensure that funds (inputs) translate into outputs and that outputs translate into sustainable higher-level results, and to monitor “how well” that is done. It is not “just about cutting costs”.

VfM was one of the parameters DFID took into consideration in 2013 when they decided to finance the DRC WASH Consortium:

“Establishing predictable, longer-term funding cycles for Consortium members will increase the overall impact of WASH programming on beneficiaries, and also increase the likelihood of basic WASH infrastructure being operated and maintained successfully by the communities themselves.”² Additionally, there was an intent to carry out joint procurement of equipment among Consortium members, and the sustainability approach of the project would ensure longer-term results. Although reaching out to isolated rural communities was recognised to increase the cost per beneficiary, this extra cost was expected to bring about benefits in terms of stronger capacities of local authorities and communities.

¹ Unless otherwise specified, all citations in this section are from DFID, 2011.

² Concern Worldwide, 2013.

Given these premises, how well has the Consortium performed under the VfM criteria?

Tracking VfM: not an easy task

Although VfM should represent a core parameter for DFID and DFID's projects, measuring it in practice has not always been easy for the Consortium.

One of the reasons is that the VfM framework was relatively recent at the time of Consortium's inception, and it was not very clear how to translate this high-level policy into action, for Concern and likely for our DFID counterparts. Indeed, DFID in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has not consistently required the Consortium to run VfM analyses, and has not provided direction on how to do so. In these conditions, it has been hard to identify feasible methods and timelines that would be both in line with the VfM framework and relevant to the Consortium and to DFID in DRC.

Another challenge has been that VfM analysis implies a degree of benchmarking or comparison. In other words, the question of "how well" the Consortium (or any development project) performs under the VfM criteria entails the question: "compared to what?" This is relevant in DRC, where the DFID development WASH portfolio in the 2013 funding cycle included two rural WASH projects (the DRC WASH Consortium by Concern and the National Programme Healthy Schools and Villages or PNEVA, led by UNICEF) and an urban WASH project (Imagine, by Mercy Corps), plus a smaller urban sanitation marketing project by Oxfam that ended in 2016.

In the absence of a comprehensive DFID-coordinated process to define and measure VfM, the risk is that each partner would devise their own methodology and produce analyses that are not comparable with the other DFID-funded WASH projects in DRC. This, in a way, would defeat the purpose of VfM analysis.

The cost-per-beneficiary trap

In this context, the only information from other DFID WASH projects in DRC on which the Consortium had a degree of visibility were their budgets and population figures. Therefore, on some occasions we attempted some rapid comparative analysis of cost per beneficiary, but we faced some distinct barriers.

Access to reliable data was the first barrier: whilst we had full access to data on the Consortium's own actual expenses and population reach, including the method to calculate population figures, we had only partial and indirect information about the other DFID funded WASH projects. Secondly, we would implicitly, and incorrectly, assume that any person reached by any DFID-funded WASH project in DRC would have the same level of assistance (e.g. the same water point design, or the same intensity and quality of capacity development and community engagement): this would have been like comparing 'apples and oranges'. Thirdly, an exclusive emphasis on cost per beneficiary would tilt the focus from impact maximisation to cheap implementation, reversing DFID's principle that VfM aims to maximise impact and not to cut costs. Therefore we concluded that this kind of quick and incomplete analyses provided misleading results and didn't help establish if the Consortium represented good VfM.

The Consortium's VfM analysis

Eventually, as the Consortium was reaching its end and we planned the independent evaluation of the project, we included VfM analysis as one of the main deliverables of the evaluation and we selected the evaluator Absolute Options LLC on the basis of criteria including familiarity with VfM. This turned out to be a fruitful strategy, as the evaluator was able to provide insightful and sound VfM analysis. To cope with the lack of reliable data on other DRC WASH development projects, the evaluator compared the Consortium with regional analogues too, i.e. with similar WASH projects in different sub-Saharan countries³. Most of the contents of this section reprise the evaluation report⁴.

