

STORIES OF CHANGE

Achieving national-level systems change through collaborative advocacy



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Foreword



**BETHLEHEM
MENGISTU**

GLOBAL COORDINATOR
AGENDA FOR CHANGE

These 5 stories from Agenda for Change WASH systems practitioners present the key factors and tactics that have led to collective national advocacy and influencing successes. Further, our members provide insights on what it takes to be an influential systems thinker and doer, while sharing important skills and tactics they've employed to persuade, bargain, negotiate, and influence change at the national level and beyond. This is unique since these aspects are rarely costed adequately, are hard to monetise and track, yet at the same time are critical to effectively realize systems change.

“ While our tools provide us with in-depth diagnostics of the system, these change stories highlight the complementary skills and approaches needed to incentivise beneficial action and behaviour from sector actors. ”

We recently launched our **Global Strategy** which presents our collective ambition - taking collective action to make nationally led WASH system strengthening the principal approach to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 6. A key pathway to achieving our ambitious mission is effectively influencing and advocating to accelerate systems shifts required at the country level.

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Achieving national-level systems change
through collaborative advocacy

It takes a ‘Story Teller, an Expert, and a Politician’ to make systems change happen.

Achieving national level systems change is usually the result of years of collaborative engagement and advocacy by like-minded people and organizations, using a variety of tactics and soft skills and putting in time and effort to bring it about.

This paper documents five stories of change from Cambodia, Ethiopia, Honduras, Malawi, and Uganda based on interviews with a change maker from each country.

Each story provides a personal account of what happened, challenges encountered along the way, and the tactics, soft skills and resourcing that helped to achieve it.

Three of the five national-level systems changes achieved are about developing and implementing water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) policy documents: a climate-resilient finance strategy in Malawi, revising the national sector plan for achieving universal access to WASH by 2030 in Honduras, and harmonizing data collection for WASH in Uganda. The other two changes refer first and foremost to a shift in mindsets, namely a clear sector commitment to achieving Open Defecation Free provinces in Cambodia and to popularizing systems change concepts in partnership with a national sector training institute in Ethiopia.



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Tactics

Some common threads emerge between the five stories on the tactics used to achieve national level systems change:

Enabling the state's leadership authentically



This tactic refers to acknowledging the legitimate role of government and being aware of our own position as a non-state actor. This requires consciously occupying the role of enabler, supporter, and critical friend without imposing our ideas, while co-creating with those who have the mandate and authority. This will ultimately ensure that the demand for systems change is led by government and that they are the ones driving the change process.

HOW THE TACTIC WAS USED BY CHANGE MAKERS:

In the cases where national sector policies or tools were developed, sector ministries identified the need for a particular systems change following a national building block analysis, and Agenda for Change members then collaborated with them in seeing it through. For example, in Honduras, the Para Todos Por Siempre (PTPS) Secretariat coordinated development of the national WASH plan by co-organizing and co-hosting regular sector gatherings with CONASA, the agency mandated to develop sector policies. In Uganda, the Sector Liaison Department at the Ministry of Water and Environment spearheaded the diagnostic assessment of sector databases with Agenda for Change members contributing to the process and making sure the agenda was kept at the top of different competing government priorities.

Working with policy champions



This tactic refers to identifying and working with champions towards a policy change, either directly with decision makers or those close to them. This also requires us to have an acute sense of where the power to effect systemic change actually lies, and what the incentive and motivations are for decision making.

HOW THE TACTIC WAS USED BY CHANGE MAKERS:

For all systems changes aimed at influencing a national policy process, Agenda for Change members worked closely with one or more policy champions. In Cambodia, WaterAid worked closely with the Director for General Technical Affairs in the Ministry of Rural Development who had a good grasp of WASH topics, was well respected in the sector, and close to the Minister. A core group of around 10 people, including Agenda for Change members collaborated closely with him behind the scenes towards a formal national commitment to ODF. In Malawi, Agenda for Change members directly accessed decision makers, namely the Minister and also the President. When engaging with them, they highlighted how a sector finance strategy provided a solution to current sector challenges, e.g., the need for Water Boards to recover debts, to secure their support. In Honduras, PTPS worked with a technical expert who was trusted by the Minister and who kept him informed of the process to pave the way for a smooth approval of the revised National WASH Plan.

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Seeking opportunities for changes as they emerge



This tactic aims at enhancing awareness and support for a sector practice or policy change by disseminating the message in different ways, typically via different types of media.

HOW THE TACTIC WAS USED BY CHANGE MAKERS:

All stories have examples where Agenda for Change members took advantage of changes in their sector context to further their cause. For example, in Ethiopia, the pandemic provided an opportunity for the Ethiopia Water Technology Institute (EWTI) to embrace online learning through a hybrid course on systems strengthening based on the IRC WASH Systems Academy. In Malawi, Agenda for Change partners used the increased occurrence of cyclones as an opportunity to argue for a climate-resilient WASH financing strategy.

Telling a compelling story well



This tactic is about taking on unexpected opportunities created through a change in the external environment that then opens up a new space for engagement. Influencing systemic change requires agility, adapting and ‘dancing’ with unforeseen changes that emerge in the sector. This is linked to an always learning and evolving mindset.

HOW THE TACTIC WAS USED BY CHANGE MAKERS:

Agenda for Change members in Cambodia and Malawi made extensive use of the media to strengthen public support for WASH. In Cambodia, this included training of journalists and setting up a ‘Media in WASH’ network to produce WASH-related media content. WaterAid Cambodia also worked with local youth interested in storytelling to document their experiences and publish them on Facebook, organized talk shows with sector leaders, and other public events such as ‘cycling for sanitation’. In Malawi, Agenda for Change members organized meetings with the print media and also took to social media to disseminate their messages, including organizing a public march on World Water Day. They also targeted specific audiences with tailored messages such as the Parliamentary Committee on Natural Resources.

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Soft Skills

A common denominator across the soft skills used amongst the five stories of change is that each change maker is deeply immersed in the local context and therefore able to act with integrity. This is reflected in the examples below.



Building engagement rooted in trust

Building trust takes time and evidence, it also requires systems change makers to have a deep understand of motivations, behaviors, incentives, cultural nuances, and aspects that are implicit/unwritten but can enable or derail the desired change. While investing in trust-embedded relationships, change makers usually invest across multiple layers of the bureaucracy i.e., top layer, the technical, the administrative layer, etc. This is key to a winning strategy; the aim is to support institutional building in the long term rather than individual relationships. It is also linked to ensuring we plan for business continuity and avert disruptions which can affect long-term institutional strengthening, like employee turn-over.

EXAMPLES FROM THE 5 CHANGE STORIES:

All 5 change makers are deeply rooted in their local contexts and have developed personal and professional ties in the sector through an engagement spanning years, if not decades, thereby making close collaboration with government feel natural. For example, Jane Nabunnya, Country Director, IRC, in Uganda has worked in the sector for years, building up a solid relationship with technocrats, decision makers, and partners. In Ethiopia, Lemessa Mekonta, Country Director IRC, can base the institutional collaboration with EWTTI on a shared understanding between him and EWTTI's Director who he has closely collaborated with in the past. In Honduras, Martín Rivera, National Coordinator, PTPS, also looks back on longstanding relations within the movement, which allow him to gently push people to go the extra mile for him. The examples demonstrate how important it is for members to work with change makers who are immersed in their local contexts.

