Water Under Fire

VOLUME 2

Strengthening sector capacity for a predictable,
quality humanitarian response

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Authors

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Foreword

Access to water and sanitation is a fundamental human right, a public health requirement, and a vital aspect of life-saving humanitarian response.[1] But keeping the water flowing in turbulent times is a complex task and one that is in growing demand.

In 2019, there were more than 50 active armed conflicts across the globe.[2] Since then, violence has only continued to increase, leading to widespread displacement, destruction of civilian infrastructure and devastating impacts on children's physical and psychological well-being.[3]

As humanitarian crises reached a global peak, almost 83 million people were in need of water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) in 2019.[4] Faced with this overwhelming demand, the humanitarian WASH partners, including UNICEF as a key partner, responded by reaching approximately 63 per cent of those in need.[5] Yet, the WASH humanitarian response only received 40 per cent of the overall funding required.[6]

In March 2020, access to WASH became even more critical with the COVID-19 global pandemic, which has compounded the need for WASH support in humanitarian situations. Frequent handwashing with soap is one of the most vital defences against the novel coronavirus and access to basic, affordable WASH services is essential for protecting families at home, safely operating health care facilities and reopening schools.

Under such intense pressure from ever more complex and protracted crises, the humanitarian community cannot currently meet WASH needs wherever and whenever they arise. Too often, WASH responses are inadequate and meeting humanitarian or sectoral standards can be a challenge because of capacity limitations, lack of preparedness and insufficient funding. As a result, emergency WASH services and assistance do not meet the critical needs of the people who depend on them.

To improve the quality and scale of the WASH humanitarian response, the sector must be more versatile. We must be able to deliver targeted interventions across all settings – from rapid-onset and acute emergencies to more complex and protracted crises. We can no longer operate a 'business-as-usual' approach and hope to meet the ongoing volume and nature of the humanitarian demand.

It is time for change.

On 22 March 2019 – World Water Day – UNICEF launched the Water Under Fire campaign to draw global attention to three fundamental areas where change is urgently needed to secure access to safe and sustainable water and sanitation in fragile contexts.

The first volume of the report series focuses on action across the humanitarian–development–peace nexus to strengthen WASH sector resilience in fragile and conflict-affected contexts. This second volume is dedicated to the WASH sector's capacity to deliver a predictable, quality humanitarian WASH response, and provides a change agenda and road map towards strengthening this capacity. The third and final volume in the series addresses ending attacks on water and sanitation services and personnel in armed conflict.

By pursuing the change agenda and road map outlined within this volume, the WASH sector can together deliver a predictable, quality humanitarian response, even in the most difficult contexts, when it is needed most. This is enshrined in the UNICEF Core Commitments to Children in Humanitarian Action.

Now is the time to recognize WASH as a life-saving service that protects and assists the most vulnerable people, including children. We must take urgent action to bolster the sector, ensuring that we can deliver humanitarian WASH at scale, anywhere and at any time.

Lives depend on it.

Manuel Fontaine
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Executive summary

Somewhere along the line, "it seems WASH has slipped off the radar for the emergency response for survival."[7] Emergency water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) responses are too often under-resourced, dependent on underdeveloped water and sanitation systems, and unable to address complex needs. Yet, for communities caught up in crises, ensuring rapid access to safe water and sanitation and safe hygiene practices can make the difference between life and death.

In protracted conflicts, children under 15 years of age are nearly three times more likely to die from diarrhoeal disease linked to unsafe water and sanitation than violence directly linked to conflict and war.[8] Around the world, even with global development progress, 1 in every 57 people is affected by crisis and requires urgent humanitarian assistance and protection.[9] More people are being forced from their homes and communities by conflict: In 2014, there were 59.5 million forcibly displaced people globally; by the close of 2019, this number had risen to 79.5 million, "the highest number on record according to available data."[10]

The WASH sector cannot operate a 'business-as-usual' approach and hope to meet the ongoing volume and nature of the humanitarian demand.

According to the capacity study that this report summarizes and develops, in many areas in crisis, the humanitarian WASH response is judged critically insufficient.[11] This shortfall can contribute to public health crises, such as outbreaks of cholera, diarrhoeal disease and vector-borne diseases, and high levels of acute malnutrition. And the importance of safe hygiene practices in addressing emergent diseases has been underlined by the global response to COVID-19.

Keeping the water flowing in turbulent times calls for a predictable, quality humanitarian WASH response. There are six main bottlenecks to building capacity in this regard:

Human resources and technical skills: Only a handful of United Nations agencies and international non-governmental organizations (INGOs), complemented by a number of medium-sized organizations, seem to have the relevant scale, culture and business systems to predictably deliver core WASH capacity. These agencies and organizations provide the WASH sector surge and response capacity when national capacity cannot cope.