Economy – right quality and price of inputs

The evaluator analysed unit costs, by dividing the dedicated part of the Consortium budget by the infrastructure constructed. All figures used were actuals: actual expenses for actual infrastructure. The average unit cost was £4,830 (€6,122, \$7,037) for water infrastructure and £791 (€1,003, \$1,152) for sanitation infrastructure. This is in line with regional analogues. Water infrastructure were most commonly wells or boreholes (approximately 60 percent of water points) followed by improved springs (35 percent) and gravity networks, while sanitation infrastructure were most often low-cost household-level demonstration toilets and a minority of more expensive toilets in schools and health centres⁵.

The evaluator also analysed past audit reports and examined some procurement files, finding the Consortium agencies' procurement processes were overall appropriate and satisfactory. Due to operational and timing challenges, the Consortium carried out limited joint procurement over time and mutualised resources among Consortium agencies only occasionally. However, this did not appear to have jeopardised the project's Economy.

Efficiency – convert inputs into outputs

The evaluator assessed the Consortium's progress towards planned outputs: actuals versus targets for 28 output indicators from the Consortium's logframe. The Consortium met or exceeded percentage targets for 18 of 28 output indicators assessed. Out of the ten where the Consortium was behind, four were just slightly below target. However, for some of these indicators, the Consortium actually exceeded numerical targets, although the percentage rates were slightly below target. The evaluation concluded that the project achieved reasonable efficiency.



89 percent of water points were still in use after two years, and 99 percent were still managed by water committees.

³ The evaluation report cites Pratt, 2015 and Tremolet, 2015.

⁴ The evaluator analysed Consortium's provisional data (early 2018). However, this data were sizeable enough to be considered reliable. The evaluation was completed in October 2018. See Rinck, Rhodes and Ciza, 2018.

⁵ The Consortium built demonstration toilets to train communities on low-cost construction techniques and materials.

Effectiveness and cost-effectiveness – from outputs to results

The evaluator analysed the Consortium's progress towards outcome indicators, which refer to longer-term results. As of March 2018, the Consortium had met or exceeded six out of seven percentage outcome indicators assessed, suggesting progress towards sustainability despite the challenging conditions for sustainable WASH in DRC.

In the evaluation methodology, cost-effectiveness measured the cost of achieving outcomes, typically the cost per beneficiary. According to calculations based on financial and M&E reports, the Consortium cost per beneficiary stood at about £45 (€57, \$66) as of March 2018.

The evaluator then ran a comparison with other DFID-funded WASH projects in DRC, PNEVA by UNICEF and Imagine by Mercy Corps - with the limitation of comparing the *actual* cost per beneficiary of the Consortium to the *planned* cost per beneficiary of those other projects, as their actuals weren't available.

The Consortium's cost per beneficiary is higher than Imagine (urban WASH) due to economies of scale of urban water systems. It is also higher than PNEVA (nationwide-scale rural WASH) because of the Consortium's investment in community capacity development, including extensive training of WASH committees and an emphasis on "improved WASH behaviours at the household and community levels, which includes a rigorous 12-step training and self-evaluation approach to community WASH standards". Interestingly, the cost per beneficiary of the Consortium compares favourably with other WASH projects in other countries in the region.

Since the evaluation took place, data on two logframe indicators have become available: water points in use two years after completion and water points managed by committees two years after completion. They showed positive results: 89 percent of water points were still in use after two years, and 99 percent were still managed by water committees, against targets of 80 percent. Seventy-three percent still had community financing systems in place, and 81 percent of the committees judged themselves as having the capacity to manage their roles and responsibilities.

This, jointly with the other data described above, suggests that the Consortium reached high degrees of effectiveness and cost-effectiveness in terms of sustainable results over time and confirms the Consortium's initial expectations.