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Imagining a ‘larger us,’ rather than focusing on the ‘I’

We must make space for others to join in on collaborative advocacy. The change that is desired is systems change which requires a critical mass to tackle complexities that cannot be achieved unilaterally. It’s about the long game and inviting/connecting with others.

EXAMPLES FROM THE 5 CHANGE STORIES:

Several change makers referred to the ability to make space for others as a key leadership quality for policy influencing. Kate Harawa, Director of Influence and Scale, Water For People in Malawi, found that collective action requires individuals to put their egos aside and engage with other peoples’ perspectives to allow for a common agenda to emerge. In Honduras, Martin Rivera found that PTPS partners needed to make space for authorities to take the lead in developing the national WASH plan and to support them in the process. Similarly, in Cambodia, Sokkung Sou, Head of Programmes at WaterAid, referred to the listening and facilitation skills of strong local leaders and their ability to bring the right people around the table to effectively implement ODF action plans.

Understanding the rules of the game

Acting appropriately within the local context involves acknowledging that not everything in the context or the system can be translated or acutely understood from the outside; therefore, employing humility and investing in nationally led systems change is the best course of action.

EXAMPLES FROM THE 5 CHANGE STORIES:

This soft skill comes naturally to people who interact in their local context but is nevertheless essential. For example, in Uganda, Jane Nabunnya knows that showing respect for peoples’ time, space, and titles smooths relations even if the actual exchanges can be quite informal. Another unwritten rule in Uganda is to closely follow government procedures to foster effective collaboration, for example by following up any verbal agreements in writing.

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Resourcing

The third area relates to the resourcing requirements of systems change work, which is important and yet often still a bottleneck in the experience of change makers.



Budgeting for systems change

Systems change work takes years and it is hard to attach the time spent to traditional project budgets that tie all funded activities and overheads to specific result areas.

EXAMPLES FROM THE 5 CHANGE STORIES:

The number of budgeted days that change makers had available to them varied across contexts and specific sources of funding they could access locally. Several systems changes were identified based on initial sector-wide assessments enabled via seed funding from the Agenda for Change (around 20-30,000 USD). Several change makers found that it was hard to get the time spent on subsequent systems change activities covered through their existing project work. For example, Kate had 25 days assigned to work on the climate resilient finance strategy in Malawi, which involved a process spanning several years. It can be problematic to keep systems change work up when there are not sufficient budgeted days.

For example, in Uganda, partners are not always able to prioritize the time needed for systems change work because they need to prioritize other work for funded programs and it can sometimes be cumbersome to bring people together or get timely inputs. Conversely, when the systems change activities were further supported by flexible donor funding, this facilitated supporting the change process. In Honduras, the Osprey Foundation provided flexible funding to the PTPS secretariat over the last 4 years, which enabled Martin to dedicate between 25-60% of his time to the review of the national WASH plan for more than a year and in Cambodia the SusWASH program funded by the H&M Foundation provided flexible funding over several years.

A need for long term horizons

Collaborative advocacy aimed at national level systems change takes time, much longer than the typical project cycle of 1-3 years.

EXAMPLES FROM THE 5 CHANGE STORIES:

Depending on the context and nature of the systems change envisaged, the changes documented in the stories here usually took several years before demonstrating achievements at scale. According to Sokkung, systems change work requires a time horizon of 5-10 years. This is easy to understand based on his story of change: in Cambodia, the work to achieve national commitment towards ODF started with small scale capacity building and model testing and several rounds of learning and adaptation before scaling up the Civic Champions Program. At that stage, WaterAid used different communication channels, tactics, and engaged with stakeholder groups across all levels of society. It is this combination of activities spread over several years that allowed WaterAid Cambodia to create a virtuous cycle, a healthy ecosystem where people from all walks of society want to work together to achieve ODF. This has been confirmed in a recent synthesis of systems change case studies¹ which found that systems-based outcomes that lead to service delivery improvements require at least a decade or more to materialize.

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¹ Fogelberg, K; Lockwood H (n.d.): Agenda for Change: WASH Systems Change Research. Synthesis findings from case studies. [Agenda for Change: WASH Systems Change Research \(washagendaforchange.org\)](http://washagendaforchange.org)



CAMBODIA



Facilitating a gradual buildup of sector leadership and commitment towards Open Defecation Free status in Cambodia



SOKKUNG SOU
HEAD OF PROGRAMS
WATERAID CAMBODIA

SYSTEMS CHANGE ACHIEVED

National commitment and sector leadership to achieve ODF at the provincial level

BUILDING BLOCKS TARGETED



Institutional Arrangements and Coordination

By the end of June 2023, 5 out of 25 provinces in Cambodia have been declared as Open Defecation Free (ODF). This achievement is underpinned by a strong commitment to ODF from key political stakeholders, namely the Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD) and provincial governors. MoRD demonstrated leadership by developing a national action plan, chairing technical working groups, active support to poor and disabled people to gain access to sanitation, and their use of the national monitoring systems for reviewing and updating action plans.

According to Sokkung Sou, national level leadership and commitment are paramount for sustainable services because they underpin all the other systems strengthening building blocks. In Cambodia, he has seen that “when there is willingness for change, anything can happen”.

Collective advocacy context

WaterAid and Agenda for Change partners are working closely with government to build a culture of learning around water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) systems strengthening to bring about change from the local to the national level. Active government leadership acts as the backbone for change.



Leadership development civic champion (WaterAid/Sokkung Sou)

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2018

STEP 1: DEVELOPING A COLLECTIVE ACTION APPROACH AT DISTRICT LEVEL

WaterAid started experimenting with systems strengthening concepts for ODF at district level using the **WASH BAT analysis tool** developed by UNICEF and the systems strengthening concept of WaterAid's **SusWASH programme**. They formed a district management group for collective action, identified building block bottlenecks, and developed action plans, first in one district in one province, and then in two other districts in a second province.

COLLABORATORS:

WaterAid Cambodia - Commune focal points - District WASH Committees - Provincial governors

2019

STEP 2: DEVELOPING LOCAL LEADERSHIP VIA THE CIVIC CHAMPIONS PROGRAM

When the government transferred all sanitation functions to the district level, this required local authority capacity building to handle these new responsibilities. WaterAid used this opportunity to introduce the Civic Champions program, a model that was first developed by the former local NGO and Agenda for Change member **WaterSHED**. The program aims to drive local commitment and leadership to improve access to sanitation. The Civic Champion program carries out training-of-trainer sessions with government staff from the commune, district, and province level on facilitation, planning, monitoring, and resource mobilization skills for sanitation. The trainings are followed by cycles of three-monthly action plans during which local leaders continue to receive coaching support. Each cycle concludes with a competition for a leadership award based on latrine increase, the use of leadership skills, and team work. After several cohorts of communes had gone through the training, WaterAid and WaterSHED documented the process and invited others to learn from it and gradually institutionalized the program within government via a collaboration with the National School of Local Administration.