Strategic development and coordination: The ability of the WASH sector to make the most of the combined potential of agencies and INGOs depends a great deal on work being commissioned on behalf of the collective and shared. Strategic development is still too piecemeal, progresses too slowly and does not provide a bridge between humanitarian and development work.

Quality control and monitoring: Achieving and maintaining WASH programming of a sufficient quality remains elusive. The sector is hindered by an ongoing debate about how even to define quality, given that each emergency context is unique. And the continued tendency to establish detailed, fixed agreements in acute crises also has a negative impact on quality.

Security and access: Loss of access due to the increase in conflicts, and the changing nature of conflict, threatens the WASH sector response. Protracted conflicts usually involve both immediate, direct suffering and fatalities as a result of attacks, and also reverberating effects such as deprivation and displacement, and indirect suffering due to the cumulative deterioration of basic services, lack of access to make repairs, and reduced life expectancy and livelihoods.

Logistics and aid bureaucracy: WASH operations often involve the moving of equipment, teams and consumables into areas that lack infrastructure and where access is difficult. Humanitarian WASH response logistics can be complicated, risky and expensive as a result.

Insufficient and inflexible funding: Based on analysis of United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) Financial Tracking Service data, "since 2009, less than 4 per cent of all reported funding registered … has been dedicated to the humanitarian WASH response."[12]

Change agenda

To build a WASH sector that can consistently and predictably provide high-quality water and sanitation services in large-scale emergencies, humanitarian organizations and WASH actors are called upon to make the following strategic and operational changes:

- Reposition WASH as a core sector for survival and protection.

- Quality WASH responses should be timely and efficient and reach the most inaccessible and difficult places.

- Prioritize preparedness and surge at all levels for WASH – and keep it simple.

- Funding should be timely, flexible and bridge the gap between humanitarian response and development financing.

- Build synergies between acute humanitarian situations, protracted conflict contexts and development.

Road map

By 2025, the WASH sector will have the capacity and resources to deliver in emergencies at scale, anywhere and at any time.

This is the vision of the road map based on these five recommendations. The road map not only identifies how to implement the change agenda, but it also serves as a declaration of intent by the entire humanitarian WASH community. By pursuing the road map, the WASH sector can together deliver a predictable, quality humanitarian response, even in the most difficult contexts, at the time it is most needed.

Axis 1: The humanitarian WASH response is life-saving and is driven by public and environmental health outcomes

We will embed humanitarian WASH as an integral part of public and environmental health priorities, while maintaining a life-saving mandate and mainstreaming cross-cutting themes. We will:

- roll out and document the systematic use of epidemiological and environmental data to target emergency responses by the WASH sector[13]

- create a protocol for the systematic design and documentation of humanitarian WASH responses based on the health outcomes

- develop agreements reinforcing and outlining the linkages between WASH and health outcomes in emergencies[14]

- expand the capacity of the sector to systematically tackle environmental health risks and impact.

Axis 2: The humanitarian WASH response consistently meets agreed accountability systems and the highest quality standards

We will shape the capacity of the WASH sector to deliver accountability and high-quality responses in emergencies, while maintaining public and environmental health as core objectives. We will:

- develop and roll out a system to mainstream quality assurance and accountability in all humanitarian WASH responses[15]

- establish a framework to support the mainstreaming of safe programming and cross-cutting issues for the humanitarian WASH response

- create a set of operational toolkits and frameworks to support coordination and programming on quality assurance and accountability

- set up a global monitoring system to measure compliance with the roll-out of quality assurance and accountability systems across countries by the global and national coordination mechanisms.[16]

Axis 3: The humanitarian WASH response is predictable and results in sustainable impacts rooted in preparedness and resilience

We will link humanitarian and development WASH programming through new and innovative approaches aimed at overcoming the 'siloed' and 'business-as-usual' approach. We will:

- advocate for engagement by development donors to strengthen a resilient and risk-informed WASH sector (allowing for quick transition)

- explore, expand and develop diverse operational models that support sustainable investments and strategic partnerships to reinforce a resilient, prepared and risk-informed WASH sector

- strengthen engagement and commitment across development and humanitarian WASH by all stakeholders to reinforce a resilient, prepared and risk-informed WASH sector.

Pillar 1: Capacity – The humanitarian WASH response has the right systems, at the right place, at the right time

We will increase humanitarian response capacity in the WASH sector to enable a more predictable, effective and elevated level of quality programming and coordination. We will:

- develop a harmonized, system-wide approach for capacity development in humanitarian WASH[17]

- enhance the capacity of WASH professionals to systematically address and tackle public and environmental health risks as part of humanitarian WASH responses

- consolidate a predictable pool of competent and skilled WASH professionals that can be mobilized to respond in emergencies

- embed surge capacity as a key aspect in preparedness and response planning at global and institutional levels

- strengthen the capacity of national governments to prepare for, lead and coordinate a more predictable, effective and high-quality humanitarian WASH response.

