

APPLYING WASH SYSTEMS APPROACHES IN FRAGILE CONTEXTS

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We welcome thoughts and feedback on this paper. Please send these to w.tillet@aguaconsult.co.uk.

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ACRONYMS

ACF	Action Contre la Faim / Action Against Hunger	LIF	Low-Income Fragile
CAR	Central African Republic	LIS	Low-Income Stable
CARE	Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere	LRRD	Linking relief, rehabilitation and development
CERF	Central Emergency Response Fund	NFI	Non-Food Item
CLTS	Community Led Total Sanitation	NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
CSO	Civil Society Organisation	OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
DAC	Development Assistance Committee	ODA	Official Development Assistance
DFID	Department for International Development	ODI	Overseas Development Institute
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo	OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
FSM	Faecal Sludge Management	PEA	Political Economy Analysis
GTO	German Toilet Organization	PPP	Public Private Partnership
GWC	Global WASH Cluster	SDF	Sustainable Development Goals
HDN	Humanitarian – Development Nexus	SSI	Sustainable Services Initiative
HRP	Humanitarian Response Plan	SWA	Sanitation and Water for All
IASC	Inter Agency Standing Committee	WASH BAT	WASH Bottleneck Analysis Tool
IDP	Internally Displaced Person	WASH	Water, Sanitation & Hygiene
INGO	International NGO	WFG	Water for Good
JSR	Joint Sector Review	WHH	Welthungerhilfe
KPI	Key Performance Indicator	WSP	Water & Sanitation Programme (World Bank)
LCCA	Life Cycle Costs Analysis		

SUMMARY

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

By 2030, 80% of the world's poorest people will reside in 'fragile' states (UNICEF, 2019c), and many of such states are off track to meet the WASH SDGs (Sadoff et al., 2017). Failing to find effective means to sustainably raise WASH service levels in fragile contexts may mean failing to meet the WASH SDGs. This paper seeks to address the relative gap in sector guidance and documentation on how to apply WASH systems concepts and approaches in fragile contexts to strengthen WASH service resilience.

There is no universal definition of fragility, but this paper uses **OECD's** definitions and lists of fragile states. **Section 2** introduces the definitions used, and the different temporal, spatial and thematic dimensions of fragility. Case study examples are presented from countries listed by OECD (2018) as both 'extremely fragile' (i.e., Yemen, DRC) and fragile areas of 'fragile' countries (i.e., North Eastern Nigeria, Northern Kenya).

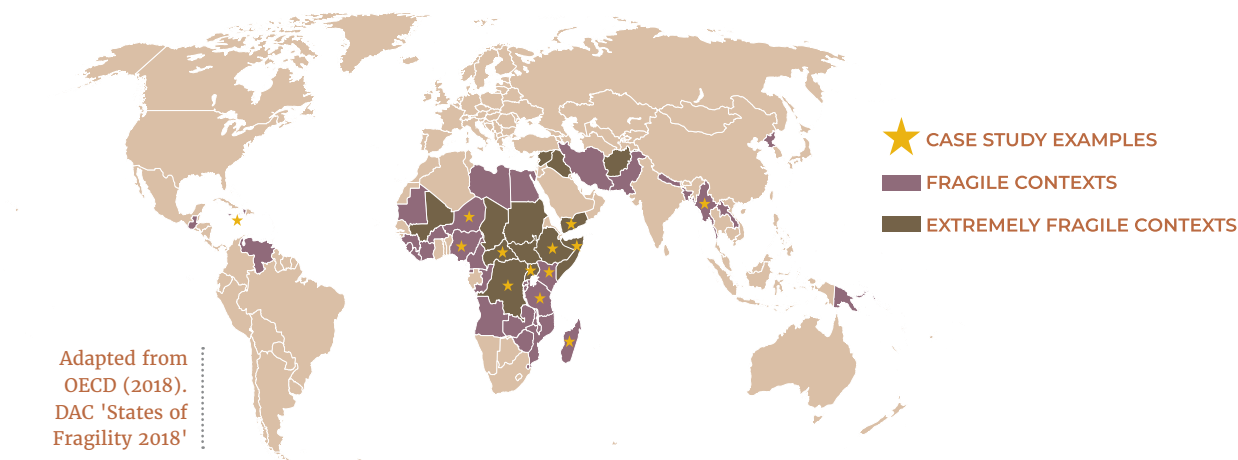
Fragility has a major detrimental impact on a country's developmental progress. Shocks – both internal or external – can easily pull country systems and the wider sector back down the developmental trajectory (World Bank, 2011). It can take countries 20–30 years to return to pre-conflict levels of service delivery following protracted conflicts (UNICEF, 2019c). Poor water governance can also be both a cause and aggravator of fragility (FAO and World Bank, 2018).

The nature of the humanitarian 'challenge' is evolving: crises are affecting more people, occur more frequently, and persist for longer. The number of people globally in need of humanitarian assistance reached a historical record of 120 million people in 2018 (UNICEF, 2019c); the average length of Humanitarian Response Plans increased from 5.2 years in 2014 to 9.3 years in 2018 (GWC, 2020), and UNHCR (2019) estimates that the average refugee displacement event lasts 17–20 years.

Conventional short-term humanitarian action, and the funding that supports it, are undoubtedly essential for saving lives. However, it is increasingly recognised that they are largely unable to address the root causes of fragility or systemic challenges. There can sometimes be a tendency to bypass or substitute capacities of the (weak) state institutions or local markets to allow for rapid and independent humanitarian response (GOAL, 2020a). In protracted contexts, this can lead to challenges in transitioning out of humanitarian assistance (Waal et al., 2017). Without effectively strengthening capacities and resilience, the "emergency intervention mode is self-perpetuating" (Mason and Mosello, 2016, p. 46). There can also be a reticence of developmental actors to engage in systems approaches in fragile contexts, where risks are high and means of achieving success uncertain.