COLLABORATORS:

*WaterAid Cambodia - WaterSHED - Commune focal points - District WASH Committee
Provincial governors - Ministry of Interior - Department of Training (National School of Local Administration)*

2020

STEP 3: BROADENING THE COMMITMENT TOWARDS ODF

When the basic concept of the program – to increase leadership and commitment towards sanitation amongst elected local government representatives -- was shown to be effective, WaterAid worked towards scaling it up within and across provinces. At the local level, WaterAid Cambodia mobilized additional change agents e.g., through targeting women and youth groups and organizations representing the interest of vulnerable groups. At the province level, WaterAid worked closely with provincial governors to replicate the process of developing action plans and peer-to-peer exchanges to compare progress and learn from each other. In parallel, WaterAid worked closely with the media to increase the visibility of the program and of ODF at all levels: media outlets worked with local youth groups on storytelling, organized talk shows, and covered the success of the Civic Champions program at public events such as the National Sanitation Forum.

COLLABORATORS:

*WaterAid Cambodia - Local and national media outlets - MoRD - Provincial governors
Local change agents of different walks of life - Organizations representing the interests of vulnerable groups*



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2020-2021

STEP 4: ACHIEVING NATIONAL COMMITMENT TOWARDS ODF

At the national level, a small group of like-minded organizations including Agenda for Change members worked in close collaboration with the Director of General Technical Affairs at the MoRD on increasing and formalizing the government’s commitment to ODF. This group continuously worked together through various informal channels of communication such as Zoom and Teams calls, and the Telegram app. Part of the approach was to familiarize the Director with other countries that went through similar experiences. This exposure helped facilitate the process of Cambodia becoming a member of Sanitation and Water for All (SWA). While becoming a SWA member, the Government made a formal commitment to achieving ODF in 4 provinces by 2023 and universal sanitation access by 2025.

COLLABORATORS:

Agenda for Change members - Other like-minded organizations - UNICEF - Director of Technical General Affairs - MoRD

2022-2023

STEP 5: GOVERNMENT TAKES THE LEAD TO HONOR ODF COMMITMENT

Since its formal commitment to ODF, the Cambodian Government adopted and delivered the Civic Champions Program across 8 of its 25 provinces through national and sub-national government bodies, with continued technical support from WaterAid Cambodia. The Government clearly demonstrated its commitment by developing a national action plan and establishing and chairing of the national technical working group on ODF, the Minister of Rural Development visiting ODF provinces, and through continued quality assurances and monitoring of progress.

COLLABORATORS:

Ministry of Interior - National School of Local Administration - MoRD - Sub-national Administrations Department of Rural Health Care - WaterAid Cambodia

APRIL 2023

STEP 6: FIVE PROVINCES ACHIEVE ODF STATUS

By the end of June 2023, 5 provinces have been declared ODF by MoRD in Cambodia. The Government continues to work towards achieving universal access to sanitation by 2025. Despite strong government commitment, the process is not without its challenges. One is moving up the sanitation ladder from ODF towards safely managed services. Another challenge relates to mobilizing sufficient resources to reach the last 2-5% of the population in each province. This is particularly difficult in places where there are no obvious low-cost sanitation solutions e.g., in floating communities living on lakes and rivers. Work is now underway with academia and a private company to pilot innovative technologies.



Leadership development civic champion (WaterAid/Sokmeng You)



Tactics used

Regularly reflecting, documenting, and adapting

WaterAid Cambodia continuously reflected and documented its approach to the Civic Champions program initiated by WaterSHED, adapting it as they went along. This allowed WaterAid Cambodia to develop a strong understanding of the context, social norms, and culture that affect motivation, and adapt the program accordingly. Strong documentation e.g., by developing a research brief, translating it into Khmer, and by producing a documentary for screening at national sector events such as World Sanitation Day, helped building evidence for a case to scale the program to the national level.

Enhancing public support through competition and recognition

At the lowest level, households competed for small awards. At the province level, WaterAid Cambodia invited governors to make a joint commitment towards ODF, followed by exchange visits for joint learning and ranking. According to Sokkung, the competition between provinces were an important contribution to increased national ownership and commitment. The approach builds on a broader culture of achieving recognition through non-financial awards in Cambodia; the certificates earned act a strong motivational factor for the individuals who receive them.

Using the media to increase the case for ODF

WaterAid Cambodia put a lot of effort into engaging the media to increase visibility around the Civic Champions Program and ODF. Activities included training journalists and setting up a 'Media in WASH' network to increase public engagement for WASH services. This included a competitive element whereby media outlets that produced many WASH-related stories and reached a wide audience received public recognition from the Cambodian government. According to Sokkung, this meant that ODF received high media attention, including talk shows with sector leaders from different administrative levels in three provinces and the coverage of public events such as a 'cycling for sanitation' campaign.



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Soft skills

Leadership skills

Leadership skills are very important for implementing systems strengthening approaches and at the heart of the systems change process in Cambodia, implemented via the Civic Champions Program. Effective leaders bring a combination of strong facilitation skills and the ability to enable key stakeholders to work together as a team. They also act as role models through their own enthusiasm and by demonstrating commitment, for example, by allocating administrative budget to ODF. In addition, strong leaders are humble: they listen to researchers and experts and use that information to formulate their WASH action plans.

An organizational culture fostering learning

WaterAid Cambodia built a working culture around values related to courage and learning. The senior leadership team fosters these values through a well-established cycle of trial, learning and documentation, for example through monthly value awards which are a strong motivational factor for staff. WaterAid Cambodia also strongly values critical thinking and clear communication, the skills that make people passionate about systems strengthening. It is this culture that allowed WaterAid Cambodia to effectively implement the civic champion programme, which became so influential in driving commitment to ODF in Cambodia.



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Resourcing

Staff time

It is difficult to put an exact number of days that Sokkung and others committed to the Civic Champions program in Cambodia but he is clear that a lot of formal and informal staff time went into the program during the first 2-3 years of relationship building. The funding for staff costs was covered by the SusWASH program, funded by the H&M Foundation. Now that relationships are well established, time commitment has eased. Sokkung is convinced that the initial investment was worth it since WaterAid Cambodia is in a strong influencing position now and its time is spent more on backstopping and coaching rather than advocating for change. Overall, systems change work needs to be conceptualized as a 5–10-year engagement.

Other resources

WaterAid Cambodia invested resources in capacity building and model testing related to the learning and adaptation approach, which is hard to accommodate in traditional project funding.



Media engagement in WASH sector influencing (WaterAid/Sotheamin Net)

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ETHIOPIA

Working with the Ethiopian sector training institute to popularize systems strengthening concepts



**LEMESSA
MEKONTA**

COUNTRY DIRECTOR
IRC ETHIOPIA

SYSTEMS CHANGE ACHIEVED

Popularizing systems thinking concepts in the Ethiopian Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) sector

BUILDING BLOCKS TARGETED



Institutional
Arrangements
and Coordination

In Ethiopia, IRC is building the sector’s capacity by cascading basic WASH systems change concepts at national and local government training institutions and regional sector government stakeholders. The hybrid training courses are based on the **IRC WASH Systems Academy online trainings** and have been adapted to the Ethiopian context. In April 2023, five training of trainer (ToT) courses have been run and two universities have included the course material in their curricula resulting in over 1,000 trained individuals in Ethiopia, mostly from academia and government. This is starting to create a ‘ripple’ effect as systems strengthening graduates further spread the concept amongst their networks.

Using the concept of ToT contributes to sustainable WASH services by spreading the thinking behind the systems change philosophy more widely than would be possible when working directly through just the immediate members of the Agenda for Change collaboration in Ethiopia. Practically, this happened by embedding systems change training in the Ethiopia Water Technology Institute (EWTI), the agency mandated with sector capacity building. EWTI then became the hub for spreading the training further to other sector training centers across the country. According to Lemessa Mekonta, to bring about systems change in the WASH sector, it is important for people to understand the factors behind service failures. For example, when a generator fails, people usually think about spare parts only, without digging deeper to understand the link to finance, the supply chain, or technical skills needed to replace the broken part. Conversely, a systems thinking mindset is required to make strategic choices that lead to more sustainable services.