Pillar 2: Coordination and partnership – The humanitarian WASH response is sustained by effective leadership and strategic partnerships

We will establish strategic partnerships and reinforce effective leadership and coordination mechanisms to further enhance the WASH sector's capacity to respond to humanitarian emergencies. We will:

- establish new and enhanced strategic partnerships among diverse stakeholders across the humanitarian–development nexus in fragile contexts

- reinforce coordination mechanisms and information management systems among partners within the WASH sector and with other sectors

- develop operational partnerships at regional and country levels focusing on specific initiatives (i.e., preparedness, Ebola and cholera response)

- elaborate new and enhanced partnerships with academic institutions to support capacity development in operational research and knowledge management.

Pillar 3: Financing – The humanitarian WASH response is supported by innovative, flexible and predictable funding

We will identify and advocate for innovative and alternative funding opportunities and financing mechanisms (including multi-year) to support the WASH sector to respond to emergencies, while reducing risks and vulnerabilities and increasing resilience. We will:

- diversify and increase funding opportunities to attract political commitments and engagement by new and existing donors[18]

- strengthen sector-financing and investments of development WASH stakeholders in humanitarian WASH to reinforce resilience, emergency preparedness, and risk-informed service delivery

- advocate for the establishment of a global fund dedicated to sector-financing and investments for the humanitarian WASH response.

Road map 2020–2025

Vision

By 2025, the WASH sector will have
the capacity and resources to deliver in
emergencies at scale, anywhere and any time

IMPROVED OPERATING METHODS
IN THE HUMANITARIAN WASH SECTOR

Axis 1
The humanitarian WASH response is life-saving and driven by public and environmental health outcomes.

Axis 2
The humanitarian WASH response consistently meets agreed accountability systems and the highest quality standards.

Axis 3
The humanitarian WASH response is predictable and results in sustainable impacts rooted in preparedness and resilience.

Strategic initiatives (axes)
• protocols and systems development • interlinkages with other sectors • knowledge management • thematic capacity building • quality assurance and accountability systems • mainstreaming of safe programming and cross-cutting issues • operational toolkit development • global monitoring system set-up • priorities on resilience and preparedness identified based on risks • engagement of development stakeholders

PREREQUISITE PILLARS FOR A FUNCTIONAL CAPACITY
IN THE HUMANITARIAN WASH SECTOR

Pillar 1
Capacity
The humanitarian WASH response has the right systems, at the right place, at the right time.

Pillar 2
Coordination and partnership
The humanitarian WASH response is sustained by effective leadership and strategic partnerships.

Pillar 3
Financing
The humanitarian WASH response is supported by innovative, flexible and predictable funding.

Strategic initiatives (pillars)
• structural capacity building (international/local actors, service providers) • harmonized, system-wide approach • coordination mechanisms and information management systems • strategic and operational partnerships • sector-financing and investments • dedicated global fund

Source: Global WASH Cluster, *Delivering Humanitarian Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) at Scale, Anywhere and Any Time: Road map for 2020–2025*, GWC, Geneva, 2020.

1. Introduction

Somewhere along the line, "it seems WASH has slipped off the radar for the emergency response for survival."[19]

Emergency water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) responses are too often under-resourced, dependent on underdeveloped water and sanitation systems, and unable to address complex needs. Yet, for communities caught up in crises – and especially children – ensuring rapid access to safe water and sanitation and safe hygiene practices can make the difference between life and death.

In protracted conflicts, children under 15 years of age are nearly three times more likely to die from diarrhoeal disease linked to unsafe water and sanitation than violence directly linked to conflict and war.[20] Around the world, even with global development progress, 1 in every 57 people is affected by crisis and requires urgent humanitarian assistance and protection.[21] More people are being forced from their homes and communities by conflict: In 2014, there were 59.5 million forcibly displaced people globally; by the close of 2019, this number had risen to 79.5 million, "the highest number on record according to available data."[22]

The WASH sector cannot operate a 'business-as-usual' approach and hope to meet the ongoing volume and nature of the humanitarian demand.

The average humanitarian appeal in 2018 lasted nine years, compared with five years in 2014.[23] Large protracted crises, such as those in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia, South Sudan, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen, command the majority of resources. By 2030, more than 80 per cent of the world's poorest people could be living in fragile contexts.[24] Humanitarian needs will remain extremely high and the increasingly complex and protracted nature of crises challenges the traditional way in which WASH actors respond.