There are strong 'silos' between humanitarian and development WASH programming and funding, which pose particular challenges in the transition from relief to long-term development (Gensch et al., 2014). There is increasing recognition of the need to bridge these silos, focussing on the Humanitarian-Development 'Nexus' (HDN) issues such as disaster prevention, preparedness, and resilience (GWC, 2018), and increasing the wider 'connectedness' and complementarity between humanitarian and development action. Global humanitarian strategies and commitments such as the **Agenda for Humanity** and the **Grand Bargain** seek to change the ways of working and funding in fragile contexts. These commitments and encouraging shifts towards longer-term, more flexible funding in protracted crises (Metcalfe-Hough et al., 2019) provide an increasingly strong enabling environment and mandate for applying longer-term, systems-strengthening approaches in protracted crises contexts. However, the question is then, how?

This paper builds on related work in the sector on WASH in fragile contexts and on nexus issues^A and seeks to add value through applying a systems lens. It is based on the experience of the authors and a number of actors working in fragile contexts, with a mixture of theory and practical case study examples and reflections from 8 INGOs and UNHCR, augmented by a review of relevant sector literature. It is a discussion and practice paper seeking to deepen sector thinking and dialogue on applying WASH systems approaches in fragile contexts, and more broadly in integrating aspects of resilience into systems thinking.



KEY QUESTIONS THIS PAPER TOUCHES ON

- How does fragility provide opportunities and barriers to systems strengthening? ([section 6.1](#))
- How do WASH systems concepts and approaches need to be adapted for fragile contexts? ([section 6](#))
- How could more 'conventional' WASH programming in fragile contexts be adapted to better strengthen systems? (sections [6,7](#))
- How can WASH systems be strengthened in fragile contexts, and what could be priority areas? ([section 6](#))
- What practical examples are there of systems strengthening in fragile contexts, and what are some of the experiences in doing this? (sections [6, 7](#), and detailed 2–3 page country [case studies in the Annex](#))

OBJECTIVES OF THE PAPER

- To contribute** to the nascent body of literature on WASH systems approaches and sustainability in fragile contexts and resilience
- To advance** the WASH systems debate and thinking into the largely neglected area of fragile contexts
- To contribute** to the HDN efforts to increase dialogue, understanding, and synergies 'between the H-D silos'
- To provide** examples for organisations working in (and funding) fragile contexts to highlight that systems approaches are possible
- To stimulate** others to further document and work on these issues

While this paper focuses on fragile contexts, it highlights the issue of mainstreaming preparedness and resilience into WASH systems approaches, which is not a topic relevant for fragile states alone.

^ASuch as UNICEF (notably its [Water Under Fire series](#)), World Bank, GWC, SWA, UNHCR, ODI. See Section 1.1.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY WASH SYSTEMS, AND SYSTEMS APPROACHES?



Section 4 provides a brief orientation to concepts and terminology often used in WASH systems thinking. It emphasises how WASH systems, which deliver and enable (and sometimes hinder) WASH service delivery, comprise a complex web of interrelated actors and factors. Weaknesses in the system – be them weak ‘building blocks’^B, actors’ counter-productive behaviours, or ineffective linkages within the system – all undermine the system’s potential to deliver sustainable, inclusive, WASH services at scale.



FIGURE A:

An example of a simplified theory of change for WASH systems strengthening. Source: Agenda for Change (2018)

FIGURE B:

An example of a Conceptual Framework for WASH Systems. Source: Agenda for Change (2018)

Approaches to strengthen WASH systems are diverse; however, they often involve processes of systems diagnostics, and often involve collaboration of multiple actors, at multiple levels, to address systemic challenges. WASH systems approaches often focus on strengthening government systems and leadership.

WASH SYSTEMS IN FRAGILE CONTEXTS

Section 5 analyses how WASH systems can ‘look and behave’ both in ways similar to systems in low-income stable contexts and with some specific characteristics and challenges that can typify fragile contexts. Section 6 then considers how systems concepts and approaches may need to be adapted based on these specificities. Some of the specificities of fragile contexts are listed below:

- » **Wider contextual aspects (beyond the WASH system boundary):** Depending on the context, this may include: weakened security and the rule of law; weak governance, and impaired legitimacy or functional presence of the state, and eroded trust and ‘social contract’ between citizens and the state; volatile, politicised changed environments; short-term perspectives and focus on immediate needs rather than longer-term goals; environmental degradation and exposure and vulnerability to natural hazards and climate change; economic fragility; erosion of livelihoods and extreme poverty; aid dependency; Internally Displaced People (IDPs) and refugees.
- » **WASH system actors and behaviours:** Impaired capacity or role of state institutions to lead the sector; the presence of the ‘humanitarian system’ with its cluster architecture, actors, mandate and processes; a plethora of non-state actors (e.g. NGOs); humanitarian-development silos; the widespread presence of informal service providers; skillsets and perspectives of WASH actors may be more ‘humanitarian focussed’; at times, competition between actors for resources, leadership struggles, reluctance to engage with the government; tendencies to bypass or substitute country systems and undertake direct service delivery; often short-term programming cycles and supply-driven approaches; dynamics of willingness to pay and ‘ownership’ of WASH services by users.
- » **WASH system factors:** Table A provides a summary of common gaps and systemic weaknesses in fragile contexts^C, organised around the system ‘building blocks’ presented in Figure B.

^BSee the eight building blocks within Figure B. Note: there is no sector-wide consensus on a single framework.

^CNote, these tables aim to focus on specifics in fragile contexts, which are in addition to wider systemic gaps present in low-income stable contexts that are also likely to be issues in low-income fragile contexts.









 INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS & COORDINATION: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Low-capacity/leadership authorities, substitution » Short-term projectised capacity strengthening » Plethora of non-state actors, issues of fragmentation and low alignment / harmonisation 	 FINANCE: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Short-term, restricted-mandate aid financing » Economic fragility, market price volatility, limited public sector budgets, and corruption » Users' limited willingness/ability to pay
 SERVICE DELIVERY: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Legacy of lifesaving interventions → 'chaotic' asset base, posing challenges for asset management » Supply-driven response undermines market actors » Surges in demand due to mobility of populations 	 REGULATION & ACCOUNTABILITY: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Humanitarian / development 'silos' with different standards and accountability lines » Limited state regulatory capacity / governance » Impaired trust (users→utilities, govt→NGOs)
 MONITORING: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Security challenges to project/sector monitoring » Projectised, fragmented sector monitoring efforts » Ad-hoc 'needs assessments' rather than routine, systematic, area-wide service level monitoring 	 WATER RESOURCES MANAGEMENT: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Poverty & displacement → enviro. degradation » Water scarcity, climate change, conflict, linkage water resource planning→E-response » Governance and regulation of water resources
 PLANNING: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Silos in humanitarian-development planning » Highly changeable, projectised, low-funding-predictability context, impedes long-term planning » Limited government leadership in sector planning 	 LEARNING & ADAPTATION (L&A): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Institutional memory loss due to high staff turnover (government, humanitarian actors...) » Actor dialogue more on coordination than L&A » Short, targets-focussed projects: time for L&A?