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Collective advocacy context

In Ethiopia, like-minded sector organizations established a national working group on WASH systems strengthening around 2018. Since then, the collaboration has evolved substantially with many institutions now embedding systems strengthening approaches in their work. IRC's WASH Academy basic systems strengthening course adds a vital element by spreading systems concepts and approaches across the country, thereby reaching many more people than individual organizations are able to reach directly.

2018

STEP 1: IDEA OF A HYBRID SYSTEMS CHANGE TRAINING OF TRAINERS (TOT) IS BORN

In Ethiopia, IRC has long held close ties with the Ethiopia Water Technology Institute (EWTI), the institution mandated for water supply and sanitation capacity building and technology transfer in the country. EWTI is well placed for reaching many sector stakeholders based on agreements with technical and vocational education training centers (TVETs) and higher education institutions across Ethiopia and has a well-established relationship with many local governments. Because of the strong existing relationship with EWTI, the idea of developing and rolling out a training course based on a WASH systems strengthening philosophy felt like a natural extension of collaboration to both organizations and was easy to put into practice.

COLLABORATORS:

EWTI - IRC Ethiopia

2019

STEP 2: FORMALIZING THE COLLABORATION THROUGH A MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING (MOU)

IRC and EWTI signed an MoU to formalize their collaboration. In it, IRC Ethiopia commits to strengthening EWTI's capacity in delivering innovative sector trainings and EWTI to using its set-up for implementing collaborative training initiatives. As part of the MoU, two members of EWTI visited the IHE Delft Institute for Water Education in the Netherlands and learned how online training courses are designed and delivered.

COLLABORATORS:

EWTI - IRC Ethiopia



A national level training including universities undertaken in Bishoftu, Ethiopia (IRC WASH Ethiopia).

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2020

STEP 3: PILOTING THE TOT

When the pandemic struck in 2020, this provided an opportunity for EWTI to fully embrace the development of online training courses. At the same time, IRC was in the process of developing the online WASH Academy course content which was used as a basis for the course in Ethiopia. EWTI decided to teach the content of the course in a hybrid format of nine short online training sessions, each followed by live group reflections and exchanges. At the end of the three-day pilot, funded by the USAID Sustainable WASH Systems Learning Partnership, the first set of 25 participants, mostly EWTI staff and two TVET trainees, provided vital inputs for further adapting the course to the Ethiopian context. There was a lot of enthusiasm amongst the course participants to spread the training further amongst local governments and universities, and this was concretized in an action plan.

COLLABORATORS:

EWTI - IRC Ethiopia - USAID - TVETs

2022-ONWARDS

RENEWING THE MOU, ADAPTATION, AND FURTHER TOTS

Based on the first batch of trainee feedback, EWTI and IRC adapted the training content substantially. They introduced local WASH sector examples from the Ethiopian context to be used in the live reflection sessions and translated the course into two Ethiopian languages, Amharic and Oromifa. The two organizations have since renewed their MoU until 2025 and EWTI has made the basic WASH systems strengthening training a compulsory part of its own training packages for government staff and local lecturers and is planning to share the course across Ethiopia's vocational training centers, the TVET colleges. In addition, EWTI and IRC conducted three other ToTs: two courses with regional sector stakeholders in Amhara and Oromia and a ToT with a group of university and TVET lecturers. Again, there was a lot of enthusiasm amongst the participants affiliated with local universities and TVETs, to further share the course. One university, Arba Minch, requested and benefitted from a local follow-up ToT and two universities, the University of Arba Minch and Jimma have since incorporated the course into their curriculum. Other universities have carried out one-off ToTs locally. EWTI has also received requests from other regions, the Southern Nations Nationalities and Peoples Region and Dire Dawa, to conduct ToTs there. In collaboration with USAID's Transform WASH project, EWTI also developed and delivered an additional course on 'market-based sanitation' using the same hybrid concept. The course content was very well received by the Ethiopian trainees and is now available [online on the WASH Systems Academy](#).



A national level training including universities undertaken in Bishoftu, Ethiopia (IRC WASH Ethiopia).

Tactics used

Influencing the system through targeted capacity building

EWTI is strategically placed for influencing the sector from within, because of its mandate to strengthen sector practitioners' capacities and its established ties with education institutions across the country. This means that the collaboration with EWTI has a strong potential multiplication effect in the sector. For EWTI the collaboration with IRC Ethiopia provides a welcome opportunity to innovate on its training content and delivery in line with its sector mandate.

Seizing Covid-19 as an opportunity

The pandemic created an opening for EWTI to embrace the concept of delivering trainings in an online environment. Like so many other education institutions around the world, the institute was forced to switch to online delivery of its content and was grateful for the opportunity provided by the WASH Academy course to learn how to do this.

Adapting the training to an Ethiopian audience

It was important to develop a course concept that would work in the Ethiopian context to make sure it would be taken up locally. To achieve this, EWTI and IRC Ethiopia included a pilot phase during which they iterated the original course concept based on feedback from the first batch of participants. Some of the key changes are the introduction of Ethiopian examples into the reflection sessions and the translation of the course content into two Ethiopian languages, Amharic and Oromifa.

Supporting champions

Amongst the ToT participants, there are always some change agents who enthusiastically take up the course content and promote it widely. EWTI and IRC Ethiopia tapped into the champions who showed initiative to further spread the course and actively supported them e.g., by delivering an additional ToT at Arba Minch University and continued to work with them by hiring them to deliver further ToTs.



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Soft skills

Strong personal relationships

Strong personal relationships are the starting point for fruitful collaboration and the development of institutional relationships, and this works well when personal relationships exist at the leadership level. In this case, Lemessa had known the director of EWTI for a long time. Based on prior collaborations they had developed a shared understanding of systems strengthening concepts and knew what to expect from each other. The trust between them, based on a long history of collaboration, underlies the MoU between the two organizations.

Trusted relationships

in Ethiopia, the key sector collaborators have built up trusted relationships between each other, often going back decades. Based on the personal and organizational reputation built up over time, and a strong network of sector experts and leaders, Lemessa is able to easily reach out to the right person – e.g., an influential decision maker - or to identify a training champion.



A national level training including universities undertaken in Bishoftu, Ethiopia (IRC WASH Ethiopia).

Resourcing

Staff time

The resourcing for the hybrid course can be split into the time required for developing the relationship and course content and the time for delivering the ToTs. IRC WASH had 35 days allocated to develop the partnership with EWTI. This did not include Lemessa's or other colleagues' time (about 15 extra days) since some of the time they spent in developing relationships would be difficult to attach to a particular program.

Costs for delivering the course

The delivery of the ToT is relatively easy to quantify. It took around 5,000 USD of staff time to prepare and deliver a 3-day ToT and around 7-8,000 USD to support 25 trainees to attend the course, including logistics and travel time.

Further hidden resource requirements

For a long-term partnership you need to be prepared to continue investing at least a minimum level of effort into the relationship to bridge the gap between funded projects. If you do not persist and keep up the momentum, you may lose the partner organization's trust when there are personnel changes at leadership level.