Figure 1 Mama Kabula (16) of Mulombwa village in Manono territory, DRC. She's one of 9 children and is in her second year of secondary school. She says that, before the intervention of Concern, there was no clean water in the village and many people suffered water borne illnesses. She now spends less time fetching water and more time on homework. Photo taken by Kieran McConville, September 2017

Equity – working with women and the poor

The evaluator used the inclusion of women in the Consortium project to assess Equity. According to a gender review from 2017⁶ and more recent M&E data, about one-third of the water management committee members are women. This includes leading positions (president, vice-president, secretary and treasurer), with a prevalence of women among treasurers.

Testimonies gathered during the evaluation suggested that women often hold the position of treasurer because of the perception that they “more responsibly manage money”. In addition, the 2017 gender review reported anecdotal community testimonies that women and girls benefit from reduced time spent collecting water and are less prone to gender-based violence risk.

The evaluation added that the Consortium faces challenges in changing gender-related norms, as women’s roles continue to be based on existing perceptions. Nonetheless, the Consortium is on track towards its target of female participation in water committees and has been successful in involving women in decision making and in reducing their time burden for fetching water.

Conclusions and learnings

The independent evaluation concluded that the development sector should do more to “assess programme performance based upon long-term ‘best value’ (cost of sustainable results)”. The evaluator also recognised the DRC WASH Consortium’s efforts towards responsible stewardship of funds and towards “lowest cost/best value”. This represents a significant acknowledgement for the Consortium, as it draws on systematic and well-informed analysis.

Over time and also thanks to the insights of the final evaluation, we have come to fully appreciate that low cost is not the same as good value. The fact that the cost per beneficiary is often the most immediate aspect to measure in a project shouldn’t generate the illusion that this is the only relevant assessment parameter, and shouldn’t prevent implementers and donors from seeking more fine-tuned analyses. In this context, VfM can represent a very helpful tool to broaden the analysis horizons of development projects and may be used even when donors do not necessarily require it.

However, the VfM framework as such is a high-level policy, far too abstract for direct application to individual projects unless concrete guidance is made available. In the same way, benchmarking VfM performance (the “compared to what?” question) remains a challenge for implementers in the absence of comparable data across different projects. In this respect, donor agencies could do more to enable their implementing partners to parameter, track and achieve VfM.

In the case of the Consortium, it is not by chance that the intervention of an independent evaluator, in close collaboration with the Consortium Coordination Unit, was needed to run a systematic VfM analysis. The Consortium could have carried out this kind of analysis earlier in time -which could have improved our ways of working- if guidance were available from our donor. Likewise, as DFID finances several WASH development projects in DRC, a joint and adapted framework for VfM analysis would have helped gauge the performances of the various

⁶ Kilanga, 2017.

projects and of DFID DRC WASH portfolio overall, and could have better informed strategic decisions in the sector.

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Piloting WASH sector decentralisation in DRC



By: Maria Livia De Rubeis and Gian Melloni

Background

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the 2006 revision of the Constitution marked the beginning of a process of decentralization of all its vital sectors. A new Water Law, promulgated in 2016, streamlined the legal and institutional framework based on the devolution and transfer of services to local administrations. According to the Law, Decentralized Territorial Entities (or ETDs¹) are recognized as “project owners” for public water and sanitation infrastructure. In summary, their responsibilities revolve around: the coordination of the different stakeholders in the field; the definition of water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) needs and priorities within the framework of local development strategies; investment plans to match needs; and ensuring water services are accessible to all at fair rates covering the full costs incurred by service providers.

While, at the time of writing, three years have passed since promulgation of the Water Law, its incomplete conversion into inter-ministerial orders has hindered effective implementation. Competences in the WASH sector remain split among multiple ministries², with the Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) retaining a de-facto major role through the National Rural WASH programme PNEVA. As such, the MoPH was a primary interlocutor for the Consortium at the national level and its primary partner in the field, through its local health offices³. Both the PNEVA and the DRC WASH Consortium also put in place other collaborations with different local actors having a mandate to support the delivery of WASH services in DRC⁴.

