

Capacity development in the WASH sector of Ethiopia



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Millennium Water Alliance - Ethiopia

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Position paper 5 of 5

Position Paper 5: Capacity development in the WASH sector of Ethiopia

Featured Ideas.

When considering how to improve capacity in Ethiopia's WASH sector, it is important to take into account the following:

- Significant capacity gaps surrounding the WASH sector exist in government, communities, educational institutions and the private sector.
- Ability gaps exist around preliminary assessment, planning, design and quality control of WASH facilities.
- Priorities in capacity development should include operations and maintenance for already-existing water points to increase sustainability, as opposed to focusing primarily on new implementation.
- Women are significantly underrepresented in government and private sector WASH work.
- The WASH sector is increasingly opening up opportunities for private sector roles, but private sector capacity – such as business operations, quality control and WASH knowledge – are limited.
- Focus areas can include monitoring, water quality and use of life cycle costing for improved functionality.



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Introduction.

Background on Capacity Development Efforts

The United Nations (UN) understands capacity development as, “The process through which individuals, organizations and societies obtain, strengthen and maintain the capabilities to set and achieve their own development objectives over time¹.” This definition aligns with the long-term strategic plan of the Millennium Water Alliance (MWA) to strengthen the systems needed to move towards self-reliance and reduce dependence on aid.

Capacity development is a well-established need in the water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) sector globally and is prioritized in Target 6.a of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)^{2,3}. Target 6.a states:

“By 2030, expand international cooperation and capacity-building support to developing countries in water- and sanitation-related activities and programmes, including water harvesting, desalination, water efficiency, wastewater treatment, recycling and reuse technologies⁴.”

A 2014 study by the International Water Association across 15 countries noted that while the Millennium Development Goals increased work and funding in areas such as infrastructure and institutional development, human capacity development has been overlooked⁵. The study also noted the lack of women with high levels of technical and managerial capacities to support WASH services, the need for more related courses in tertiary education institutes and the influence that a lack of trained professionals has on operations and maintenance⁶. It is important to note that capacity development does not equate only with trainings. Conceptually, it is much broader and includes resources, materials and enabling environments. A corresponding study by the UN also noted a critical global lack of planning and availability of human resources in the WASH sector⁷.

Capacity Gaps in WASH in Ethiopia

The One WASH National Program (OWNP) II indicates that the current capacity of funding for WASH in Ethiopia is approximately \$500 million per year, whereas what is required to achieve Growth and Transformation Plan II (GTP II) goals is 4 times this, or \$6.5 billion over 3 years⁸. Clearly, capacity development and expansion are imperative if Ethiopia intends to achieve GTP II or the SDG targets. The government of Ethiopia (GoE) has set capacity development as a priority for the WASH sector. This was notably demonstrated through the WASH Implementation Framework of 2011⁹, the GTP II and the OWNP II which address capacity building in the WASH sector¹⁰. The OWNP suggests providing funds from the Consolidated WASH Account (CWA)¹¹ to federal ministries and regional bureaus in order to build WASH capacity in policies, implementation, monitoring and training¹². Conversely, the WASH Implementation Framework discusses development of individual capacities for government officials at a variety of levels. As well, it references community-level capacities for community members, health extension workers, artisans and caretakers. Finally, it looks at the development of organizational capacities, operating system capacity, and supplies and logistics.

Budgets, tools and physical capacities necessary for rural WASH capacity development are also critically important¹³. A Life Cycle Cost Analysis in three target districts of the Amhara National Regional State found that only 1-2% of the district budget is allocated to the District Water Office; more than half of that budget is utilized to cover just administrative and personnel staff salaries. Meanwhile, the health and education sectors each receive, on average, 12% and 45% of the district budgets, respectively. This results in inadequate staffing and gaps in staff knowledge and training and materials. In these target districts it was found that, while at least 75% of the required staff positions in the District Water Office were filled, many of those holding these staff roles did not have adequate training and skills in areas of WASH planning, management and monitoring¹⁴.

- [Cont.] Capacity Gaps in WASH in Ethiopia

This challenges the District Water Office's ability to support – and hold accountable – service providers and conduct necessary WASH related activities. A lack of resources also results in low pay and minimal incentive structures for staff, resulting in high turnover. Material shortages also hamper achievement and sustainability of service delivery. A lack of motorbikes to visit sites, few computers to support monitoring efforts and limited equipment to test water quality are a few of the commonly reported issues.

