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ENSURING AVAILABILITY AND SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT
OF WATER AND SANITATION FOR ALL

WASH governance in support of humanitarian programs in South Sudan: a case study from Northern Bahr el Ghazal

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BRIEFING PAPER 2370

ACF recognizes the need for more WASH governance in link with its operations in humanitarian crisis, and has conducted a series of studies on the subject. One such study was done in South Sudan in 2015 to analyze the state of WASH governance, and the links and gaps in order to improve ACF programs, as the WASH crisis in South Sudan is not only a resource crisis but also an issue of governance. The sector is fragmented and lacks regulation and policies. The limited availability of spare parts and of control mechanisms hinders the access to water of the population. To capitalize on its governance work, ACF has published a WASH governance manual dedicated to its country offices and its partners. It explains why, when and how to implement WASH governance activities or projects in humanitarian and development contexts.

Introduction: WASH governance in support of humanitarian programs

663 million people in the world lack access to an improved water source. Unclean water is the second biggest killer of children: 1.8 million children die every year as a result of diarrhea or other diseases caused by unclean water, poor sanitation and unhygienic environment and practices. Health costs associated with poor water and sanitation have a big impact on productivity and economic growth, trapping vulnerable households in cycles of poverty. There has already been a consensus that this water-crisis is not only about scarcity, but also largely about water resource mismanagement. In other terms, it is a "governance crisis" (1).

Governance systems "determine who gets what water, when and how, and decide who has the right to water and related services." (2) Even if water governance is specific to each context, some good governance principles have been widely accepted, and agreed on by ACF. The OECD's 12 principles groups (3), are displayed in Figure 2.

Working on water governance is a good opportunity for an NGO to enhance the impact of its programs, through advocacy and the strengthening of the institutions and the civil society. Monitoring and strengthening the governance principles will help with adherence to other principles followed by NGOs. They are linked with the right to water and sanitation, humanitarian principles and the DAC principles (4). Figure 1 shows the links between Human Rights, Right to water and Sanitation, and Governance. Moreover, urban programming is becoming a priority for the humanitarian sector, and urban areas concentrate more actors than rural areas, as shown by Figure 3. NGOs need then to adapt and to analyze the stakeholders and their agenda, so they can work safely and effectively in a specified area.

Understanding the context allows NGOs to answer more effectively to the crisis and to beneficiaries' needs. A study on the water governance set up in any given country allows for identification of the issues, reforms needed and quick wins that an NGO can accomplish. Identifying what exists, what the gaps are and what links exist or lack, will help an NGO have a coherent and efficient answer, and to not merely reinvent the wheel. It is also a way to think about an exit strategy and to hand over the water facilities with the knowledge that they will be supported by an effective institutional set. Reinforcing the capacities of local institutions and of communities will enhance the sustainability of the project. If needed, it can also be the occasion to prepare for the next crisis with the local and national institutions.

