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Building resilient WASH sector: experiences from Bangladesh and Uganda

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**EQUITABLE AND SUSTAINABLE WASH SERVICES:
FUTURE CHALLENGES IN A RAPIDLY CHANGING WORLD**

**Building resilient WASH sector:
Experiences from Bangladesh and Uganda**

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REFERENCE NO. 3261

Introduction and objectives

Development programmes emphasise more and more the importance of sustainability, which means sustained activities after the closure of the programme. However, when the programme is closed there is no funding available and no professional support to maintain the previously established activities. Therefore, programmes are expected to engage the target population to be able to carry on after the closure. For a community to be able to maintain previously established programme activities needs to develop resilience against a variety of challenges. The development of resilience is influenced by the given context and characteristics, which is highly unequal across and within countries.

In our current work, we use the FIETS sustainability approach¹ for defining the variety of challenges across five domains. This framework gives a structured approach to look at financial, institutional, environmental, technical and social perspective of sustainability.

We look at the inequalities to develop resilience by using wealth quintiles and access to water, sanitation and hygiene services and facilities measured by the JMP ladders².

In the present paper we draw experience from the WASH SDG programme (2017-2022)³. The programme is being implemented in seven countries by a consortium consisting of the WASH Alliance International (WAI)⁴, Plan Netherlands and SNV. The programme aims towards an improved WASH situation for all, especially increase demand for improved WASH facilities and practices; improve the quality of service provision and. improve governance of the sector. Simavi as lead implementing organisation of the WAI-programme in Bangladesh and Uganda designed and conducted the baseline and midline assessment to measure changes over time and across the countries. The focus of the change in this paper is measured in the area of WASH services in different social groups. The groups are classified by wealth quintiles. The measurements give insights on the different reality of resilience.

Approach and methodology

Research questions:

1. How are the access to WASH service levels different for different social groups?
2. How does this differ per country?
3. What difference we see over time?

The midline assessment of the WASH SDG programme was conducted late 2020 and early 2021, simultaneously in Bangladesh and Uganda. The assessment used random sampling proportional to the population of the intervention areas, as well as the rural and urban division. The assessment included quantitative surveying in communities (households), as well as qualitative interviews with previously defined stakeholders. The method was chosen to ensure comparability with the baseline results and the representativeness.

Analysis and results

With the midline assessments in hand we have the opportunity to compare results across countries and over time. The results both from Uganda and Bangladesh show a heterogeneous and complex picture. We observe the change over 2 years of programme implementation in two countries (one district in Uganda and two in Bangladesh) along three JMP ladders, water, sanitation and hygiene.

When we are looking at the overall picture it shows positive results in terms of improving WASH services in the intervention areas. The expectation is that over the time target population moves from the lower JMP ladder stages to upper ones as the result of the programme.

The population distribution on all three JMP ladders is improving relative to the start of the programme. Population on the lower ladders stages are generally decreasing, while on the upper stages increasing. This is a simplified description of the changes with no regards to the volume of the change. However, it shows the overall direction of the change and gives indication on the consistency of the programme implementation.

Analyses by wealth quintile shows a more heterogeneous picture. While the hygiene and sanitation services show improvement in the overall population both in Uganda and Bangladesh, improvement on the water service ladder shows inequalities across wealth quintiles. It is also interesting to look at how people in the different wealth quintiles benefit.

Agago district in Uganda access to basic water, sanitation and limited hygiene services increased by an average of 33% in the lowest wealth quintile over 2 years. At the same services are improved in the 5th quintile too by an average of 42%. The improvement is welcome, but not that straightforward.

Comparably, the results from Bangladesh (Barghuna and Sathkira districts) show similar pattern but in a different way. People from the limited water service level moved either to basic or unimproved service levels across all the 5 wealth quintiles. However, more people in the lower wealth quintiles are move backward than in the people in the first or second quintile.

Transition to better WASH services is not that obvious in the lower wealth categories.

Our results show that people in lower quintiles are more likely to move both forward to better services as well as backward, when services interrupted and facilities deteriorate. Services for operation and maintenance as well as availability of spare parts directly effects sustainability of the facilities. However, availability of spare parts can not be the reason on its own. It is rather an indication and can be used as a proxy indicator for the operation of WASH market.

This finding suggests to have a closer look at the operation and maintenance aspect of the facilities and evaluate them from the angle of sustainability and resilience. Results show that even if bigger efforts are made to reach the more vulnerable social groups with WASH services, the facilities deteriorate faster than for the people in higher wealth quintile.

Conclusions and recommendations

In the lower wealth quintiles transition to improved WASH services is interrupted, and often followed by deterioration. This is due to inconsistent maintenance. Interventions in the WASH market with the boost of service providers and has positive effect on availability and affordability, as well as opportunity for income generation. This disproportionately affects people in lower wealth quintile, which ultimately causes the deepening of inequalities. This can be addressed by involving people in need in the planning process by diversifying decision making platforms.

Further findings are expected in April, further analyses will be done before the conference.

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