The combination of scarce resources, open staff positions and knowledge gaps within existing staff roles leads to insufficient monitoring and evidence development for decision making and funding prioritization. Currently, there are multiple approaches and systems for measuring and monitoring WASH indicators from various NGOs, ministries and other initiatives. What is missing is a comprehensive system for systematic and consistent monitoring¹⁵. There is a National WASH Inventory, heavily supported by NGOs and donors, that has taken place two times in the history of the country (first in 2011 and again in 2019). But there are not consistent district level systems for gathering information and reporting it through a management information system, similar to the approach taken by the health and education sectors.

National WASH data collection is utilized primarily to track national targets and progress and does not happen at the frequency required or with the necessary indicators to support routine ongoing maintenance and functionality of water points. Furthermore, most water quality testing is supported by test equipment donated by UNICEF and other NGOs to district or zonal governments. This lack of consistent and well-coordinated monitoring further hampers service delivery as many of the capacity gaps remain unknown¹⁶.

In some contexts, the private sector supports critical roles for WASH service delivery. This is particularly seen in the supply of spare parts, operations and maintenance capacity, for example. In Ethiopia's WASH context, however, the private sector has a minimal role. Understandably, the private sector does not have the WASH sector knowledge to fill in operating proficiency gaps. Additionally, the enabling environment to allow businesses to operate safely and successfully in partnership with the public sector and communities is limited.

Educational institutions are often looked at to fill knowledge and experience gaps for public and private sector personnel. A recent study of Technical and Vocational Education Training centers (TVETs) in Ethiopia noted significant constraints to this, primarily due to a lack of funding¹⁷. This results in poor salaries for teachers, high turnover rates and a lack of equipment, materials and space for training. Educational institutions experience challenges in placing students in cooperative education programs because the manpower to find and manage those opportunities doesn't exist. A previous study in 2013 noted that TVETs may also struggle because they are managed from the top down by a national government as opposed to being demand responsive¹⁸. TVETs are challenged to ascertain where the most critical training needs are at the local level and focus on these, to prepare the unemployed workforce to step into jobs. See Box 1 for a summary of identified gaps in Ethiopia WASH sector capacity.

Box 1:

Identified Capacity Gaps

Communities

- Water, sanitation and hygiene committee (WASHCO) skills and expertise are inadequate for operations and maintenance.
- WASHCO personnel are volunteers and lack financial incentives.
- Guidelines or regulations on rural water tariffs are lacking.
- WASHCOs are often not legalized or formally registered.
- Government capacity challenges create issues for securing professional maintenance help.

Private Sector

- Supply chains are incomplete or non-functional.
- WASH related products and services are in low demand from customers.
- Guidelines and regulations are not in place to support private sector WASH work.
- Private sector models for operations and maintenance are limited and not fully self-sustaining.
- Quality control is lacking.
- Business operation skills are inadequate for efficient operations.
- Viable and sustainable business model development is difficult.

Government¹⁹

- High staff turnover rates.
- Limited funding for resources including vehicles and water quality testing equipment.
- Insufficient staff, as well as low IT equipment and data skills capacity.
- Inadequate human capacity, expertise and skills²⁰.
- Inconsistent monitoring of data and information about best practices.
- Inability to use evidence and engage in long-term strategic planning and visioning²¹.
- Minimal funding, high turnover and a lack of information about needed skillsets prevent TVETs from filling capacity gaps²².
- Lack of technical water quality monitoring skills.

Civil Society

- Difficulty developing trusted partnerships with other NGOs to capitalize on strengths of each.
- Limited understanding of broader WASH systems.
- Over-focus on hardware implementation.
- Misguided approach (leading, rather than facilitating government leadership).
- Insufficient communication and coordination across districts.

Government Capacity Building Priorities.

MWA suggests that a combination of people, resources and an enabling environment (see Figure 1) are required for success and sustainability. This means having the right amount of people with the necessary skills and experience; critical resources, such as fuel, equipment, and funding; and a supportive, enabling environment with the right mix of regulations, authority systems and incentives.

Government leadership in the WASH sector is similarly required to move beyond aid dependence towards long-term sustainability. Today, the government does not have the necessary capacity to fulfil this role entirely, particularly at the district²³ and kebele levels²⁴. What emerges are obvious gaps the private sector can potentially fill. From this, major donors such as USAID and DFID, as well as the Government of Ethiopia, are promoting an increased role for the private sector in WASH^{25,26}. While Ethiopia's private sector is not well equipped with the skills or enabling environment to step in, educational institutions are trying to assist. In general, they are well aligned to deliver government and private sector skill development, but they too must have the resources and assigned personnel to do this. Box 2 provides select example of the priorities indicated by the Government of Ethiopia for WASH capacity building.