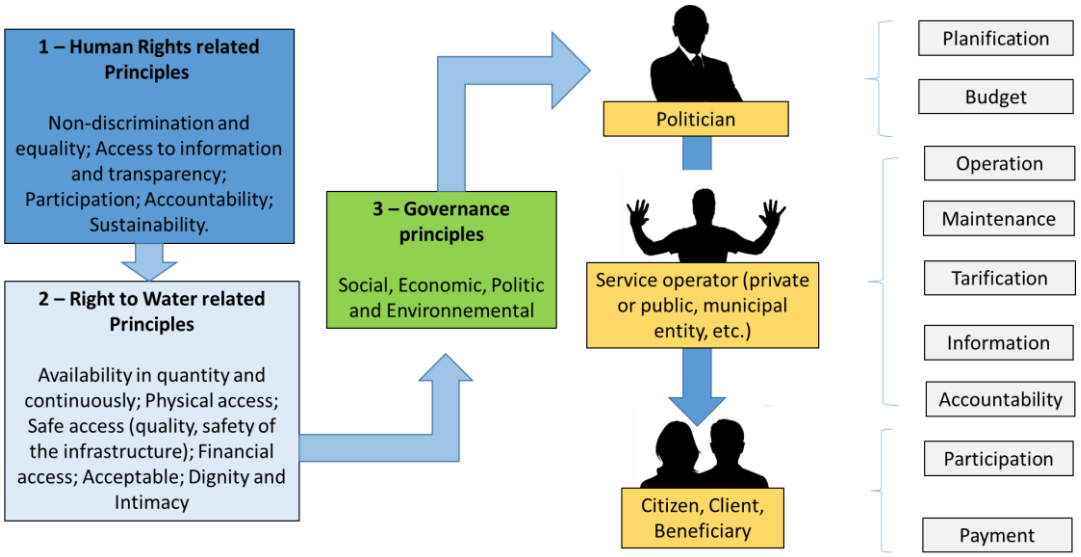


Figure 1. Links between Rights and Governance principles and users

Source: Lapègue

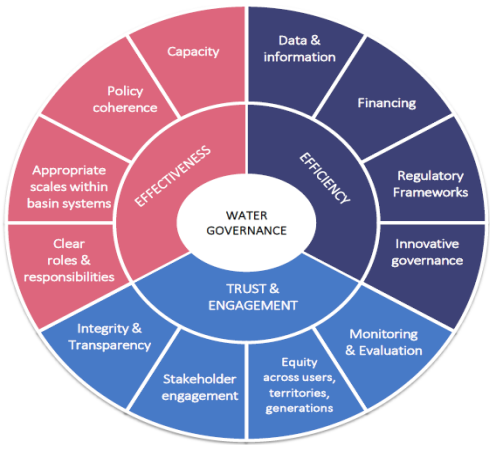


Figure 2. The OECD's 12 principles

Source: OECD, 2015

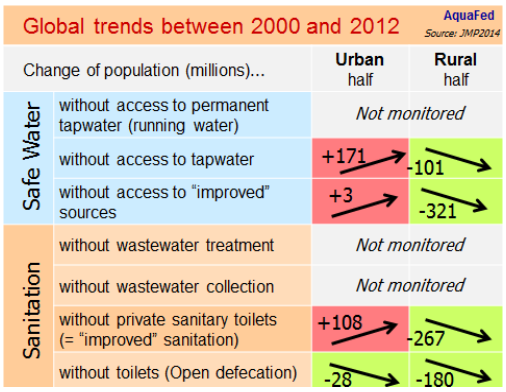


Figure 3. Global trends of needs between urban and rural in WASH

Source: Aquafed, 2014

This is why Action Against Hunger decided to start working on governance in 2012. Since then, a number of studies have been conducted in diverse contexts to contribute to the organization's WASH programs. To capitalize on these research activities and on experiences from country programs, a WASH governance manual was written in 2015, dedicated to ACF teams and its partners (5).

Context of the study

The Republic of South Sudan has a population of approximately 11.3 million people (6). After more than 20 years of civil war, the country is now facing another outbreak of violence. South Sudan is grossly underdeveloped, and experiences an acute lack of social services, instability and insecurity. It has substantial water resources, but they are unevenly distributed across the territory and inconsistent throughout the year.

According to the African Development Bank, 31% have access to improved water, and 14% to improved sanitation (7).

Northern Bahr el Ghazal (NBeG) is one of the 10 States of South Sudan, located in the North-West of the country and bordered by Sudan to the North. Its population is estimated to be over 721,000 people. NBeG has remained relatively stable during the recent outbreak of violence in South Sudan, but it is considered to be the most poverty-stricken state of the country, with 76% living below the poverty line. Global acute malnutrition (GAM) rates are also very high in NBeG: above the 15 per cent emergency threshold (8).

The Country is still in a transitory period since its independence in 2011. The national government is responsible for the development of policies, strategies, guidelines, regulations and standards that will apply to the whole country. Regarding the WASH sector, a few regulatory documents already exist and several institutions are involved. A Water Policy was adopted in 2007. Several other laws and policies are related to the WASH sector, such as the Health policy and the Local Government Act. There is still no specific legislation to guide the whole sector which defines roles and responsibilities of the different institutions and levels of government. A new Water Bill has been drafted and is under negotiation (Water Bill 2013), which aims at clarifying roles and responsibilities (9). There is no streamlined sanitation policy and no environmental policy yet at national level, and many states do not have a water policy.

Methodology of the study

To strengthen its work, ACF conducted a study on WASH governance in South Sudan. The objectives were to get a clear, documented picture of the legal and institutional framework of the WASH sector. This study was aimed also at pointing out hindrances in local governance that limit access to water for the most vulnerable, as well as gender-related issues and identified possible solutions/approaches. Finally, the study looked at the sustainability of the services, to identify gaps and opportunities, and possible ways of improving it.

