



Making humanitarian and development WASH work better together

Nathaniel Mason and Beatrice Mosello

The worlds of humanitarian and development WASH (water supply, sanitation and hygiene) operate as siloes. A lack of complementarity and collaboration makes it more costly to provide WASH services, reduces the effectiveness of targeting and sustainability, and ultimately increases the vulnerability of poor and marginalised people to disease and missed socio-economic opportunities. The underlying causes are deep rooted and extend beyond the WASH sector. Based on global and country-specific research, we recommend that efforts to resolve the challenge are led from the operational level, where WASH professionals can find workable compromises. Longer term, this needs to be supported by wider efforts on the part of donors providing humanitarian and development funds for WASH, and by the platforms and partnerships that support humanitarian and development WASH.

- To increase complementarity at operational level: UNICEF should facilitate agreement of a limited set of 'shared priorities', core ways of working that can be agreed between development and humanitarian WASH stakeholders, in 3-5 pilot countries.
- To tackle underlying incentives that inhibit complementarity: Leading development and humanitarian WASH donors should aim to increase the proportion of funds that allow for flexible, longer term programmes, and establish a 'Champions Group' to work on improving the incentives for working across the siloes.
- To challenge the cultural and systemic barriers that exist beyond the WASH sector: Secretariats for WASH partnership and coordination structures (particularly Sanitation and Water for All and the WASH Cluster at global, regional and country level) should establish a cross-sector initiative aimed at enhancing complementarity between the wider development and humanitarian communities.

Introduction

This briefing summarises the findings and recommendations from a study focused on understanding the nature and causes of the disconnect between development and humanitarian WASH, and possible solutions. We examined the levels at which these siloes exist and the underlying reasons why, drawing on extensive consultation with global experts, literature review and two in-depth case studies on South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Given the case studies, this briefing is particularly focused on protracted crises where weak governance and conflict make it harder for governments, utilities and international agencies to deliver adequate WASH services to the population. Findings are nonetheless relevant for other contexts such as rapid-onset disasters.

We also look at positive stories of where and how WASH service providers and donors are overcoming the siloes. From this, we recommend a number of actions that use the strengths and capacities of existing organisations and sector structures to provide a bridge, rather than creating new entities and initiatives to fill a gap.

The research was commissioned by the Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) Section in the United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF) together with the Water Supply and Sanitation Program of the World Bank (WSP), and undertaken by the Overseas Development Institute (ODI). For further details please refer to the synthesis report and two country case studies on DRC and South Sudan.

Diagnosing the problem: the wedge that drives the communities apart

The siloes between humanitarian and development WASH are sustained by a hierarchy of underlying causes, which can be visualised as a wedge driving the communities apart (Figure 1). These include differences, contradictions and tensions in:

- **High-level norms**, which are expressed in the two communities' mission statements, principles and standards.
- **Incentives**, rooted in the international architecture for humanitarian and development assistance and the related signals given by funding and accountability arrangements as well as engrained attitudes to risk.
- **Operational processes**, including procedures and systems for targeting effort; for implementing new services and sustaining existing ones; for recruiting and developing staff; and for initiating and sustaining productive dialogue.

Towards the top of the wedge, norms and incentives often relate more to the international level and many of identified issues are relevant for all sectors, not just WASH. Towards the bottom level of operational processes, where the siloes play out more at national and local level, there are an increasing number of WASH-specific issues.

Norms

By norms, we mean the standards of expected behaviour shared by members of a community or group. While simplistic interpretations tend to reinforce a division, through opposing stereotypes, there may be more commonality than is often assumed. Key divisions between the siloes arise around:

- **Mission:** Perceived differences in mission, as humanitarian WASH aims to 'save lives', whereas the purpose of development WASH has strong health dimension but extends to other considerations, e.g. socio-economic opportunity.
- **Principles:** Humanitarian principles such as neutrality and independence are sometimes perceived as incompatible with development principles such as ownership, especially in politically charged contexts.
- **Standards:** Separate sector standards have arisen for development (Sustainable Development Goals, Joint Monitoring Programme indicators) and humanitarian (Sphere standards) WASH interventions.

Figure 1: Hierarchy of norms, incentives and operational processes that underlie the humanitarian-development siloes in WASH



Source: Authors

Incentives

If norms are about ‘What should be done?’, incentives deal with the question ‘Why should it be done?’ Three broad categories of incentive play important roles in translating differences in high-level norms into differences at the operational level.