Figure 1: Capacity Building Needs and Relationships



Box 2: Select Examples - Government of Ethiopia Capacity Development Priorities from OWNP II²⁷

- Strengthen monitoring and evaluation capacity.
- Continuous training and development of human resources including intense training and ongoing coaching and mentoring.
- Institutionalizing and professionalizing education institutions (ranging from universities to TVETs) to provide short and long-term courses.
- Strengthen national and regional communications across the four WASH sectors.
- Increased authority and technical capacity for national and regional water coordination offices.
- Development of business models, technologies, skills and planning to support utilities to achieve full cost recovery.
- Increase government staff and institute more human resource development units.
- Improve procurement, contract administration, design and planning processes.
- Support research and development in priority areas and enhance knowledge management activities.
- Strengthen decentralized capacity development – with a focus on communities.

WASH Capacity Building in Ethiopia

Communities

Currently, most rural water points are community managed. The tasks and efforts around this are designated to volunteer-led water, sanitation and hygiene committees (WASHCOs). These WASHCOs struggle with the ability to collect consistent tariffs and often lack the knowledge, tools and abilities to conduct ongoing operations and maintenance for a reliable, functional water supply. Also challenging is that self-supply – one identified service delivery model for rural households in challenging-to-reach areas – should be supported by technical staff for quality control and water safety. However, there is often no support available in kebeles for this.

One potential solution is to have more technical expertise at the community level. In Tigray region, a full-time, technical water staff works within each kebele helping to coordinate water activities for drinking and irrigation. This role is paid for by the local government. This is similar to the approach of the health sector where each kebele has a health extension worker who supports health efforts at the kebele level, though it should be noted that these technical water staff are not intended to replace WASHCOs for doing operations and maintenance. In Amhara, where household self-supply is a viable option in some districts, if there were kebele WASH staff, they could potentially support households in self-supply quality improvement and help WASHCOs ensure ongoing functionality of water supply systems. Another option is to build the knowledge and capacity of the WASHCOs through legalization processes and the development of professionalized “Water User Associations” where multiple WASHCOs partner, combine tariffs and hire professional maintenance services. Piloting professionalized maintenance models and perhaps employing youth trained by TVETs who struggle with unemployment, may also be considered²⁸.

Private Sector

A 2018 study by Open Capital Advisers noted the unique role that the private sector plays in the provision of water – both at the community or household level and also through public provision²⁹. The private sector needs to be mobilized and supported so that it can fill critical gaps. Notable provision areas can include:

- Supplying water quality improvement equipment
- Supplying self-supply tools and spare parts
- Offering artisan work
- Supplying replacement parts and equipment
- Delivering operations and maintenance support

Capacity development is likewise needed in several areas. One area is the support and encouragement of government agencies to strengthen the regulatory and governing frameworks for the private sector working in WASH. Improvement here will make it easier and less risky for them to enter the sector. Working with micro-finance institutions is also important to ensure that businesses wishing to start or expand can access needed funding³⁰. This is a newer idea supported in the recently released OWNP II programme plan³¹.

Private sector entities also need support in developing operations skills and sustainable business models with the necessary financial incentives for continuing operations. Finally, technical training of manufacturing and artisan skills is needed. At times, private sector artisans or producers of products (such as those producing rope pumps) have been criticized for bringing low quality products to market.

Educational Institutions

For the private sector to get the business and technical support it needs, educational institutions must be able to serve them. In rural areas it is often the TVETs that play a role in skill development and technical training. GTP II suggests that:

“Technical and vocational education and training institutions will serve as centres of technology accumulation for micro and small-scale enterprises.”

Thus, it is necessary for TVETs to receive adequate funding to sustain viable, operational facilities and employ staff with the qualifications and incentives to provide high quality education to others. Several studies have shown that TVETs (but also other education institutions) bear similar challenges as government institutions. These include limited staff, inadequate knowledge, lack of resources and limited access to reliable information for decision making.

It is found that TVETs often provide training that is not directly linked to the skills and knowledge individuals need to fulfil available and critical jobs. Information and awareness surrounding current, local gaps in private sector and government skills need to be accessible to TVETs so they can develop trainings to reduce these gaps specifically. Those who receive this education will then have more viable opportunities to gain employment. This will both decrease unemployment levels and improve services available in the WASH sector. Also of note is that women are widely underrepresented in technical fields and WASH government positions. GTP II has a target to ensure gender equity at all educational levels and thus, the increased capacity and role of women should be emphasized³². Educational institutions can play a role in prioritizing this.

Capacity Development Efforts of MWA

“If something does not lead to change that is generated, guided and sustained by those whom it is meant to benefit, then it cannot be said to have enhanced capacity.”

– United Nations Development Program³³

The Millennium Water Alliance applies a “systems approach” to capacity development to ensure improved long-term sustainability and progress. This means not just looking at one component, such as the private sector, or at one approach, such as trainings. Instead, we look broadly at the need for resources, information, incentives and an enabling environment.