TABLE A:

Common weaknesses across the 'building blocks' in fragile contexts. See [Table 5](#) for a detailed version of this table.

FRAGILITY CREATING BOTH CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR WASH SYSTEMS APPROACHES

If it was easy to apply systems approaches in fragile contexts, such approaches would be commonplace. The fact they are not reflects the clear challenges to implementing such approaches in fragile contexts. However, fragility and shocks also create clear windows of opportunity for systems strengthening. These are briefly summarised below, and elaborated in [Section 6.1](#):

- » **Challenges:** Short-term, strict-mandate sector funding restricting the ability to take a longer-term approach; high-risk context, short-term target-driven projects and weak government/ market capacity incentivises direct implementation/ substitution, and disincentivises local market-friendly procurement; concerns of government engagement and risks to reputation and core humanitarian principles; sector stability and continuity of longer-term efforts; political sensitivities for long-term solutions for displaced persons; life-saving priority over sustainability.
- » **Opportunities:** Donor commitments such as the '[Grand Bargain](#)'; donor interest in 'exit strategies', 'nexus' issues, 'building back better' and 'transformative programming'; residual funding in the sector following crises; relative areas of systemic 'strength' (e.g. in reporting, coordination and planning) that can be entry points to build on; how shocks and crises can 'press the reset button' on sector agendas, and outbreaks raise political will on WASH; the growing humanitarian trend of cash and market-based approaches; how many NGOs (and UNICEF) have 'dual mandates' (humanitarian and development); appetite to find longer-term arrangements for displaced persons; technological advancements facilitating remote working and monitoring.

PEACE, FRAGILITY, POLITICAL ECONOMY & GOVERNANCE



ADAPTING HOW WE CONCEPTUALISE AND STRENGTHEN WASH SYSTEMS IN FRAGILE CONTEXTS

EVOLVING THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK, AND OVERALL OBJECTIVES FOR SYSTEMS STRENGTHENING:

While many of the characteristics of WASH systems in fragile contexts are similar to low-income stable contexts, there are specificities in fragile contexts that should nuance how we conceptualise, analyse, and strengthen WASH systems in such contexts. Section 6 outlines suggestions and examples of this.

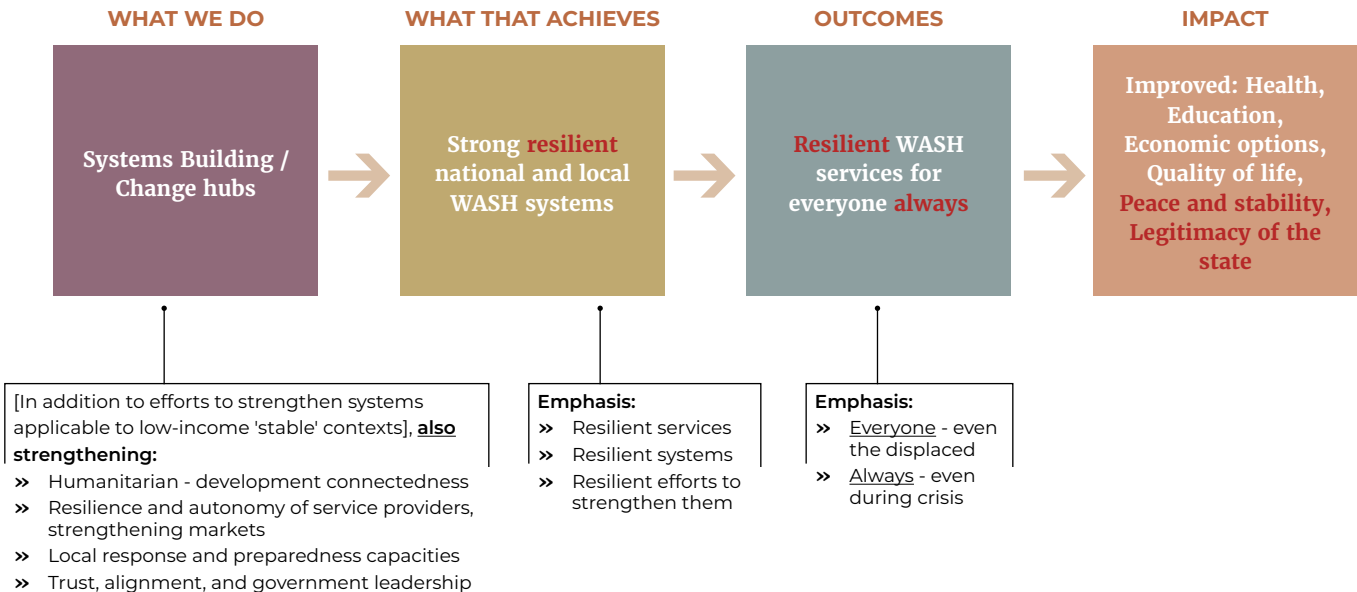
To reflect these specificities, certain adaptations have been made to the conceptual framework (highlighted in red in Figure C), and Annex 1 provides further suggestions on how sub-factors within each building block can be further nuanced. Building on this, the simplified Theory of Change for WASH systems strengthening has also been adapted and nuanced for fragile contexts (see Figure D).

FIGURE C:

Adaptations of the WASH systems conceptual framework for fragile contexts. Source: Authors.