Achieving national-level systems change
through collaborative advocacy



HONDURAS



How a national-level in-depth participatory review process facilitated collaboration around a revised national sector plan in Honduras



MARTÍN RIVERA
NATIONAL COORDINATOR
PARA TODOS POR SIEMPRE

SYSTEMS CHANGE ACHIEVED
A revised National Plan for achieving the Water and Sanitation Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030 (PLANASA II)

BUILDING BLOCKS TARGETED

- Planning**
- Monitoring**
- Finance**

PLANASA II, the national plan for achieving the water and sanitation SDGs, is based on a systems strengthening framework with a focus on providing sustainable services. This is a stark contrast to the previous version of the sector plan which focused more on infrastructure development to increase services coverage. PLANASA II promotes the Human Right to Water and Sanitation and prioritizes climate resilience in response to an increased occurrence of adverse climate events in Honduras, such as cyclones. An in-depth and participatory analysis of the previous plan generated insights that equipped sector stakeholders to design PLANASA II. The joint engagement in the learning journey and the detailed documentation of sector needs has enabled more united thinking and action across government and development partners. For example, infrastructure development is now implemented with climate resilience criteria and accompanied by service provider capacity building so they have the necessary skills to translate infrastructure improvements into sustainable services.



Submission and final approval of PLANASA by CONASA's Board of Directors in April 2022 (PTPS Honduras)

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Collective advocacy context

In Honduras, the Para Todos Por Siempre (PTPS) movement, founded in 2013, facilitates collective actions for strengthening the water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) system to achieve SDG 6 by 2030. PTPS is a broad platform that includes civil society, cooperation agencies, and government stakeholders, including local authorities from across 45 municipalities, where sector stakeholders know each other well and what they can expect from each other. PTPS supports joint reflection and learning on WASH policy and delivery at national and sub-national levels. There is an open space for dialogue and collaboration, and its bi-monthly meetings provide regular opportunities for learning, partnership, and advocacy on topics around the systems strengthening approach. PTPS is the national chapter of Agenda for Change in Honduras.

2020

STEP 1: AGREEMENT ON DEVELOPING A NEW NATIONAL PLAN

In the spirit of WASH systems change work, the National Council for Water and Sanitation (CONASA)² and PTPS conducted sector-wide reflection meetings (assemblies) on six recurring topics every two months. At the 2020 yearly sector meeting on monitoring of the national WASH Plan (PLANASA I), participants concluded that not only the monitoring of the national plan was weak, but that the content of the plan itself had become outdated and needed an overhaul. Participants committed to a formal diagnostic of the existing plan to learn from past weaknesses and to develop a new plan that was more realistic and achievable. CONASA and PTPS then held talks with the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) to launch an in-depth review process and obtain financing and technical support to formulate PLANASA II.

COLLABORATORS:

CONASA - *Different departments from across government* - *Water and Sanitation Services Regulation Entity (ERSAPS)*
Municipalities - *Civil society organizations* - *Service provider associations* - *Development banks and cooperation agencies*

2021-2022

STEP 2: PARTICIPATORY DIAGNOSTIC OF PLANASA I & DEVELOPMENT OF PLANASA II

Members of PTPS and CONASA formed a technical committee to go through an in-depth diagnostic process with the support of two technical consultants (specializing in WASH and water resources management). The diagnostic process examined the status of the sector in depth, complementing a lack of formal sector data through interviews, for example, to clearly understand the degree of financial resourcing of national authorities to WASH actions at the municipal level. After completing the review, the committee used their detailed understanding of the gaps and previous shortcomings for updating the national WASH plan.

COLLABORATORS:

CONASA - *Different departments from across government* - *Sector NGOs* - *IADB* - *Service provider associations* - *ERSAPS*

² CONASA the agency responsible for sector policy and planning in Honduras.

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JAN-APRIL 2022

STEP 3: GETTING OFFICIAL APPROVAL FOR PLANASA II

After the group had drafted the document, the next step was to get it formally approved by CONASA's board, made up of five ministries. A key asset in obtaining approval was that the technical secretariat of CONASA and PTPS had worked closely with a technical representative from the ministries throughout the review and drafting stages. This person had the trust of the board members, and facilitated the approval of the document. A key concern from the side of the government was how financing of the ambitious target of achieving universal access by 2030 could be achieved. The issue was overcome by specifying the need for financial contributions from municipalities, development partners, NGOs, and citizens next to the central government, to close the financing gap.

COLLABORATORS:

CONASA's technical secretariat - CONASA board - PTPS members

APRIL 2022-ONWARDS

STEP 4: PUTTING PLANASA II INTO PRACTICE

After obtaining official approval for PLANASA II, CONASA with PTPS support, started working on developing three specific strategies for implementation - a financing strategy, a monitoring strategy, and a technical assistance strategy. An important lesson from the previous plan was that it was not kept as a live document after it had been formulated. This time, PTPS and CONASA continue to keep the implementation of the plan alive by picking a set of revolving review topics for bi-monthly PTPS Assembly discussions at the national and sub-national level. For example, in February 2023, the Assembly discussed how PLANASA's implementation will be monitored and in a year's time, the plan is to review the first set of monitoring results. Apart from upholding everyone's commitment to implementing PLANASA II, the bi-monthly Assemblies also provide an important space for continued dialogue between the central and local government level and with key development partners. Some hurdles still need to be overcome in implementing PLANASA II. For example, some of the new components, such as making new infrastructure investments climate resilient, have not yet been fully integrated. That said, there is a new spirit of collaboration around implementing PLANASA and additional funding from the central government to CONASA accelerates implementation. Now it is up to CONASA, with continued support from PTPS, to use these resources effectively and to further increase their resourcing envelope going forward.

COLLABORATORS:

*CONASA - ERSAPS - Relevant ministries (environment, health, education, forestry agency)
45 municipalities and its mancomunidades - Development partners - International finance institutions
Sector NGOs - Service provider associations*

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Tactics used

PLANASA itself is a key advocacy tool for the sector

Based on a detailed gap analysis, PLANASA II provides a clear national guideline for everyone and entry points for collaboration to improve sector performance. The forthcoming monitoring, finance, and technical assistance strategies complement the national plan.

Assemblies as a platform for continued advocacy of PLANASA II

PTPS is keeping up the momentum on PLANASA II implementation through bi-monthly national and subnational stakeholder meetings called ‘assemblies’. Each meeting covers a particular topic. For example, in February, the assembly discussed the strategy for monitoring the implementation of PLANASA II, and in a year’s time, they will revisit the topic by reviewing the monitoring data collected during the first year of implementation. The assembly meetings provide a broad platform for interaction across the different levels of government and provide an important opportunity for national dialogue; they are open to anyone and usually very dynamic and collaborative in nature.

Supporting government in its sector leadership role

An important aspect of the systems strengthening work in Honduras is that the PLANASA review process and implementation is driven by the agency responsible for planning and coordinating WASH activities in Honduras – CONASA. To support the agency in this role, PTPS continuously engages with CONASA where there is a need. For example, PTPS helped to identify financial resourcing for the initial review process. PTPS also supports CONASA by providing a sector-wide space for coordination, for example through organizing national and sub-national PTPS assemblies. At these events, PTPS collaborates closely with CONASA, e.g., all meeting invitations are sent out jointly by CONASA and PTPS and PTPS opens them while CONASA chairs them.