This study was conducted within ACF from March-May 2015, in which most of the work was completed in South Sudan, including two weeks in Northern Bahr el Ghazal (March 2015). Two approaches were used: a qualitative one, through interviews of stakeholders of the WASH sector at national and local level, in Northern Bahr el Ghazal and Juba, focus group discussions, and readings; and a quantitative one, through a survey of 210 households in Northern Bahr el Ghazal (Aweil East and North).

Findings of the study

At national level: a fragmented national WASH sector lacking capacities

Several institutions are involved in the WASH sector at national level: the Ministry of Water Resources and Irrigation (water, rural sanitation, and hygiene), the Ministry of Health (sanitation and hygiene), the Ministry of Lands, Housing and Physical Planning (urban sanitation), the Urban Water Corporation (urban water), the Ministry of Environment (sanitation), and the Ministry of Gender, Child and Social Welfare.

At state level, the national ministries' counterparts are responsible. The structure of local government consists of three levels: the highest called County, followed by Payam, and finally Boma, which is the lowest level of local government. At local level, the most involved people are: the County WASH department and the County Health department at county level; the Senior Pump Mechanic and the Payam Health Committee at Payam level; and the Boma health committee at Boma level. The Payam and the Boma administrators, and the County commissioner are also involved, as WASH is often a key issue in the communities.

Due to the number of stakeholders, the lack of resources and communication, the WASH sector is experiencing poor coordination at national level. The responsibility chain between national, state and county levels are not clear enough, notably regarding sanitation and environment, where there is no national policy.

South Sudan, as a new country, is facing big challenges in capacity development. It is difficult to find qualified staff in the country. An overall strategy exists to develop and manage human resources, however funds are lacking and this strategy is not being brought up to the state or local levels. There have been a large number of institutional and governance projects implemented for national and state level authorities in the WASH Sector in the last 5 years, specifically by USAID, JICA, GIZ and DFID. There is still much to do on these issues, but the focus on institution building is heading in the right direction.

The financial crises and small budgets allocated to the WASH sector's institutions, along with the lack of clear general financing plans, result in difficulties to perform duties and competition amongst the institutions to receive the budgeted projects. This also influences the lack of capacities and coordination.

The lack of reliable data is also an issue for the WASH sector. It is caused by a lack of resources and capacities to do monitoring for the institutions responsible for it, including a lack of political and personal will, and low prioritization of this aspect.

Therefore, the WASH sector in South Sudan is facing several issues, such as poor coordination, lack of capacity, low budget, unreliable data, and no focus on water resources management.

At rural local level: the example of Northern Bahr el Ghazal

A quantitative survey led in Aweil East and Aweil North shows that access to WASH is very low. If time, distance and quantity of water are considered, only 6% of the respondents have access to water, 14% have hand washing facilities and 1% have latrines (10), which is based on the right to water and sanitation and WHO recommendations. Access to WASH is also influenced by the governance structure. Communities who have a Water User Committee (WUC) have better access to WASH. However, there are many issues regarding governance indicators in the villages surveyed: many people don't pay for water, most believe they cannot participate in water related decisions, access information or complain about water. Moreover, they do not really trust the water responsible people.

In NBeG, the Water User Committee (WUC) model is the most present. People are not accustomed to paying for water and the willingness and ability for communities to contribute to financing of water has been negatively affected by years of free handouts and high subsidies by NGOs. Low accountability and transparency of the WUC is an obstacle towards monthly payments. However, in most communities, there are already WUCs, who received training and who involve women, which can be built upon.

Access to hygiene and sanitation is very low in Northern Bahr el Ghazal. It faces obstacles such as culture, lack of awareness, low understanding by the institutions' staff, etc. Behavior change requires time and trust with the communities. Sensitization and education regarding hygiene and sanitation is time-consuming and demands access to the population. Interesting initiatives have been taken to build awareness and to reach more communities. Most NGOs and institutions in NBeG use CLTS approach in sanitation projects. However, staff in the counties is not always adequately trained (no training or lack of follow-up, with very few support afterwards). Focus group discussions showed that women are very interested in learning more about good hygiene practices.

The WASH sector at local level is facing many issues such as poor coordination, low accountability and transparency, and weak monitoring and mapping among the stakeholders. Given the acute emergency needs all over South Sudan and in particular in conflict-affected states, NBeG is deprioritized by national authorities and stakeholders as its humanitarian needs are considered more linked to low development and poverty. Fewer funds are therefore available even if the needs are still high. NBeG needs to build a good spare parts chain, accountability mechanisms, and control mechanisms. Pump mechanics are already working quite well with the communities but the availability of spare parts is a main issue. Finally, not considering water resources can also bring unplanned water scarcity issues in the coming years.