FIGURE D:

An adapted, annotated high-level theory of change for systems strengthening in fragile states. Source: Authors



[Section 6.2](#) outlines how objectives for systems strengthening could be evolved, such as:

- » **Strengthening country systems for disaster preparedness and response:** Strengthening local capacities and processes for disaster preparedness and response (and management and coordination of this response), before crises, can help “avoid the inefficiencies and other far reaching negative consequences of creating parallel systems” (GOAL, 2020b) in the event of crises.
- » **Strengthening resilience of WASH services and WASH systems:** [Section 6.4](#) details how systems approaches can be applied to strengthen service providers and market-based actors’ resilience to shocks and withstanding periods of weak or absent government support and oversight.
- » **Strengthening the humanitarian-development nexus:** Systems strengthening can be applied to the ‘humanitarian system’ in its ability to effectively deliver on its mandate, and particularly in building the connectedness with the wider sector / development actions ([see section 6.4.4](#)).
- » **Contributing to peace and state building efforts:** Particularly in areas of water scarcity and existing tensions around water governance, systems approaches can be used to strengthen inclusive methods of water resources management, strengthen processes for dialogue and conflict resolution on water issues, and increase WASH service providers’ inclusiveness and accountability. This can reduce legitimate grievances that may spark future conflicts (FAO & World Bank, 2018; Mason, 2012). Strengthening accountability and governance of WASH services can also help rebuild the legitimacy of the state to its populations and rebuild the ‘social contract’ ([see 6.2.2](#)).

EVOLVING PROCESSES AND FOCUS AREAS FOR SYSTEMS STRENGTHENING:

[Section 6.3](#) provides suggestions on how WASH systems diagnostics and multi-stakeholder visioning processes – common in WASH systems approaches – may be adapted for fragile contexts. It highlights how such processes can be nuanced to act as forums that bring both humanitarian and development actors together and help develop a longer-term, connected vision to which they all subscribe to and see their clear role in. It also highlights additional aspects that WASH systems analysis in fragile contexts could consider, such as conflict and power analysis, and market assessments.

[Section 6.4](#) provides theoretical suggestions and practical case study examples of different ‘areas’ of the WASH system that may be relevant to strengthen. It highlights the need for systems approaches to include the work on governmental systems strengthening that is common and well documented in more ‘stable contexts’, while stressing that efforts should not be limited to this. In light of the sector context and fragility of the state, systems strengthening should also focus efforts on strengthening service providers’ resilience ([6.4.2](#)), the local WASH market system ([6.4.3](#)), and the wider ‘humanitarian system’ ([6.4.4](#)).

TABLE B:
Examples of focus areas and case studies for systems strengthening in fragile contexts

AREA OR ACTOR OF THE WASH SYSTEM	EXAMPLE FOCUS AREAS FOR SYSTEMS STRENGTHENING RELATING TO FRAGILITY	EXAMPLES PROVIDED (IN TEXT BOXES AND/ OR CASE STUDY ANNEXES)
CENTRAL AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT <i>(where humanitarian principles allow engagement) See Section 6.4.1.</i>	Strengthen foundations for transition from parallel systems, and capacities for emergency coordination and response; strengthen leadership role in sector; strengthen WASH service governance, and the ‘social contract’.	WHH’s work at central and decentralised levels in Somaliland; Concern’s strengthening of local government in Northern Uganda; ACF’s work with local authorities in North Eastern Nigeria; Water for Good’s work on sector monitoring and planning in CAR.
SERVICE PROVIDERS <i>(e.g. utilities, water management committees) See Section 6.4.2.</i>	Strengthen their resilience; increase their autonomy and ability to function in times of weak state support (strengthening capacities, adapting service delivery models); extend their services to IDPs/refugees; adapt accountability and regulatory arrangements; make service governance more inclusive.	JFW’s support to service provider associations in DRC; Oxfam and CARE’s work on utility strengthening in Northern Kenya; Concern’s work on life cycle costing in South Sudan and DRC; Water for Good’s maintenance model in CAR; CARE’s gender inclusion work in Yemen and Syria; UNHCR’s work on service delivery models for displacement camps in Uganda and Ethiopia.
MARKET ACTORS <i>(e.g. supply chains, maintenance/ FSM providers, water truckers) (6.4.3)</i>	Strengthen their resilience; improve the quality of services and products that they provide, and relative regulation of this; increase their capacity to be effectively used in emergency response.	ACF’s market-based approach for chlorine products in Haiti; JFW’s work on strengthening FSM services in Madagascar; Oxfam’s work on FSM service delivery for displaced and host populations in Myanmar.
THE HUMANITARIAN WASH ‘SYSTEM’ <i>(e.g. the cluster), national CSOs (6.4.4)</i>	Strengthen connectedness with development efforts; increase harmonisation / alignment of sector actors; strengthen capacities of local CSOs for preparedness and response.	UNHCR’s systems approach to planning and service delivery for FSM in Cox’s Bazaar, and its work on public service delivery models for displaced persons settlements in Uganda.

In preparing this paper, one stakeholder asked, ‘but what if the government is the problem?’. Indeed, it is a common (often valid) concern in humanitarian circles that engaging with governments may risk humanitarian principles of independence, impartiality and neutrality (Mason and Mosello, 2016). [Section 6.4.1](#) provides practical suggestions for engaging with and strengthening government in fragile contexts. It suggests that pragmatism is needed, that humanitarian principles should not be overused as a reason not to engage, and the state’s weak capacity should be the rationale to strengthen it not a rationale to bypass it.

EXAMPLES OF STRENGTHENING THE DIFFERENT BUILDING BLOCKS, AND AT DIFFERENT PHASES

[Section 6.6](#) provides examples of actions to strengthen the individual building blocks of the WASH system in fragile contexts. These are in addition to what would also be relevant to do in low-income stable contexts. These are summarised in [Table 3](#), and [Table 5](#) lists more ‘concrete’ examples.