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Being deliberate in who to involve when

Throughout the diagnostic period and when preparing PLANASA II, PTPS and CONASA made sure that sector stakeholders were not overwhelmed by having to attend too many meetings. A smaller committee was formed to drive the process forward and relevant experts were invited to specific meetings. For example, the Ministry of Environment only attended the committee meetings related to water resources management. PTPS and CONASA also kept up the momentum by organizing bi-weekly meetings with the smaller group whilst keeping the wider group informed of developments through regular updates.

Working closely with trusted aides of decision makers

At the start of the diagnostic and planning process, the technical secretariat of CONASA ensured that the Minister nominated a trusted technical expert who would provide a link between him and the technical work carried out in the committee. The committee had several meetings with this trusted expert to ensure that the Minister was briefed throughout, without being drawn into the details.



Sharing of PLANASA at PTPS Assemblies (PTPS Honduras)

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Soft skills

Empathy and gentleness

According to Martín, to influence others, you need to be welcoming and friendly and show interest in others. This includes being able to engage with the topic from their perspective. For example, during national PTPS assemblies, Martín thanks everyone for coming and takes a personal interest in every person. He always uses a friendly tone of voice.

High level of trust and commitment

Martín has very close ties with many PTPS members based on past collaborations that go back for 20 years in some cases. This creates a high level of trust and commitment and means that he can gently push people to make additional efforts.

Supporting national leadership

In Martín's experience, it is important to make space for government authorities to take the lead and to support them in this process, like through technical support that PTPS provided throughout the review process.



Submission and final approval of PLANASA by CONASA's Board of Directors in April 2022 (PTPS Honduras)

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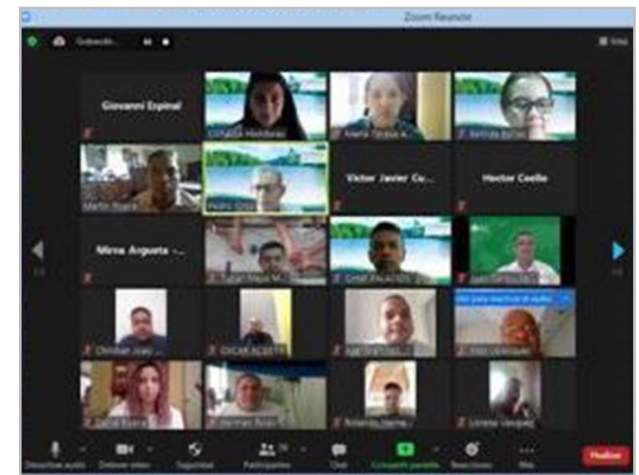
Resourcing

Time spent

Overall, the preparation of PLANASA took around 25-30% of Martin's time, at peak time it took up to 60%. Most of the time was during office hours but he also spent time outside office hours to review documents. Several NGOs, in particular Water for People, Catholic Relief Services, World Vision, and IRC, as well as different government stakeholders and key development partners, also contributed their time and effort throughout the process.

Flexible core funding

All regular activities of PTPS, including the development of PLANASA II, were funded by the Osprey Foundation. The funding to the PTPS secretariat was demand-led and completely flexible. Other PTPS members also supported the review process through funding specific activities such as meetings, field visits and training workshops. IADB provided funding for the external consultants who supported the development of the plan.



Virtual consultation and formulation workshops were held in 2021 (PTPS Honduras)

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A blue silhouette map of Malawi is centered on a vibrant, multi-colored gradient background. The background transitions from yellow and green on the left to orange and red on the right, with a bright white lens flare effect on the right side. The word "MALAWI" is written in white, bold, uppercase letters across the middle of the map.

MALAWI



How a sustained collective advocacy and collaboration process facilitated the development of a climate resilient WASH financing strategy in Malawi



KATE HARAWA

DIRECTOR FOR
INFLUENCE & SCALE
WATER FOR PEOPLE

SYSTEMS CHANGE ACHIEVED

A climate-resilient financing strategy for the Malawian water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) sector

BUILDING BLOCKS TARGETED



Planning



Finance



Regulation

The Malawian climate-resilient financing strategy lays out, for the first time, the sector financial needs for achieving universal access to water supply and sanitation services in line with the 10-year Malawi Implementation Plan (MIP-1) from 2021-2030, and proposes practical solutions to close the gap. In response to elevated threats from climate change, the strategy considers different climate scenarios for achieving universal access to sustainable WASH services. Based on a detailed context analysis of WASH sector financing, the strategy identifies ways to reduce sector costs e.g., through reducing water losses as well as different sources of funding such as taxes, tariffs, transfers, and concessional and commercial finance.³

Having a climate resilient finance strategy in place means the recently established Ministry of Water and Sanitation (MoWS) is providing leadership and guidance on the resource needs to achieve the MIP-1 by 2030, and the different sources of funding available to plug the financing gaps to then approach relevant stakeholder with concrete requests. There are early signs that having the strategy in place has contributed to attracting additional funding to the sector: there is more funding from the central government for WASH, and negotiations are underway with the World Bank for providing much needed resources to support the Blantyre Water Board. The climate resilience focus is also starting to be applied, for example as part of the current revision of district sector investment plans to make them more climate resilient.

³ Government of Malawi & UNICEF (n.d.): Malawi Climate Resilient WASH Financing Strategy 2022-2032.



Collective advocacy context

A core set of partners is coming together to bring about lasting change in the sector. Working jointly on a common goal has enabled partners to act as a catalyst for a broader movement towards change, supported through the Water and Environmental Sanitation Network (WES-NET) in Malawi, which amplifies members' voices across the sector's civil society organizations.

2020

STEP 1: IDENTIFYING THE NEED FOR A FINANCE STRATEGY

The Agenda for Change Global Hub provided catalytic funding (in part) so that the Malawi collaboration could organize a sector-wide assessment of the WASH sector building blocks. During the assessment, WASH financing was identified as one of four key weaknesses in the system, in particular the low government budget allocation for WASH in Malawi (around 2%) and lack of reference to climate resiliency despite increases in adverse climate events such as cyclones. At that time, WASH was a department in the Ministry of Natural Resources, Forestry and Environment (MoNRFE). The assessment report was fully endorsed by the government and joint work started to get the strategy underway. Whilst working with the MoNRFE, the Agenda for Change collaboration took advantage of the Conference of the Parties on Climate Change in 2021 to secure a commitment from the minister to develop a climate resilient finance strategy at this international high-level meeting. This commitment helped to further deepen government ownership to the strategy.

COLLABORATORS:

*Agenda for Change Malawi members - WES-NET - Different departments across government departments
Development partners including UNICEF*

2020-2021

STEP 2: LOBBYING FOR STAND-ALONE MINISTRY FOR WATER AND SANITATION

Whilst working on the commitment and development of a sector finance strategy, Agenda for Change members also lobbied for WASH to be elevated to a separate ministry to achieve higher visibility and to ensure a better resource flow to the sector. To achieve this, partners used a wide range of tactics that spoke to different audiences: they prepared briefing notes to explain the implications of WASH for other sectors and met with the natural resources committee in Parliament. Agenda for Change members also actively used social media and worked with the traditional print media; they organized a march on World Water Day and even secured an audience with the newly elected President. At the end of 2021, during a cabinet reshuffle, water and sanitation were elevated to a separate ministry, the Ministry of Water and Sanitation.

