

IRC

WASH SYSTEMS SYMPOSIUM

All systems go!

Concept, themes and organisation

12-14 March 2019, Fokker Terminal, The Hague, The Netherlands

Origin of the event

IRC celebrated its 50th Anniversary in 2018, making it an excellent time to reflect on the past and look towards the future of the global Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) domain and IRC's continued role in promoting progress and transformation. Over three years into the Sustainable Development Goals, it is also timely to take stock of the current state of WASH and chart a way forward to reaching global targets contained in SDG6.

The topic of this symposium—WASH systems—responds to an increasing demand to understand system for service delivery and how to make them stronger, more sustainable and more resilient. Over recent years, IRC has worked with partners and colleagues in popularising the adoption of systems approaches to WASH including through co-convening the 2016 Sustainable WASH ymposium in Kampala.

Now, three years after the Kampala Symposium, and given the rapid progress being made in sustainability thinking, we believe that the time is right to once again bring together planners, policymakers, practitioners and researchers of WASH systems strengthening and systems approaches more generally, to take stock of experience to date and map the way forward.

Symposium topic

Water, sanitation, and hygiene services require a robust system in order to function effectively over the long term. The complexity of delivering WASH services equitably, reliably, affordably and consistently over time goes far beyond efforts of simply constructing WASH infrastructure (although getting that right is crucial). An intricate network of people, institutions and factors need to work effectively together to guarantee the delivery of water and sanitation services over time and to respond flexibly to changing conditions: taken together, these make up the WASH system.

The 'language' of WASH services, WASH systems and of systems approaches has emerged and gained traction in the last few years, and the Sustainable Development Goals are explicitly supportive of a systems-based understanding of development processes. A growing number of organisations and initiatives are experimenting with and implementing systems approaches as a way to more develop and strengthen sustainable WASH services.

While there are different methodologies and vocabularies in use, our goal is simple and pragmatic: to identify, understand and amplify approaches that work. The symposium will cover content ranging from whole systems conceptual frameworks to systems thinking for sector finance to technical tools for addressing specific parts of the system.



Audience

- WASH practitioners, academics, technical staff operating at different levels of government, multi- and bilateral donors, utility operators, regulators and development partners from around the globe.
- Systems nerds, systems sceptics, “traditional” practitioners and systems specialists from other sectors.

Some 450 attendees are expected. The symposium programme will be WASH-focused, with invited speakers, moderators and panellists from other sectors – systems thinkers and practitioners who can contribute evidence of what has worked in other sectors and what has not, and for what reasons. The symposium will follow the “gold standard” of sessions that are gender and age balanced and representing diverse geographic experiences.

Symposium objectives:

- To review the status of WASH in the context of the SDGs, and to identify opportunities for innovation in the current “transformational” thinking;
- To identify how to build the strong local and national WASH systems needed to deliver sustainable WASH services to everyone by 2030, by bringing together systems thinkers and doers, from within and beyond WASH.
- To stimulate holistic thinking that will reveal opportunities for driving systemic change in the WASH sector.
- To share current state-of-the-art thinking and experiences in WASH systems; to develop skills and tools for moving from theory to practice, to implementation and to scaling up of systems approaches
- To develop a shared agenda for taking the learning and practice forward and support participants to become *systems leaders*

Symposium outputs

- Background paper - published prior to the symposium.
- 6 thematic overview notes - published prior to the symposium.
- All accepted submissions (papers, presentations, multi-media) - collated and made available in electronic proceedings of the symposium.
- An overall symposium report – published after the symposium – will serve as the second part of the symposium proceedings. This will briefly describe overarching conclusions and findings, and a write up of key discussions taking place at the symposium
- A WASH Systems State of the Art book – published in late 2019/early 2020
- A draft global agenda for WASH systems strengthening.

IRC will develop a major publication on the state of the art of systems approaches and systems strengthening in WASH. Co-authors for (chapters in) this book will be identified during the symposium.

Event moderation and language

Simultaneous interpretation into English, French and Spanish will be available for all plenary sessions and submissions will be accepted in these three languages. The background paper and main symposium outputs will be produced in English.

The event will use two-host moderations during plenary sessions and transitions between smaller group parallel sessions. There will be one permanent anchor person who is a paid professional journalist or speaker to ensure use of simple language and neutral reflection, and who will maintain the focus on the objectives and logical order of events that form the red thread through the symposium programme. Each day will feature a second anchor person from IRC, who will provide the WASH sector angle and maintain the consistency of emerging messages.

Symposium production and partners

IRC is producing the event with support from consultants and in collaboration with partners.

Opportunities for financial sponsorship and official partnership are **online**.

The symposium is being produced by multiple teams from within and beyond IRC:

- Logistics team and Event producer
- IRC internal content review group
- Creative Panel and Creative Director – IRC with associates and consultant
- Symposium Review Committee- two-three IRC Board members, key IRC partners, financial event sponsors, thematic leads
- Communication team (IRC and consultant)
- Thematic Leads- mostly external to IRC

All systems go! web page: ircwash.org/symposium

For more information please contact:

Angela Huston, Content Lead, huston@ircwash.org

Bryony Stentiford, Symposium Director, stentiford@ircwash.org

General inquiries: symposium@ircwash.org