TABLE C:

Example components of the system to strengthen in fragile contexts. See [Table 5](#) for specific examples

EXAMPLE SYSTEMIC FACTORS TO CONSIDER STRENGTHENING:	
INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS, LEADERSHIP & COORDINATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Coordination processes and connectedness between H & D actors / silos » Leadership role of government in the sector, and issues of sector fragmentation » Sector capacities in preparedness, response and in applying ‘development’ approaches » Sector policy, strategy and guidelines to better include humanitarian and resilience aspects
RESILIENT SERVICE DELIVERY MODELS / INFRA.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Models for WASH service delivery that are more resilient and locally autonomous » Resilience of infrastructure, and processes of service provider asset management » Sector usage and reinforcement of local maintenance services and supply chains » Asset management capacities at the service authority and sector level
MONITORING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Sector monitoring frameworks: the degree of alignment to / usage by sector actors; the inclusion of humanitarian and development indicators in assessments and monitoring » Monitoring capacities – to monitor construction, service levels, and potential disasters
INCLUSIVE, CONNECTED & RISK-INFORMED PLANNING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Sector plans: The existence of risk-informed, strategic WASH plans at different levels that include humanitarian and development components » Planning processes, government leadership of them, and actor alignment » Processes of disaster contingency and response planning at different levels
FINANCE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Processes for more connected, multi-year (transitional) sector financing strategies » Service providers’ financial viability and resilience » Foundations for cash /market-based approaches for use in humanitarian response
TRUST, REGULATION & ACCOUNTABILITY^D	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Regulatory and oversight arrangements for service delivery (incl. adapting R&A models) » Accountability processes for WASH in conflict and humanitarian response » Trust and accountability processes (e.g. users↔utilities, govt↔NGOs. citizens↔state)
WATER RESOURCES MANAGEMENT & ENVIRONMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Water resource planning, and usage of these plans to inform humanitarian action » Institutions for inclusive and credible management of water resources, conflict resolution » Legal, monitoring and (adapted) regulatory frameworks to protect water resources » Climate and disaster resilience of service delivery infrastructure and technologies
LEARNING & ADAPTION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Learning and adaptation processes within humanitarian actors and platforms » Knowledge management & process for shared learning between the H-D silos » Processes of learning between countries (e.g. on strengthening the ‘nexus’ and resilience)

^DSee also UNICEF, GWC & SIWI (forthcoming): *WASH Accountability in Fragile Contexts*, for further examples.

Different ‘phases’^E present opportunities to strengthen WASH systems, with different objectives – considering interventions in this way can strengthen connectedness between actions in the different phases. [Section 6.7](#) and [Annex 2](#) provide examples of strengthening systems at different phases.

REFLECTIONS FROM IMPLEMENTING ORGANISATIONS

As part of the process of developing this paper, interviews were held with some of the organisations that submitted case studies to capture their experiences and reflections on applying systems approaches in fragile contexts. These are detailed in [Section 7.1](#) and summarised briefly below.

Key issues emerged, such as the trade-offs between meaningful government involvement and relinquishing some control on project timeframes and decision making; how meaningful partnerships are built on trust, which takes time to grow; the need to work ‘beyond the comfort zone’ of the community level, to work, in partnerships, at higher ‘levels’ of the system (and the need to evolve organisational skill sets to do so); about how a better understanding of the stakeholders and power dynamics is essential; and how taking a longer-term perspective even in humanitarian contexts is key, but needs to be accompanied by risk-informed planning, and adaptive management.

[Section 7.2](#) continues with the interviewees perspectives, relating to how WASH sector funding in fragile contexts could better support, enable and incentivise efforts towards systems strengthening. It emphasises the need for longer-term, adaptive programmatic funding, which can be shifted between response and longer-term efforts, is outcomes focussed, supports costs of deeper contextual analysis, and enables ways of working to support systems strengthening^F.

CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE PERSPECTIVES

In the development of this paper, one WASH systems (development) expert asked “but how can you strengthen the system if there isn’t one?”, whilst one humanitarian professional stated that WASH systems strengthening is “not my mandate”. This paper seeks to demonstrate that there is always a WASH system to engage with and strengthen, no matter how weak, and that strengthening WASH systems, with a mutual objective of strengthening WASH services’ resilience, is everyone’s business.

This paper aims to address a relative gap in sector guidance and documentation in how to apply WASH systems approaches in fragile contexts. It provides suggestions on how to adapt and nuance the way we look at, analyse, and seek to strengthen WASH systems in fragile contexts. It recognises that applying systems approaches in fragile contexts is faced with many barriers, yet there are also many opportunities and an increasingly favourable funding environment to apply such approaches.

The WASH sector needs to place the ‘nexus’ issue of resilience in the centre of efforts to strengthen WASH systems, aiming not only for resilient WASH services but resilient WASH systems and resilient efforts to strengthen them. The humanitarian principle of ‘do no harm’ should be extended to ‘do no harm to markets, systems, and prospects for sustainability’. Both development and humanitarian donors should continue to increase the proportion of sector funding that enables and incentivises systems strengthening in fragile contexts.

This paper builds on the emerging body of literature on WASH in fragile contexts. It is hoped that this paper will stimulate further discussion, thinking, documentation, guidance, and experience sharing in the sector on this issue of applying WASH systems approaches in fragile contexts.

^EFor example pre-crisis, acute humanitarian response, protracted phase and post-crisis /recovery

^FFor example, on ways of collaborating with government, and for market-sensitive, local procurement



INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS, LEADERSHIP & COORDINATION

STRENGTHENING COORDINATION PROCESSES AND CONNECTEDNESS BETWEEN HUMANITARIAN AND DEVELOPMENT ACTORS

- » Strengthening the effectiveness of WASH coordination platforms at central and decentralised levels, and ensuring these are inclusive of both development and humanitarian sector actors, and strengthening cross-sectoral coordination.
- » Strengthening the flow of information between central and decentralised coordination structures.

STRENGTHENING LEADERSHIP ROLE OF GOVERNMENT AND REDUCING FRAGMENTATION OF ACTORS' ACTIVITIES

- » Strengthening coordination and information flow between government entities (e.g., disaster management agency and water ministry) and helping to clarify ambiguities in institutional mandates for disaster preparedness and response and humanitarian coordination.
- » Strengthening capacities and processes within mandated government institutions for coordination, information management, and communication to allow the progressive assumption of cluster functions (where appropriate).
- » Support the government to undertake studies, or provide them with study findings and data, to help in their ability to lead the sector.
- » Where appropriate, working with government at different levels to understand and address some of the disincentives of non-state actors to engage with government (e.g., accountability, rent seeking behaviours, risks of politicisation).
- » Support government to lead process whereby sector actors define and agree an overarching vision for the WASH sector and implore sector actors to align behind a common sector plan and vision in their respective projects (valid at national and sub-national levels for planning and alignment).
- » Defining standard operating procedures and developing implementation guidelines covering development and humanitarian phases, which help to reduce fragmentation of implementation approaches between actors (e.g., on issues such as engaging project volunteers, per diems, subsidy for rural sanitation).
- » Where appropriate, strengthen decentralised capacities and decision making in local authorities.