1. From the French acronym “Entités Territoriales Décentralisées”. The DRC law No. 08/016 of 7 October 2008 on the composition, organization and operation of Decentralized Territorial Entities and their relations with the State and the provinces, defines four ETD: the city, the municipality, the sector and the chiefdom.
2. Ministry of Public Works, Ministry of Energy, Ministry of the Environment, Ministry of Rural Development, Ministry of Public Health, Ministry of Education and Ministry of Planning.
3. Local health offices collaborated with the Consortium’s staff throughout the whole project cycle, from community targeting to monitoring and village certification according to nationally-defined WASH standards.
4. From the start of the programme, the Consortium has worked with the National Rural Hydraulic Service (SNHR) who bears the responsibility for quality assurance of water infrastructure, and the Provincial WASH coordinating committees (CPAEHAs).

Key steps in the collaboration



Given the fragmented institutional framework of the WASH sector, support to coordination efforts has been set at the very core of the Consortium's mandate, as explained under UK Aid's business case⁵. "The Consortium will build capacity across the sector from the bottom-up, identifying the most appropriate government actors depending on the local context. As part of project level governance strategies, these actors will be engaged in a range of different ways as part of implementation including monitoring, quality assurance, and coordination."

This explains why the Consortium was at the forefront in advocating for the Water Law⁶, as an effort to clarify institutional roles and responsibilities in WASH in DRC. As part of this advocacy, in September 2015, Concern and the Consortium led 17 national and international NGOs active in the DRC WASH sector in addressing a letter to the national parliament advocating for the Law, which was eventually promulgated in January 2016. A few weeks later, the Consortium promoted its fourth External Technical Review⁷ on the topic of the Water Law and WASH sector governance, to explore with technical experts and local institutions the kind of follow up of the Law expected after its promulgation.

This forum highlighted the importance of a strong need for capacity development of ETDs, who would require a new set of skills to fulfil their new responsibilities. The Consortium, with the collaboration of national consultants, worked to understand the practical implications of the Law for rural ETDs and how the Consortium could systematise collaboration with ETDs. The Consortium project has since then facilitated ETDs' involvement in supporting communities during and after project implementation.

⁵. See DFID, 2013.

⁶. See Jones, 2016.

⁷. The External Technical Reviews are knowledge sharing platforms on topics of interest for the DRC WASH sector that the Consortium organised biannually in Kinshasa from 2014 to 2018, involving a large variety of stakeholders.

In 2017, the Consortium designed a pilot project of capacity development of a small group of ETDs from the Consortium's intervention areas. The Consortium collaborated with the firm Hydroconseil, which provided technical and training expertise. This was ground-breaking work in DRC, as one of the few initiatives to properly understand and disseminate the messages of the Water Law among the actors concerned at the local level⁸.

An initial institutional diagnosis of existing ETD capacities served as the basis for the outline of trainings, organised in three sessions (basic, advanced and refreshers). Basic training explored the fundamental principles of the new legislative framework and its implications for the ETDs. Participants identified the barriers to the implementation of the new sectoral framework and their priority needs to establish sustainable public WASH services. Advanced trainings explored how to carry out assessments of existing WASH infrastructures: from their maintenance status to management system; as well as revenue planning in the long-term.

The final output of the advanced trainings was a financial planning tool for sustainable WASH services tailored for rural ETDs. The ETDs taking part in the sessions used an 11-stage methodology, developed with the trainers, to achieve realistic and balanced financial planning to forecast revenues and spending over the coming years. The advantage of this methodology is that it is easily understandable and usable by rural ETDs, including those who have not received training⁹.

Successes and challenges of the collaboration

Promoting the support of communities by ETDs, both before and during the pilot project, has proved generally effective. Anecdotal evidence highlighted that ETDs have frequently played an important role in helping communities find solutions to internal tensions regarding WASH issues. Also, the institutional diagnostic found that all the ETDs were willing to assume the role of project owner indicated in the Water Law, and several of them had already added access to drinking water to their local development priorities.

