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## Using a holistic sustainability framework to support shelter programming in Myanmar

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

**Using a holistic sustainability framework to support  
shelter programming in Myanmar**

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**QSAND – A shelter and settlement sustainability framework**

The QSAND sustainability self-assessment tool ([www.qsand.org](http://www.qsand.org)) was developed by BRE with the support of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in order to support holistic decision-making in shelter and settlement operations. It has been used in various post-disaster contexts by Catholic Relief Services (CRS), but as part of the ongoing development of the tool, both BRE and CRS were interested to see its applicability to other contexts beyond post-disaster relief. An opportunity to explore this arose from Catholic Relief Services' support of a project led by Karuna Mission Social Solidarity (KMSS) in northern Myanmar.

Communities across northern Myanmar have been devastated by a decades-long conflict between the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) and the government of Myanmar. Following the most recent large-scale outbreak of violence in 2011, around 100,000 people were internally displaced and residing in poorly-equipped camps. At the end of 2018, and at the behest of many of the internally displaced persons, the Myanmar Government announced that it would be closing the camps and relocating displaced populations in predetermined locations across Kachin and Northern Shan. This was largely because camp residents had little to no access to infrastructure such as WASH facilities, energy, and other resources, and because the clear divide between the displaced groups and host communities. A long-term solution to this crisis requires the implementation of long-term infrastructures to support displaced populations in rebuilding their lives.

CRS and BRE Trust opted to use the QSAND framework to assess the long-term sustainability of KMSS' intervention in a pilot study that would both provide evidence of the implications of a socially-focussed shelter and settlement programme, and allow for the testing of QSAND in a different context to its intended use.

**From response to resilience**

The key measure of success for this project was social cohesion between the displaced and host communities. In a context of ongoing conflict and intergroup tension, this was the most important outcome to achieve. However, the focus on infrastructure concerns was also a major factor for the displaced population.

QSAND uses a disaster timeline adapted from the Green Recovery and Reconstruction Toolkit (American Red Cross & WWF, 2010) to identify relevant interventions in immediate and long-term response, as well as to make suggestions for risk reduction and resilience measures. However, the focus on the disaster cycle has a tendency to view communities as simply responders to hazards. This is a long-term shortfall of the humanitarian sector more generally, as focusing on disaster response has been shown to be significantly more costly and less effective than good resilience practice and preparedness measures (IFRC, 2020).

Good disaster preparedness requires holistic consideration of a variety of social, economic, and environmental factors. Using the case study of QSAND usage in Myanmar, we are looking to explore the trade-offs between different priorities and ask how you can weight the importance of different outputs. In this project, the core measure of success was the social impact on the displaced and host communities, but access to key infrastructure was also an important factor. How do these factors interact and affect each other, and

how can the “hard resilience” of good quality housing and robust WASH and energy infrastructure influence community resilience factors?

Using a general sustainability framework to review the WASH impact of a shelter and settlement intervention allows for an assessment of the wider impact that different programmatic outcomes can have on the long-term sustainability of a community. This can help to inform programme management and decision-making. The question in a complex response situation becomes how can we weigh up social, environmental, and economic factors in a programme to ensure the long-term success of a programme, and we aim to use this case study in Myanmar to demonstrate how a framework like QSAND can help to highlight the considerations necessary for project sustainability.

## Themes

Institutional Development and Programme Management; Rural Water Supply; Climate Change.

## References

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## Contact details

George Foden and Stephen Alexander have both worked extensively with QSAND and in developing the humanitarian programme of the BRE Trust. BRE is a world leading, multi-disciplinary, building science centre with a mission to improve buildings and infrastructure, through research and knowledge generation.

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