ASSESSING AND STRENGTHENING THE CAPACITY OF SECTOR ACTORS IN PREPAREDNESS, RESPONSE AND DEVELOPMENT

- » Undertaking multi-stakeholder capacity assessments and helping the sector to develop strategic capacity development plans that stakeholders align and contribute to (moving away from short-term, projectised approaches to capacity development), and ensuring such capacities cover development and crisis-phase contexts.
- » Undertake capacity development activities with service providers, government entities and CSOs that are longer-term, moving beyond simply one-off training and equipment provision.
- » Strengthening stand-by capacities of market actors to provide timely, quality humanitarian actions, for example, the capacity of handpump mechanic associations or local private sector actors to be contracted by NGOs for rapid repair services.
- » In chronically fragile contexts, strengthen the capacities of CSOs and state entities in their understanding of and ability to implement developmental approaches for WASH.
- » Building partnerships between private and humanitarian actors for the procurement of items meeting humanitarian standards.

ENSURING SECTOR POLICY, STRATEGY AND GUIDELINES INCLUDE HUMANITARIAN AND RESILIENCE ASPECTS

- » Work with key stakeholders to strengthen legislative, policy and strategy frameworks to ensure they consider different phases from acute crisis to development, and that they prioritise and mainstream crisis prevention and resilience.

TABLE 5:
Examples of
strengthening the
building blocks in
fragile contexts

RESILIENT SERVICE DELIVERY MODELS & INFRASTRUCTURE



DEVELOP / EVOLVE SERVICE DELIVERY MODELS WHICH ARE MORE RESILIENT AND LOCALLY AUTONOMOUS

- » Test and demonstrate service delivery models that can operate more autonomously and are less reliant on the state (e.g., PPPs, umbrella associations of service providers).
- » Test models for service delivery during humanitarian contexts, and incorporate service delivery mandates of utilities to also cover IDPs (where appropriate/viable)
- » Test and develop models for preventative maintenance service delivery, which could be used both in times of crises and stability
- » Develop networks of local actors (such as community volunteers or the Red Cross) who can support maintenance and service delivery activities while service provider staffs' field access is restricted, formalise links between the informal service providers and the mandated service provider.

INCREASE RESILIENCE OF SERVICE DELIVERY INFRASTRUCTURE, AND IMPROVE SERVICE PROVIDERS' ASSET MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

- » Develop, demonstrate and promote disaster and climate resilient infrastructural designs, and encourage the adoption of these as sector (not only cluster) standards and guidelines.
- » Support service providers to have durable, resilient infrastructure, which require relatively limited operation and maintenance inputs or reduce reliance on overseas supply chains, and with redundancy within the system to cope with spikes in demand or to mitigate the impact of damage to critical assets.
- » Support service providers to develop asset management and maintenance plans, and prioritise preventive maintenance practices.

REINFORCE ROLE OF LOCAL MAINTENANCE SERVICES AND SUPPLY CHAINS

- » Increase the local capacity for maintenance (e.g., within the service provider staff or local private sector) and develop stand-by agreements with local contractors and suppliers for maintenance.
- » Build the capacity of maintenance service providers and supply chain actors to be used during humanitarian response activities, and help them to promote their services in the sector, and encourage alignment of actors in the use of their services to reinforce their viability.

STRENGTHEN ASSET MANAGEMENT CAPACITIES AT SERVICE AUTHORITY AND SECTOR LEVEL

- » Undertake nationwide or area-wide asset inventories (such as water point mapping), using the data to facilitate dialogue on maintenance arrangements, structure maintenance services, and discuss technology standardisation and quality issues.
- » Facilitate the process of the transition of one-off asset mapping surveys to recurrent asset monitoring processes, led by government and supported by non-state actors (where appropriate).
- » Support the development of sector standards and guidelines on infrastructure (including for humanitarian phase) and strengthen arrangements for monitoring of such standards by permanent local actors (where appropriate) and accountability mechanisms for those who do not meet these standards.
- » Strengthen capacities of permanent actors in stockpiling and management of stored equipment for maintenance and humanitarian response at central and decentralised levels.



MONITORING

STRENGTHEN THE SECTOR MONITORING FRAMEWORK, ALIGNMENT, AND LEADERSHIP OF IT BY GOVERNMENT

- » Strengthen the overall sector monitoring framework, helping move from isolated periodic field assessments to recurrent monitoring. Strengthen alignment to and contribution to such monitoring processes by all sector actors.
- » Strengthen data management, analysis and visualisation capacities of government, to help in the transition of sector monitoring and datasets from the cluster/NGOs to government.
- » Increase stakeholder willingness to share monitoring data (e.g., between state and non-state actors- where appropriate, and between non-state actors), and for sector datasets to be accessible by all sector actors.

INCLUDE HUMANITARIAN AND DEVELOPMENT ASPECTS IN ASSESSMENTS AND MONITORING PROCESSES

- » Include humanitarian indicators within WASH sector monitoring frameworks (e.g., IDPs, service levels during disasters).
- » Where appropriate, include development indicators and aspects within humanitarian assessment processes. For example, assessing against sector service standards, analysing capacities vis-à-vis their policy mandated functions, and measuring system strength not only beneficiary needs⁹⁶.

STRENGTHEN MONITORING CAPACITIES – OF CONSTRUCTION, SERVICE LEVELS AND OF DISASTERS

- » Strengthen the capacities of permanent local actors (e.g., national NGOs, local consulting firms, utilities/service providers, government at different levels) in assessment and monitoring processes, for example to assess humanitarian needs, to monitor quality of construction and humanitarian response actions, and to monitor service levels (including aspects of water quality).
- » Strengthen sector processes for disaster surveillance and early warning systems (e.g., epidemiological, meteorological, geological disasters), improve flows of information between sectors and institutions, between levels of government, and between state and non-state actors.
- » Pilot / upscale modes of remote monitoring (e.g., sensors, mobile-to-web applications), and build local capacities for reporting, to allow ongoing monitoring even during periods of instability.