COLLABORATORS:

Agenda for Change members - UNICEF - WES-NET

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MALAWI

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2021-MI-2022

STEP 3: FINANCE STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT

The work on the finance strategy started when WASH was still housed under the MoNRFE, with an inception workshop followed by technical training sessions on different WASH financing concepts and topics such as full life cycle costing or how to achieve cost recovery. After the trainings, the Ministry organized stakeholder workshops to discuss next steps and develop the strategy. Throughout this process, the group was guided and supported by a well-respected WASH finance expert. To truly anchor the strategy across government, it was important to break down siloes within the sector and across government departments so that all stakeholders understood the importance of a climate resilient WASH finance strategy for Malawi's development. It took a lot of energy to continue to push everyone to provide feedback and attend meetings.

COLLABORATORS:

*MoNRFE - Ministry of Finance - Ministry of Health - Agenda for Change members - Development partners
WES-NET - UNICEF - World Bank*

FIN 2021

STEP 4: KEEPING THE FINANCE STRATEGY HIGH ON THE AGENDA

As soon as the new MoWS was established, the Agenda for Change collaboration organized introductory meetings with the Minister. During these meetings, they understood that the Minister was concerned about the performance of the water boards to recover debts and her desire to increase the budget to the sector. They used this opportunity to explain how the evolving finance strategy would help to address these concerns, thereby securing her commitment to a climate resilient finance strategy as a key priority.

COLLABORATORS:

Agenda for Change members - WES-NET Minister, MoWS

AOÛT 2022

STEP 5: LAUNCH OF STRATEGY AND IMPLEMENTATION

After the launch of the strategy, Agenda for Change members worked closely with the Directorate of Planning in the MoWS to build consensus and ownership over the strategy and would share it with the other departments; when the Directorate of Planning organized meetings with other directorates to popularize the strategy, they supported the Director from behind, for example by talking through the key steps that needed to be taken. Due to various challenges, including the pandemic, steps to implement the strategy are progressing slowly. However, there are positive developments such as the recently announced **World Bank support to Blantyre water board**, or the government lead in taking the strategy implementation down to the district level by revising district WASH investment plans to make them more climate resilient.

COLLABORATORS:

Director of Planning, MoWS - Agenda for Change members



Tactics used

Ensuring government ownership of the strategy

From the beginning, the Agenda for Change collaboration made sure the need for a finance strategy came from the government and that the whole process was steered by the Ministry (first MoNRFE and then MoWS), not by outsiders. To achieve this, the members worked closely with technical people in the Department of Planning and with political appointees, including the Minister.

Securing and engaging with political champions

Agenda for Change members engaged directly with the Minister to seek ownership for a climate-resilient finance strategy. When the MoWS was established in 2021 and the strategy was almost complete, they immediately reached out to the new Minister to update her on where they were in the process of completing it and which aspects needed pushing forward to help her in taking it up as a key first task. In doing so, they made sure to understand the Minister's own agenda (securing funding for the sector and increasing the performance of water boards) and explained how the climate-resilient financing strategy would further these goals.

Creating external pressure through international commitments

Agenda for Change members supported the Minister in making an international commitment to developing a climate resilient WASH financing strategy at COP26 in 2021. This commitment acted as a further anchoring point in delivering the strategy.

Unified messaging

Members worked closely with partners and ensured unified messaging to government counterparts. For example, Agenda for Change members collaborated closely with UNICEF which also championed the strategy and dedicated funding to its development.

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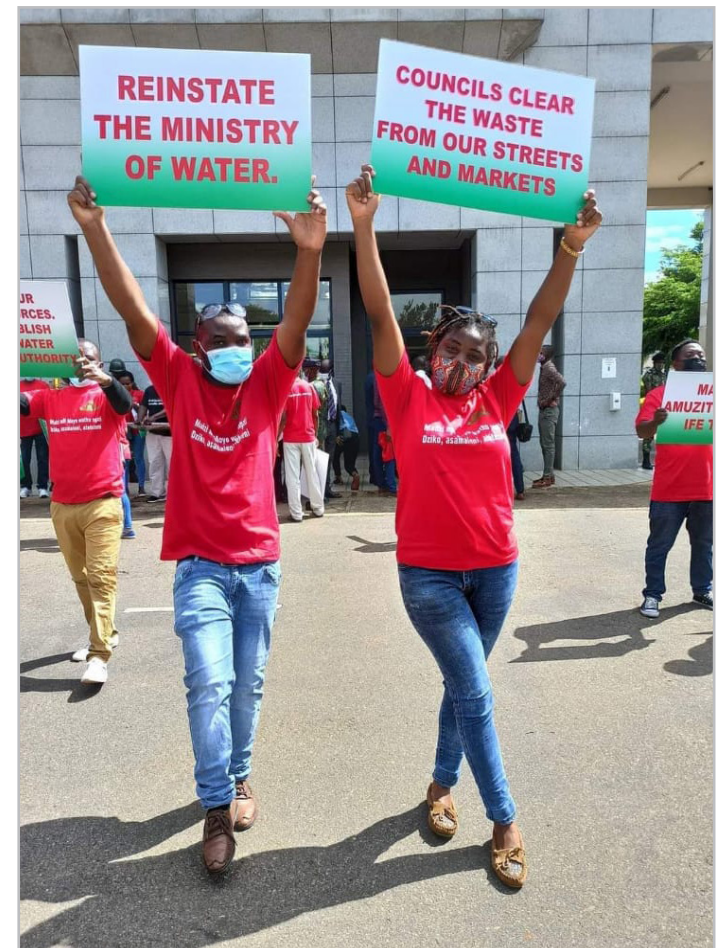


Taking advantage of windows of opportunity

There were several occasions where the Agenda for Change collaboration exploited a change in their immediate environment. For example, they used the increased attention to climate change when cyclones hit Malawi to emphasize the need for a climate resilient WASH financing strategy to lower vulnerability; when Covid-19 was rampant, they pointed to the importance of hygiene as part the wider WASH sector. When a new government was formed, Agenda for Change members continued to lobby for a separate Ministry and once it was in place, they immediately started working with the new Minister, utilizing her openness to fresh ideas.

Amplifying the message through different communication channels

The Agenda for Change members worked hard on getting messaging right and disseminated them on social media and by organizing meetings with the traditional media houses in the country. They also took to the streets, marching for WASH on World Water Day and briefed the parliamentary committee on natural resources, seeking an audience with the President, and working with political appointees and technocrats in the MoNRFE and later in the MoWS.



Demonstrators march for WASH on World Water Day in 2021 (Water For People Malawi)

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Achieving national-level systems change through collaborative advocacy



MALAWI

Soft skills

Developing interpersonal relationships

Members ensured that they had close, amicable relations with the technical experts in the Ministry. This included working together to create a common agenda, a feeling that ‘we are in it together’ rather than just pushing for the finance strategy from the outside. Having strong interpersonal relationships meant that they were able to keep their issues on the table and that people would go the extra mile for them. It took several years of working hand-in-hand to develop these trusted relationships.

Engaging with other peoples’ perspectives

According to Kate, collective action aims at going far, not fast. It’s true that a consultant would have been able to develop a strategy but who would have known about it, who would have wanted it, and who would have implemented it? In Kate’s experience, collective action requires you to leave your ego behind and engage with other peoples’ perspectives to allow for a common agenda to emerge.