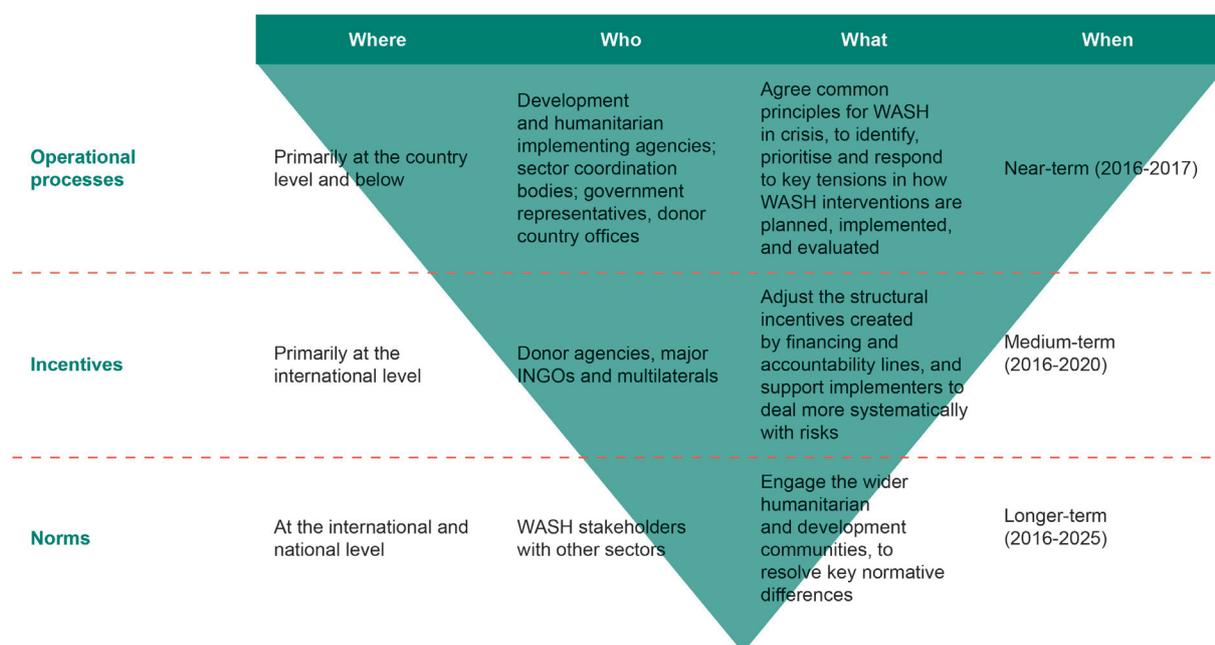
- **Finance:** Timeframes and flexibility of funding streams enforce a division, with humanitarian WASH characterised as short sighted and unpredictable, while development WASH has longer timeframes but limited flexibility.
- **Accountability:** For both humanitarian and development agencies, existing accountability and reporting systems to donors discourage a longer-term approach focused on end impact for citizens and states in need.
- **Risk:** High levels of risk (or perceptions of risk) reinforce the short termism and inflexibility of both humanitarian and development programmes; skew resource allocations; and further incentivise a tendency to resort to familiar, siloed ways of working.

Operational processes

The operational level at which interventions are planned, implemented and managed day to day give expression to and reinforce the siloes ‘on the ground’.

- **Distribution and targeting of resources:** WASH actors and interventions are compartmentalised geographically and thematically, reducing the scope for day-to-day interactions, and risking gaps in delivery.
- **Implementation modalities:** There is a perceived polarisation between rapid, supply-driven humanitarian WASH interventions and lengthier, demand-driven approaches for development WASH. Tensions also arise around how to involve and incentivise communities and local leaders.
- **Staff recruitment and development:** Career paths are separate – contract duration and performance objectives reduce potential for interaction and finding common ground. Involvement and use of locally based organisations with contextual experience to navigate complex emergencies is still limited.
- **Mechanisms for dialogue and co-working:** Within organisations, there is a lack of organisational interaction between the strategic decision-making level (headquarters) and operational management in country. Dialogue with other sectors and with national government is also limited, overlaying the humanitarian-development siloes with other divisions.

Figure 2: Prioritising action across norms, incentives and operational processes



Source: Authors

From diagnosis to action: a framework to find common ground

In moving from norms, through incentives, to operational processes, the individuals and organisations in the WASH sector are increasingly able to make material changes. Promising examples exist at all levels (see Box). We recommend that effort is concentrated in the short term on changing operational processes and incentive structures within the sector. In the longer term, it may be possible to contribute to wider efforts to reconcile the high-level norms governing humanitarian and development assistance more broadly. We explain our recommendations in more detail below, while Figure 2 summarises broadly who would need to do what, when and at which level.