⁹⁶ Note – this is unlikely for acute humanitarian assessments.

INCLUSIVE, CONNECTED & RISK-INFORMED PLANNING



DEVELOP RISK-INFORMED, STRATEGIC WASH PLANS AT DIFFERENT LEVELS THAT INCLUDE HUMANITARIAN AND DEVELOPMENT COMPONENTS

- » Support the development of sector strategies, or plans (at central or decentralised levels) that mainstream resilience and consider humanitarian issues (e.g., IDPs).
- » Develop plans that cover the transition from humanitarian to development and include an overarching vision for WASH services and the sector to which both humanitarian and development actors agree to.

STRENGTHEN SECTOR PLANNING PROCESSES, AND GOVERNMENT LEADERSHIP OF THEM, AND STAKEHOLDER ALIGNMENT

- » Strengthen the inclusiveness of sector planning processes, for example, including both humanitarian and development actors (to ensure complementarity and connectedness of their respective actions and investments), and of different affected stakeholder groups (for reduction of tensions).
- » Strengthen capacities for risk and conflict analysis, and build this into planning processes, and more broadly strengthen government and service providers' planning capacities.
- » Strengthen platforms and processes for periodic review of sector plans and strengthen government capacity to communicate sector plans and encourage actors to align to it.
- » Strengthen assessment tools, build the evidence base in the sector for planning (e.g., surveys, markets assessments), and increase linkage between assessments, monitoring and planning processes.
- » Strengthen processes of cross-sectoral and cross-institutional assessments and planning (e.g., between clusters⁹⁷, between Ministries of Water and Disaster Management Agencies).

DEVELOP CONTINGENCY AND RESPONSE PLANS AT DIFFERENT LEVELS

- » Support the development of disaster preparedness and response / contingency plans at the sector, local authority and service provider levels.

FINANCE



STRENGTHEN AND ADVOCATE FOR MORE CONNECTED, MULTI-YEAR FINANCING STRATEGIES

- » Support processes that bring together humanitarian and development actors in the development of multi-year financing strategies for the sector.
- » Support the development of transitional financing strategies at different levels (e.g., in long-term camp settings, utilities, and at the local and central government levels).
- » Advocate for and track budget allocation in the sector for resilience and DRR.

SUPPORT TRANSITION OF FINANCIAL PLANNING AND INVESTMENTS BACK TO GOVERNMENT (WHERE APPROPRIATE)

- » Strengthen government public financial management capacities and processes to meet core donor accountability requirements to allow resumption of investments channelled through the government.
- » Strengthen capacities and information base within government to allow a progressive shift from cluster-led to government-led sector budgeting processes.

STRENGTHEN THE FINANCIAL VIABILITY AND RESILIENCE OF SERVICE PROVIDERS

- » Where necessary, provide targeted subsidies or output-based investments in service providers to avoid collapse and maintain minimal service levels during acute crisis phase.
- » Increase creditworthiness of service providers to enable access to non-state investments and test and increase service providers and market actors' access to financing mechanisms such as disaster insurance or revolving funds.

⁹⁷ See https://www.sheltercluster.org/sites/default/files/docs/201905022_urban_compendium_highres.pdf for an example of multi-sectoral planning in Syria.

- » Increase operational efficiencies of service providers (e.g., efforts to reduce non-revenue water, switch from diesel generators to solar power) to increase their financial viability and reduced reliance on subsidy from the state.
- » Increase user willingness and ability to pay for WASH services, for example, through customer mobilisation campaigns, advocating for right-to-work for displaced persons, and introducing income generating activities.
- » Advocate for investment in more durable, financially sustainable solutions in humanitarian response (e.g., using low recurrent cost technologies, undertaking basic life cycle cost analysis on various solutions).

STRENGTHEN FOUNDATIONS FOR CASH AND MARKET-BASED APPROACHES FOR HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE

- » Develop stand-by agreements, processes and capacity in permanent market actors to be able to rapidly implement cash- and voucher-based interventions and meet accountability and quality standards.



TRUST, REGULATION & ACCOUNTABILITY⁹⁸

STRENGTHENING AND ADAPTING REGULATORY AND OVERSIGHT ARRANGEMENTS FOR SERVICE DELIVERY

- » Strengthening the legal framework regarding service standards and regulatory aspects to cover the informal service providers, help to formalise them (e.g. as individual providers or through associations) and their link with the service authorities and (where appropriate) mandated service providers (e.g., utilities).
- » Strengthen the legal framework for alternative service delivery models (e.g., PPPs or more autonomous service delivery models such as umbrella associations of service providers, etc) to work effectively and accountably.
- » Where appropriate, test and strengthen additional/alternative modes to official centralised state regulation, for example, increasing the role of traditional or religious leaders, local governance and oversight boards, internal regulation within service provider associations. Donors/supporting agencies may also make compliance with defined KPIs pre-requisites for ongoing support and undertake external audits.
- » Strengthening standards development and compliance monitoring (with actors like Standards Bureau) for domestic manufacture and vending of WASH items (market-based approaches).

STRENGTHENING ACCOUNTABILITY FRAMEWORKS AND PROCESSES RELATED TO WASH IN CONFLICT AND HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE

- » Strengthen the legal and policy framework in the country to ensure humanitarian issues and rights are captured, for example, requirements to provide services to IDPs/refugees, service standards, damage to infrastructure or denial of services during conflict, human rights during humanitarian response, and adherence to core humanitarian principles.
- » Strengthen the capacities of local CSOs and media to monitor, report and record violations and track compliance, and increase public awareness on their rights related to these issues.
- » Strengthen arrangements for beneficiary accountability for humanitarian response and institutionalise these processes within permanent institutions (where appropriate).
- » Inclusion of humanitarian indicators within service provider KPI monitoring and reporting frameworks.

STRENGTHENING TRUST AND ACCOUNTABILITY BETWEEN SERVICE PROVIDERS AND USERS, AND POPULATIONS AND THE STATE

- » Increase capacities and create platforms for increased customer orientation of service providers and for dialogue between users and service providers (e.g., customer forums, user committees).
- » Ensure service provider governance and oversight structures are inclusive and representative of different user groups (to increase credibility and reduce potential tensions).