However, limited familiarity with WASH themes and limited prior experience in sector planning represent barriers to overcome. In addition, ETDs suffer from ongoing shortages of financial resources, causing, among other things, frequent understaffing.

Against these challenges, results of the pilot project were overall positive, ETDs having generally retained the principal topics (e.g. the scope of their mandate and the principle of non-gratuity of water). The participants generally appreciated the contents of the sessions and the fact that they addressed a highly-felt need of the ETDs to be better prepared to take up their responsibilities under the Water Law.

A challenge of the pilot project was for the Consortium and Hydroconseil to fully forecast future implications of the Water Law. This is because the DRC WASH sector is presently in a transition between the promulgation of the Law and its full implementation, and many details are yet to be determined. In this framework, it was essential not to disrupt very sensitive balances

⁸ Notably, GIZ's multi-phase Rese programme worked towards improving the capacities of key Congolese actors involved in drinking water supply.

⁹ See www.consortiumwashdrc.net/ressources/.

among the different institutions currently operating in the sector, especially between ETDs and local government health offices. To do so, through the pilot project and within the whole programme, the Consortium sought to foster inter-institutional collaboration at the local level.



Figure 1 15 year old Liliana Mwenza wa llunga says the new water point and other interventions by the Concern-led WASH consortium in her village, Mulombwa, has had a very positive impact on family life. Photo taken by Kieran McConville, September 2017

What have we learned?

The pilot project confirmed ETDs' willingness to assume the roles and responsibilities defined under the Water Law. Despite the poor financial resources at their disposal, most ETDs that took part in the pilot project successfully helped WASH management committees in case of need, especially in resolving tensions within communities, even before the pilot project took place. This support role was particularly effective due to acceptance and recognition that communities accord to ETDs and seems a robust factor of increased accountability in the provision of WASH services.

Nevertheless, it will be necessary to evaluate the extent of future ETD involvement in programming against the changing and somewhat ambiguous regulatory context. Involving ETDs from the onset of WASH programmes and encouraging collaboration with all the local WASH institutions will certainly be good practice. However, accurate and timely re-assessments of legislative evolutions will be necessary from future actors and programmes, as well as active efforts to involve the ETDs and other local institutions in the identification of the partnerships' scope. This is because, although the Water Law has been promulgated, it is necessary to have ministerial decrees implemented in order to give power and resources to the ETDs to carry out their duties.

More generally, following the evolution of the Water Law in DRC from 2015 to 2018 also helped us appreciate the importance of understanding sector governance and of including this dimension in the design of development projects, in a perspective of institutional strengthening and of longer term sustainability.

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Influencing the WASH sector through learning and advocacy



By: **Maria Livia De Rubeis and Gian Melloni**

When the DRC WASH Consortium started in 2013, the National Programme “Healthy Schools and Villages” or PNEVA¹ of the government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) with financial and technical support from UK Aid and UNICEF was one of the few rural development programmes of significant size entirely dedicated to supporting communities for better and long-term water, hygiene and sanitation access.

The Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) sector in DRC lacked mechanisms for coordination and learning that would bring key stakeholders together. While the Cluster system ensured humanitarian coordination, development actors (active on longer term programmes and goals, sometimes in partnership with governmental agencies) struggled to find forums that would address their priorities and improve sector-wide planning, alignment, learning and innovation.

A strategy for learning

Against this background, Concern and UK Aid identified sector learning as a priority and embedded it in the Consortium’s theory of change, based on the assumption that improved management of project information leads to an improved evidence base for the Consortium and for the sector at large, which in turn brings about change for the rural communities. Therefore the Consortium, as part of its result framework, produced and disseminated evidence for sustainable community-based solutions to WASH needs in DRC.