At urban local level: the example of Aweil North (NBeG) and the country's capital, JubaThe African Development Bank estimates that access to improved water in urban areas is 17% (11). The Urban Water Corporation was created by governmental decision in 2007 to supply water to the cities and it reports to the Ministry of Water. A big share of the population relies on private water sellers, either individual or companies. Almost all urban water systems are dysfunctional and the majority of the population continues to rely on poor quality and often intermittent services. The Urban Water Corporation is not independent and does not have the capacity to serve all people. Many private water vendors are providing people with water of unreliable quality and the price of water does not cover the operational costs.

In towns, water provision resembles a conglomerate of villages rather than a comprehensive system. The population of Aweil town uses boreholes with hand pumps, and communal tap stands. People do not pay for water, and therefore, there is no selling of water in the town. It is not clear which authorities should be responsible for public tap stands, whereas most of the hand pumps boreholes are managed by Water Users Committees.

Urban Sanitation services are underdeveloped in South Sudan. The African Development Bank estimates that access to improved sanitation is 38% (12). Simple pit latrines are the most used technology in urban areas (14). In Juba, the private sector has answered most of the demand to empty latrines and septic tanks. In Aweil town, on the contrary, there is a very low demand for such services; few households have latrines to

begin with, and when a latrine is full, users usually dig another pit. There is therefore no offer for latrine emptying services in town, and in some cases, local authorities may request for a company to come from another city to fill the gap. Solid waste management, drainage and sewerage are not considered priorities by stakeholders.

Low coordination among stakeholders, lack of quality and technical standards and limited controls of the actors hinder efficiency and quality in providing people with a sustainable access to WASH.

Lessons learned and recommendations

Advocacy is key to ensuring equitable access to water and sanitation. In humanitarian contexts, governance is often neglected over delivery of infrastructure. Particularly in South Sudan, humanitarian actors can strengthen programming by including considerations of governance early in the process, by building awareness and capacity of their teams and by advocating for the following subjects: building standards and control mechanisms, enforcing criteria for borehole allocation, strengthening the WASH cluster and focusing on water resources management.

To improve rural programs, it is critical to spend more time with the communities, to build a trusted relationship and ownership of the facilities. More collaboration between WUC and the community, not just when there is a problem, would help the WUC to build trust. Strengthening the WUC, working with women representatives, developing strong links between communities and counties, and contributing to the development of a spare parts chain will improve the sustainability of the programs. Building a strong relationship with the state, the counties and local level authorities is essential to ensure their buy-in, responsibility over their population, and will allow for capacity and financing gaps to be identified and addressed. Further, involvement of the authorities in the decision making process, in capacity building and in monitoring, as well as the linkages and feedback mechanisms with communities should be described in agreements describing roles and responsibilities of each party. Specifically, capacity building of the county, a good mapping of facilities and stakeholders and stronger resource management will allow the counties to better perform. Finally, villages that have gone through the “Open Defecation Free” certification through CLTS are a good opportunity to organize training by peers and improve awareness within the communities targeted by new projects. The involvement of the local government in trainings and monitoring of the ODF status would allow for more ownership of sanitation issues.

Towns and urban areas call for collaboration with both the municipality and the state, for a deep analysis of stakeholders before starting a project, and simultaneously taking enough time to avoid failures of programmes. As waste management systems and sanitation markets are underdeveloped, a feasibility study could assess their development to prevent contamination of water resources and disease outbreaks.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study shows the link between WASH governance issues and access to water and sanitation. Each context and state has its own challenges and specificities upon which ACF needs to build. The institutions and mechanisms are still being structured, and learning how to perform. It introduces good opportunities for cooperation with local actors and for the improvement of the WASH situation in the country.

The WASH governance manual developed by ACF is a tool for teams to discover, understand and use governance approaches in their programs. By giving concrete example of activities conducted by ACF and its partners, the manual shows the added value of governance in WASH. It indicates, at all steps of the project cycle management, what can be useful and how a governance approach can be used and implemented. It also explains which levels are crucial and who the main stakeholders are to take into consideration. It links current research with implementation to give tools to WASH program managers and coordinators. Finally, the participation of several institutions and organisations in the writing of the manual makes it relevant to all stakeholders of the WASH sector, and in particular to raise awareness amongst humanitarian actors.

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