Building complementarity at the level of operational processes requires collective action between multiple stakeholders at the country level or below, to agree a set of shared priorities that can guide humanitarian and development WASH interventions in crisis contexts. The appropriate level for agreeing shared priorities is likely to be that at which operational challenges can be properly understood and the majority of day-to-day programme management decisions are taken. In smaller or more centralised countries, it may be possible to agree shared priorities at the national level. In larger countries, such as DRC, interventions may more often be planned and implemented from the subnational level. Shared priorities do not aim to cover all possible issues, but rather to frame a series of short, targeted and actionable statements which both development and humanitarian stakeholders can fully commit to. Guidance and comprehensive examples to support development of shared priorities are provided in the full synthesis report. While they must be selected according to context and the nature of the risks and challenges faced, shared priorities could include:

- Enhancing equitable targeting of resources by agreeing to allocate a proportion of WASH funding for infrastructure rehabilitation and capacity building in towns and cities that have absorbed displaced people.
- Preventing contradictory implementation modalities by determining a minimum support package and targeting criteria for sanitation subsidies to support rehabilitation after disasters.
- Aligning staff development by building a requirement for cross-silo cooperation into job descriptions and encouraging rotation and training in humanitarian response for all WASH development staff, and vice versa.
- Evolving mechanisms for co-working by conducting joint analysis and planning between humanitarian and development WASH agencies on how to transition to national sector leadership.

While other dual mandate organisations can also play a role, UNICEF is well positioned to facilitate the development of shared priorities, due to its geographic presence and extensive experience at the implementation and policy levels in both humanitarian and development WASH. Initial operational testing of the shared priorities should be concentrated in a small but diverse set of pilot countries experiencing protracted crises or high vulnerability to disasters, and build in dedicated evaluation and lesson learning.

Fostering complementarity at the level of incentives requires targeted action by a smaller number of more powerful stakeholders, notably donors financing development or humanitarian WASH, or both. Donors – including the multilaterals like the European Commission, international financial institutions such as the World Bank, and bilaterals such as the UK, Dutch, US and Japanese governments – should lead the effort to frame longer-term,

Learning from what has worked: examples of complementarity in practice

Overcoming normative differences: In South Sudan, the Cholera Task Force has shown how a specific challenge like cholera can offer a starting point for joint working, bringing together a range of external agencies with government representatives from both the health and water sectors for cholera mitigation and prevention.

Working with risk: In Northern Bahr el-Ghazal State, South Sudan, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation maintained its development programmes after the outbreak of renewed conflict through engagement with local partners and careful contextual analysis.

Getting finance to support flexibility: The DRC WASH Consortium has built rapid response mechanisms into what is ostensibly a development programme in order to cope with sudden-onset emergencies. It has had the support of its donor, the UK Department for International Development.

Finding mechanisms for joint working: At Lubumbashi, DRC's second city and centre of the ex-province of Katanga, development partners are invited to WASH Cluster meetings to share information and improve complementarity.

more flexible financing and programming modalities for the sector. To support this, WSP-World Bank and UNICEF (e.g. via the Cluster Advocacy and Support Team) should convene a ‘champions group’ of bilateral development and humanitarian WASH donor agencies and other providers of finance. The objective of the champions group would be to share and test approaches which can help correct the underlying incentives currently enforcing the siloes. This must look beyond finance itself, to challenges of weak accountability to country governments and affected populations, and inadequate preparation for, as well as intolerance of, risk.

Changing norms to enhance complementarity is a longer-term project which is unlikely to be achieved by the WASH sector alone. Perceived differences of mission and principles between the wider humanitarian and development communities are common across sectors but are rarely critically examined, and there is more commonality than is often assumed. Sector coordination platforms – for example, Sanitation and Water for All, and the WASH Cluster at different levels – can take a lead by

reaching out to their counterparts in other sectors to build a broader case for how complementarity can be enhanced while respecting differences in core principles. This effort could be strengthened by building links to country processes and tapping into nationally led and owned sector coordination processes that can themselves lead the way for other sectors in countries affected by protracted crises and disasters. WASH-focused groups within larger organisations – for example UNICEF WASH Programme Division or the World Bank WSP – can undertake similar efforts.

All of this will require careful monitoring, evaluation and learning by doing. Specific process milestones and outcome indicators (for example, number of countries with operationalised ‘Shared Priorities’) can be used. However, broader techniques such as Outcome Mapping could allow diverse interests to come together around a shared vision, adapt the direction of change as required in response to new information, and track the deeper policy and behavioural shifts required to bridge the siloes.



Overseas Development Institute
203 Blackfriars Road
London SE1 8NJ
Tel +44 (0)20 7922 0300
Fax +44 (0)20 7922 0399
www.odi.org
info@odi.org



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