To do so, the Consortium has dedicated tools and resources to learning, including a complex monitoring and evaluation system and staff in charge of M&E and of Communication, Advocacy and Learning in the Consortium Coordination Unit. This has contributed to systematic documentation and dissemination of our project’s learnings, both at the national and international level.

The Consortium website, as of late 2018, has published 18 reports, manuals and studies, and has had 745 unique visits per month on average since its creation. The Consortium has systematically disseminated its approach and lessons learned through international publications. To date, we have released six research papers through WEDC international conferences² and

¹ From the French acronym “Programme National Ecole et Village Assainis”, meaning “National Programme for Healthy Schools and Villages”.

² WEDC (Water, Engineering and Development Centre) is a leading education and research institute for developing knowledge and capacity in water and sanitation.

RWSN platforms³. Research ranged from life-cycle costing in DRC, to supply chains of spare parts for hand pumps and to effective monitoring of WASH programmes⁴.



Figure 1 Pump technician, Ilunga Wailungabje (left), and supervisor Daviens Ngoy Wangay (right), doing maintenance work on a water pump in Katchambuyu village, Tanganyika, DRC. Photo taken by Kieran McConville, September 2017

The Technical Reviews

Our main means for promoting learning were the biannual “Technical Reviews”, which we organise in Kinshasa. These are platforms for sharing and discussing experiences and expertise on subject matters that are at the heart of the Consortium strategy but also that have relevance to the sector at large, such as life-cycle costing, community mobilisation and WASH governance. Throughout the eight reviews from 2014 to 2018, we have gathered 60 to 100 participants each time, from organisations such as INGOs, United Nations, donors, local and national authorities, as well as private sector and local civil society.

As the Consortium was still in the process of defining its approach and of building its own expertise, early Technical Reviews focused on programmatic matters mainly of the Consortium, allowing us to gather ideas from sector experts and to fine-tune our approach to sustainability. Over time however, the focus of our Technical Reviews shifted more and more towards learning for the sector at large, as the Consortium was developing the know-how to engage in more ambitious sets of topics.

³ RWSN (Rural Water Supply Network) is a global network of rural water supply professionals.

⁴ The full list is available on www.consortiumwashrdc.net/ressources

Advocating for the Water Law

A symbol of this shift is the fourth Technical Review (early 2016) on WASH sector governance and accountability, with the participation of high-level governance players such as UNDP, GIZ, SNV and national specialists. The emphasis was by now more on WASH sector priorities than on those of the Consortium.

This Technical Review was conceived as a complement to a significant (and effective) advocacy initiative that the Consortium had led in late 2015. A DRC WASH sector reform, debated but not approved for years, outlined significant decentralisation of roles and responsibilities in WASH from the central government to local governments. It was the assessment of the Consortium that such reform would bring about beneficial impacts for rural populations across the country. Therefore the Consortium took action by addressing a letter, co-signed with Concern and 17 national and international NGOs, to the DRC national parliament, asking to pass the reform. The parliament voted the Water Law in December 2015 and the president promulgated it in January 2016.

A different kind of advocacy

In conjunction with this kind of high-level public advocacy, the Consortium has consistently tried to influence the sector by more 'mediated' means.

This more nuanced kind of advocacy has typically addressed the issue of financial sustainability of water supply in rural areas and of life-cycle costing of water infrastructure. We have done this by sharing as often and as convincingly as possible our Economic Approach and its results and by stimulating debate about community financing, in multilateral or bilateral encounters. Even though this is hard to define in unequivocal terms, it is interesting that some key players in development WASH, such as PNEVA and UNICEF, are now tending to talk more and more about community financing of water point management. The principle that water access is a right but cannot be granted for free is heard more and more often in DRC WASH sector debates.