⁹⁸ See the upcoming paper from UNICEF, GWC & SIWI on WASH Accountability in fragile contexts. Also, there is an upcoming WASH regulation tool upcoming from UNICEF and SIWI – see <https://www.worldwaterweek.org/event/9008-water-and-sanitation-regulation-in-the-climate-change-era>

- » Strengthen arrangements and processes for greater accountability and transparency of central and local government entities to populations, for example, increasing public access to information, periodic public dialogue forums, more accountable planning and decision-making processes.
- » Strengthen the accountability of service providers on financial management (e.g., public audits) and test technologies to increase accountability (e.g., mobile payments, water ATMs, better billing and meter reading systems).
- » Strengthen capacities and processes for complaints, dispute resolution, and impartial arbitration, at service provider and wider government institution levels.

STRENGTHENING MUTUAL ACCOUNTABILITY PROCESSES IN THE SECTOR, BETWEEN STATE AND NON-STATE ACTORS

- » Increase the presence of government, NGOs/UN agencies, and development and humanitarian actors in sector coordination platforms to develop a culture of dialogue and mutual accountability.
- » Strengthen processes of Joint Sector Reviews, ensuring presence of and dialogue and accountability between humanitarian and development actors, and between the state and non-state actors.

WATER RESOURCES MANAGEMENT & ENVIRONMENT



STRENGTHEN WATER RESOURCE PLANNING AND INCREASE USAGE OF THE PLANS IN HUMANITARIAN PLANNING AND ACTION

- » Undertake water resources assessments at different levels and strengthen hydrological monitoring systems to increase the availability of data to support (accountable) planning and decision making.
- » Strengthen the inclusion of humanitarian issues in the planning process for water resources and strengthen the usage of and alignment to such plans in humanitarian planning and action.

STRENGTHEN INSTITUTIONS FOR MORE INCLUSIVE AND CREDIBLE MANAGEMENT OF WATER RESOURCES

- » Strengthen capacities of permanent institutions for water resource monitoring, data analysis, inclusive planning, and strengthen coordination between state and non-state actors on planning.
- » Strengthen processes for (accountable) water resources allocations, and for conflict resolution, and increase sharing and public access of water resources data.
- » Support the creation and effectiveness of multi-stakeholder dialogue platforms on water resources issues.

STRENGTHEN THE LEGAL AND MONITORING FRAMEWORKS TO PROTECT WATER RESOURCES

- » Formalise informal WASH service providers and strengthen processes for allocation of abstraction licenses and processes for monitoring and compliance of these.
- » Strengthen the legal framework and enforcement processes (which may be non-state reliant) related to protection of water resources and addressing issues of deliberate contamination.

STRENGTHEN CLIMATE AND DISASTER RESILIENCE OF SERVICE DELIVERY

- » Strengthen hydrological monitoring and drought early warning systems and strengthen the connectedness and flow of information between state and non-state institutions regarding surveillance and planning for droughts and natural disasters.
- » Support the development of disaster preparedness and contingency plans at the sector, local authority and service provider levels, and strengthen local capacities for disaster surveillance and response.
- » Develop, demonstrate and promote climate and disaster resilient infrastructure designs, and advocate for the mainstreaming of climate and disaster resilience into sector policy and plans at different levels.
- » Identify secondary sources of water that can be used as additional sources for service providers during emergencies, including stand-by arrangements with owners of private water sources.

IMPROVE WATER SECURITY TO REDUCE TENSIONS

- » Strengthen service provider capacities and processes to reduce physical water losses and increase efficiency of water resources management and usage, and promote water retention and recharge measures to increase water availability.
- » Apply water safety planning at the community level, and consider conflict as part of the risks that are considered and mitigated as part of this process,
- » Strengthen humanitarian assessments to include water resources issues and include water resources issues in conflict and fragility analysis. From this, ensure humanitarian and water resource planning are conflict-sensitive, and strengthen the link between water resources management and peacebuilding efforts

**LEARNING & ADAPTION****STRENGTHEN LEARNING AND ADAPTATION PROCESSES WITHIN HUMANITARIAN ACTORS AND PLATFORMS**

- » Institutionalise learning topics as a standard agenda item in WASH cluster coordination meetings at different levels and encourage a culture of sharing learnings (and failures).
- » Support processes for post implementation review, such as humanitarian after action reviews, post implementation monitoring surveys and evaluations of the WASH response.

STRENGTHEN AND INSTITUTIONALISE KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT, AND ENCOURAGE LEARNING AND REVIEW BETWEEN THE SILOS

- » Encourage greater sharing of learning and information between humanitarian and development actors, and the inclusion of such actors in joint sector review processes. Strengthen links between review, learning, and policy/plan adaptation processes.
- » Support the adaptation of generic approaches in WASH (e.g., CLTS, community management) to the fragility context of the country and help government to adapt guidelines accordingly⁹⁹.
- » Strengthen knowledge management processes and platforms in the sector and build capacity of permanent actors (e.g., CSO network or government) to progressively take on the knowledge management functions of the cluster.
- » Strengthen information sharing processes in the sector, such as sector newsletters, and help categorise learnings between different 'phases' to help in transition planning and prevention strategies.

FACILITATE LEARNING AND EXCHANGE PROCESSES TO HELP UNDERSTAND TRANSITION JOURNEYS OUT OF FRAGILITY

- » Support stakeholder exchange visits (e.g., between humanitarian and development actors) to help increase knowledge and mutual understanding of issues.
- » Support exchange visits of government and other local actors to other countries, or other parts of the country that have successfully transitioned from humanitarian to development phases, to inspire stakeholders as to possible pathways out of chronic fragility. Also showcase examples from elsewhere of how humanitarian efforts have adapted systems approaches.

STRENGTHEN ENGAGEMENT AND CAPACITIES OF LOCAL RESEARCH AND TRAINING INSTITUTIONS

- » Build the capacity of local/regionally based universities and training institutions to meet the humanitarian and development skill needs of the sector
- » Engage local research institutions and consulting firms in appraisals and reviews of humanitarian action to build knowledge base within permanent local structures.

⁹⁹ See the GTO case study in the annex for an example of this for CLTS in South Sudan.