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Launch day of the Climate Resilient WASH Strategy. From left: Joseph Magoye, Water For People Sustainability Manager; James Mambulu of Bawi consultants; Mery Masoo, WaterAid Country Director; Kate Harawa; Catarina Fonseca, consultant; Hon. Minister Abida Mia; Dr. Max Wengauwanga, Ministry of Water and Sanitation; Willies Mwandira, WESNET Director; Rudolf Schwenk, UNICEF representative



Resourcing

Officially budgeted days

Kate had 25 days to work on the climate resilient WASH strategy and other members of Agenda for Change also contributed their time.

Collective advocacy requires going the extra mile

Some of the advocacy work requires change makers to interact with key stakeholders in an informal setting, away from the office desk where exchanges tend to be more formal. For Kate, this meant that she engaged with people outside the working day or attended a meeting just to get a chance to have an informal chat with an important person that she wanted to speak to informally. Kate found that it is often these conversations that are most useful, though they are not budgeted for in projects.

Continuous learning and peer support

Kate was grateful for the WASH Academy courses from IRC WASH that helped her to better understand the WASH topics she campaigned about. It was also helpful to have the support of the Agenda for Change members to bring people together regularly to drink tea and coffee whilst brainstorming and coming up with new tactics.



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Achieving national-level systems change
through collaborative advocacy



UGANDA



Ensuring effective collaboration with government at the helm: consolidating sector monitoring tools in Uganda



JANE NABUNNYA
COUNTRY DIRECTOR
IRC UGANDA

SYSTEMS CHANGE ACHIEVED

Developing a consolidated Water and Environment Monitoring Information Systems (WEMIS) data collection tool

BUILDING BLOCKS TARGETED



Monitoring

The sector MIS data collection tool is currently in the early stages of its development. Once completed, it will enable integrated online management of sector data. WEMIS will allow stakeholders to timely and comprehensively report sector data and serve as a central platform for informing planning, resource mobilization, and allocation for water supply and sanitation service delivery. It will also feed into the regular production of the Uganda Water Supply and Environment Atlas, which provides an overview of coverage, functionality, and distribution of water schemes across the country. According to Jane Nabunnya, “you cannot plan for what you don’t know,” and WEMIS will help remedy that problem.

Collective advocacy context

In Uganda, the Ministry of Water and Environment (MWE) is at the helm of systems strengthening efforts in the country, supported by the Agenda for Change members. The MWE chairs regular technical working group meetings through which systems strengthening activities are coordinated, currently with a focus on monitoring. Sector collaboration is based on many years of working with the MWE and on a relationship of mutual respect.



5 STORIES OF CHANGE

Achieving national-level systems change through collaborative advocacy



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through collaborative advocacy

APRIL 2021

STEP 1: SECTOR MONITORING IDENTIFIED AS NEEDING IMMEDIATE ACTION

In 2021, Agenda for Change members, led by Water for People and with funding from the Agenda for Change Global Hub, conducted a National WASH Systems Strengthening Assessment. When holding the assessment's validation workshop, participants identified the monitoring building block as an area that needed urgent attention. Participants were particularly concerned by the fact that MWE houses 19 similar databases resulting in uncoordinated monitoring at the absence of an overarching government-led monitoring framework. There was unanimous agreement that the monitoring building block needed to be the starting point for systems change work. Workshop participants agreed to develop a consolidated Water and Environment MIS data collection tool and established a steering committee for the harmonization process led by the MWE Sector Liaison Department.

COLLABORATORS:

The three directorates of the MWE - Agenda for Change members (IRC, WaterAid, Water for People) - UWASNET - UNICEF World Bank - Private sector representatives

2022-2023

STEP 2: MIS SITUATION ANALYSIS

The Sector Liaison Department at the MWE started a cycle of weekly hybrid stakeholder engagement meetings. As a first step, the group conducted an MIS Situation Analysis to ascertain the content, status, and person / department responsible for each database and any data problems.

COLLABORATORS:

Sector Liaison Department, MWE - Likeminded organizations, including Agenda for Change members

2023

STEP 3: WORKSHOP TO HARMONIZE DATA COLLECTION TOOLS

Next, the MWE held a 3-day workshop to harmonize the various data collection instruments in line with current and emerging information needs for the sector. Workshop participants went through the already existing tools and indicators from each department, the data gaps and duplications that needed to be addressed, and which department would be best placed to house which data. The workshop established a Task Team with technical experts from Forest Sector Support, Environment Sector Support, Water for Production, Urban Water Supply and Sanitation, and Rural Water Supply and Sanitation to develop a consolidated WEMIS data collection tool.

COLLABORATORS:

Representatives from all directorates and departments of MWE - Agenda for Change members - Development partners

2023-ONWARDS

NEXT STEPS

The Task Team will present the draft consolidated WEMIS data collection tool at a workshop planned for May 2023 and piloting is scheduled for the next Ugandan Financial Year 2023/2024.



Tactics used

Ensuring government is in the lead

A key tactic is to work closely with the government, enabling them to lead in convening meetings and carrying out the diagnostic analysis of databases. In Uganda, this way of working feels natural because of many years of close collaboration with government. Agenda for Change members support the process by gently reminding government partners, e.g., checking in informally on how things are going, and continuing to push the agenda. The close relationship with Government and other partners has been built up over years in Uganda. Jane herself has been in the sector for a long time during which she has developed the strong ties that she can rely on today.

Keeping everyone informed

Another tactic is to consult the Government and Agenda for Change members and keep them informed of the developments to put the collaboration into practice. This happens through a combination of calls, online meetings, and email updates. For example, IRC made sure that all involved stakeholders understood the need for the government to take a lead in organizing the upcoming workshop to coordinate WEMIS tools and kept them informed about developments towards this event in the meantime.



Participants gather for a data harmonization and reporting workshop on various tools, held at Water Resources Institute, Entebbe on February 12 - 15, 2023 (IRC WASH Uganda)



Soft skills

The ability to understand and effectively navigate the local context

The fact that Jane knows the Ugandan context very well enables her to read and act in accordance with unwritten rules. For example, in Uganda, one needs to follow government procedures to foster effective collaboration. Based on existing rapport, common positions are reached and then followed up in writing. For example, all Agenda for Change members have formalized verbal agreements of collaboration via signed Memoranda of Understanding with MWE and with the local governments they work with. It is also important to respect people's time, space, and titles. For example, calling an engineer, doctor, professor, or commissioner by their title is common practice in Uganda. This shows respect and helps to smooth the process and interactions, even if the actual exchanges are quite informal.

Resourcing

Staff time and how the rigidity of donor funding can hamper systems strengthening work

Jane cannot quantify exactly how much time she and two others in IRC and from other Agenda for Change members in Uganda have invested in the process so far. A key challenge is that there are not many days available from the Agenda for Change members or from existing projects for carrying out this type of work. The requirements for allocating working days to specific projects makes it hard to engage in the systems change processes typically carried out under Agenda for Change. This constraint reflects the collaborative action work at the national level, too. Partners are not always able to prioritize the time for systems change work, and this sometimes makes it cumbersome to bring people together and get timely inputs from partners.



Mr Orijabo Albert (standing), Assistant Commissioner, Ministry of Water and Environment, addressing participants during the workshop held at Water Resources Institute, Entebbe on February 12-15, 2023. Beside him (seated) is Ms Achiro Brenda Muthemba, Country Director, Water for People. (IRC WASH Uganda)