Likewise, we have pushed for years for the Consortium-assisted communities to be included in the national "Healthy Villages" database, as a means to foster post-project follow-up by national and local authorities and therefore to promote longer term sustainability of results. Whilst blockages of various types prevented this from happening in the past, the process started in late 2017 and is well underway as of late 2018. In this final period of the Consortium, the challenge is pushing towards the inclusion of the Consortium-assisted communities in the post-certification system, which is a nationwide PNEVA-led framework for light-touch support by local government health offices⁵ of "Healthy Villages" after project end.

⁵ Post-certification entails periodic monitoring visits to certified communities for a minimum of three years. Communities who have lost one or more of the required standards for certification are supported in the definition of a catch-up plan and monitored until they reach their objectives.



Through its own initiatives and through promotion of joint initiatives... the Consortium has been effective in creating a favourable environment for sector sharing, learning and innovation.

Challenges and successes

An issue that remains somewhat unresolved is how to identify the right pitch for the Consortium's 'sector learning'. On the one hand, promoting sector learning can be hard for an actor like the Consortium who does not have a formal mandate to coordinate the sector, unlike, for example, Cluster Coordinators in the humanitarian system. The risk is limited effectiveness of the Consortium's initiatives. On the other hand, pushing too insistently to gather development WASH stakeholders around the debate table may have the counterproductive effect of putting us in a position of perceived competition to actors with stronger formal legitimacy, like UN agencies or governmental departments. Keeping a fine balance between effectiveness of action and awareness of our limitations has been an ongoing exercise throughout the project.

This is why, whenever possible, we have joined forces with external actors. Since January 2018 we have been the co-facilitators, together with UNICEF, of a newly established knowledge management platform chaired by the national authority CNAEHA⁶. Another recent example is the inclusion of our core programme results in UNICEF's report "Atlas 2017", which this year for the first time ever includes the results of other actors alongside PNEVA's⁷.

Through its own initiatives and through promotion of joint initiatives, and within its limitations, the Consortium has been effective in creating a favourable environment for sector sharing, learning and innovation. Our Technical Reviews have gained momentum in Kinshasa and among local partners, taking up a leading role in facilitating sector debate. We have retained interest from one Technical Review to the next, by trying to maintain high degrees of quality and relevance and by involving a variety of actors.

Confirming this assessment, DFID's Annual Review of the DRC WASH programme in 2015 found that "the WASH Consortium coordination unit has added value by creating a dynamic learning environment and regularly integrating lessons learnt into the programme design. [...] Sector learning events and an update to the technical manual have fostered debate within the sector and consolidated the approach within the WASH Consortium partners."

What have we learned?

The DRC WASH Consortium architecture has had the great strength of having a substantive component of 'learning' ingrained in its theory of change and in its result framework, supported by not insignificant budgetary and human resources. This shows that developing the right know-

⁶ *Comité National d'Action pour l'Eau, l'Hygiène et l'Assainissement*, a unit of the DRC Ministry of Planning mandated to coordinate and harmonise WASH sector policies and strategies.

⁷ UNICEF, 2018.

how and carrying out effective sector learning (and even assuming a central role in that) are achievable when adequate and dedicated resources are available.

Another core point is that exploring the boundaries of our mandate in terms of learning and advocacy is an exercise that demands constant adjustments. The distinction between evidence-based learning and broader advocacy is sometimes blurred; this implies that before taking initiatives, we should carry out careful analysis of the interests and the influence of key stakeholders, as well as of the overall operating environment. This helps tell apart issues that are appropriate for evidence-based learning from issues that require 'vocal' advocacy or more nuanced approaches.

The identification of Consortium's key messages and recommendations has been fundamental in promoting sector learning and pursuing advocacy initiatives. This has been possible through constant reflections on the Consortium's own identity and through constant analysis of the evolving operational context, which have been beneficial to our learning processes and have made the project more adaptive. The experience of the DRC WASH Consortium has shown that knowledge management can be a strategic resource both to generate organisational learning and to influence broader sector debate.

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- Links to full reports

What it doesn't include

- Targeted recommendations
- Additional evidence not included in the papers cited
- Detailed descriptions of interventions or their implementation

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