Working with the private sector, MWA will boost technical training for business operators and artisans, while supporting improved business operations and the development of viable business models to keep financial incentives strong. Early efforts to improve business operations, quality control and technical production of WASH related product skills have shown some success³⁴. Additionally, we will influence development of the needed regulatory environment and availability of financing³⁵. This means supporting government on leadership development activities and advocating for increased funding. This funding will allow district governments to employ the necessary staff to engage with WASHCOs and support higher functionality rates. MWA also intends to incorporate support of TVETs in targeted areas. This support will take the form of offering information about the skillsets needed at the district level in WASH and championing funding to allow TVETs to better provide technical and business skills.

- [Cont.] Capacity Development Efforts of MWA

Through its systems approach, MWA intends to look at the accountability mechanisms and incentives to ensure that WASHCOs have the technical skills and the motivation to maintain their local water point – while supporting the same for service providers. While the exact mechanisms to achieve this are currently unknown, MWA will support communities and service providers to develop feedback mechanisms between users, providers and service authorities to enhance this.

MWA serves as a facilitator of change. This means we work at key points within the system, without taking the lead. It is imperative that leadership and ownership come from government, private sector and communities. In this, MWA will support government partners to develop strategic planning and leadership skills where there is need³⁶. MWA will also encourage greater coordination across WASH sector actors at the district and kebele levels, as recommended nationally, to promote synergy, influencing and learning across sectors and stakeholders.










Currently, MWA is working as a convening hub in several districts, providing support to government and other district stakeholders who come together for discussion, collaborative planning and learning. It is still unknown how this role can be successfully taken up and owned by government in the districts given the limited staffing and resources. This too will serve as an area for learning.

As MWA continues its work to foster capacity development in the WASH sector of Ethiopia, three areas of focus are critical:

- **Strengthening** monitoring systems and the use of data for decision-making, as well as increased resource allocation.
- **Using** life cycle costing to support functionality beyond an initial implementation.
- **Improving** water quality.

Recommendations.

To strengthen capacity in Ethiopia's WASH sector, MWA offers the following recommendations:

-  Support the private sector with business operating skills to improve efficiency and sustainability.
-  Influence for increased funding to the WASH sector to decrease resource gaps in staffing and materials.
-  Increase the focus on WASH monitoring systems so that necessary information is available for capacity development and resource allocation decision making.
-  Explore new approaches for strengthening WASHCOs and pilot alternative, professional maintenance models.
-  Prioritize inclusion of capacity development for women to expand their role in government and the private sector.
-  Take a systems approach to capacity building that goes beyond trainings to include incentives, resources and evidence-based decision making.
-  Encourage CSOs to use a facilitation approach to support government leadership in the sector.
-  Support and partner with existing entities such as the Ethiopia Water Technology Institute, local universities and TVETs.
-  Foster partnerships between NGOs to capitalize on the leading strengths of each organization.

About.



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The Millennium Water Alliance is a permanent coalition of leading humanitarian and private organizations that convenes, integrates, and influences critical players in the business, technology, government and NGO sectors to supply clean, safe drinking water and sanitation to millions of the world's poorest people in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Founded in 2002, MWA tests, innovates and scales effective and sustainable solutions towards this goal. Learn more at www.mwawater.org.

In Ethiopia, the Millennium Water Alliance (MWA) has convened a group including CARE, World Vision, Helvetas, Food for the Hungry, WaterAid, Catholic Relief Services, IRC WASH, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and Splash, to support the work of the Amhara National Regional State in achieving the WASH SDGs in three districts.

This position paper is the fifth in a series of related position papers. These papers can be found on the MWA website. Other papers address issues including financing, long-term WASH planning, and service-delivery models. This paper aims to summarize the agreed thinking of the alliance on how Ethiopia can improve WASH sector capacity to support achievement of the global SDGs. It was approved by the following members in August 2019 for publication: CARE, Catholic Relief Services, Food for the Hungry, IRC WASH, WaterAid, and World Vision.

The paper was drafted by Laura Brunson (MWA) with detailed review by Tedla Mulatu (MWA), Joseph Pearce (IRC WASH) and Abebaw Kebede (CARE). Additional contributions were provided by Genene Abera (Catholic Relief Services), Gardachew Tiruneh (CARE), Manaye Siyoum (WaterAid), Lemesa Mekonta (IRC WASH), Mussie Tezazu (MWA), Etsegenet Hailu (Food for the Hungry), Teshale Dalecha (Food for the Hungry) and Nigussie Yisma (World Vision) during a meeting of MWA held in April, 2019.



Appendix:

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