In the overcrowded camps for Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, for instance, inappropriate management of faecal sludge demonstrated the need for the sector to reinforce its technical expertise as well as innovation. Experiences in Yemen, meanwhile, have highlighted the need for the WASH sector not only to strengthen its technical capacities, but also to adapt how organizations operate in dangerous and hard-to-reach areas. The sector in general shows a more risk-averse approach

Failure to recognize WASH as a survival sector can lead to a failure to protect the most vulnerable and at risk, including children – whether they face violence and conflict, disaster or other emergencies.

than in the past and an increased reliance on local partners to implement activities in otherwise inaccessible areas.

According to the capacity study that this report summarizes and develops, in many areas in crisis, the humanitarian WASH response is judged critically insufficient.[25] This shortfall can contribute to public health crises, such as outbreaks of cholera, diarrhoeal disease and vector-borne diseases, and high levels of acute malnutrition. The importance of safe hygiene practices in addressing emergent diseases has been underlined by the global response to COVID-19. WASH is a key preventative measure in reducing the spread of the coronavirus and is one of the principal public health recommendations.[26]

Failure to recognize WASH as a survival sector can lead to a failure to protect and assist the most vulnerable and at risk, including children – whether they face violence and conflict, disaster or other emergencies.

2. The capacity gap

The WASH capacity gap manifests as delayed responses, poor coverage of hard-to-reach areas and poor quality in operations.

Delayed responses

Late, irregular or regularly interrupted WASH operations have major consequences for crisis-affected populations. Yet, as with other sectors, deployment in response to a new crisis in a new context is often not fast enough, particularly when it must be done at scale. WASH actors that lack immediately available funds, or which must set up new operations beyond their usual geographical zone, need at least two to three months to become fully operational.

Timeliness of response is even more critical when dealing with epidemic outbreaks where, in order to be most effective, WASH interventions must be put in place *before* the outbreak reaches its peak. Without rebuilding the WASH sector's technical, operational and personnel capacity, this will not happen in difficult contexts and hard-to-reach areas such as Yemen, where cholera was first detected in 2016 and erupted in 2017 (the epidemic is ongoing at the time of writing).

Consultation with a wide range of observers suggests that the overall response to the 2017 epidemic in Yemen was too slow to scale up, unable to keep pace with the rapid escalation of the epidemic, and probably had a limited impact on its overall course. More than 580,000 cases and over 2,000 deaths from cholera were recorded between April 2017 – when the disease erupted – and August that year.[27] WASH Rapid Response Teams, organized by UNICEF and composed of trained national staff, can move faster to implement control measures (e.g., chlorine, hygiene kits, educational materials) in newly identified cholera hot spots. Yemen's epidemic had already peaked, however, by the time the programme reached scale in August 2017.[28]

Poor coverage

There are still too many situations in which vulnerable people's needs are not being met. It is a frequent feature of crisis response that a 'centre–periphery divide' develops, with most agencies and international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) working where the operational context is still relatively easy, and only a few in the hard-to-reach areas. Additionally, those lacking skills in urban WASH may be hesitant to respond in host communities, instead directing support to the rural areas and camp settings they

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are most familiar with. Yet internal displacement increasingly gravitates towards, and takes place within, urban areas in many countries worldwide.[29]

Access constraints frequently lead to limited reach or very uneven coverage of WASH needs. This has been the case in Mali, where there was very little coverage in the far north; in South Sudan, where logistical difficulties are enormous;[30] and during the Haiti earthquake crisis, where only a handful of organizations were able to work in the gang-controlled areas of Martissant and Cité Soleil.[31]

People living near the front lines in Yemen and in the Syrian Arab Republic have been deprived of even minimal access to water as military operations have destroyed water, health and power supply systems and aid actors have been unable to support service providers to restore them. The situation can be even worse in conflict-affected urban contexts, as occurred in Aleppo (Syrian Arab Republic) and Mogadishu (Somalia).[32] And when water trucking is used to increase coverage, this quickly becomes very expensive and can lead to reduced water quality.

The case studies and interviews in the capacity study describe how limited coverage in hard-to-reach areas in the Central African Republic, Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mali, the Niger, South Sudan and Yemen has led to difficulties in controlling disease outbreaks, has reduced population mobility and has increased the incidence of diarrhoeal disease and subsequent high malnutrition rates.[33]

Poor quality

The quality of WASH operations has a direct bearing on the capacity of people to stay in a given place, on public health and on providing a minimum of well-being. Quality goes beyond technical standards – it is also about implementing a people-centred approach that upholds humanitarian principles, accountability and agreed ways of working.

Achieving a high-quality humanitarian WASH response thus involves consistently meeting appropriate standards (given the context), in terms of both processes and outcomes, when providing support; working for, and with, affected populations to deliver services that meet needs and are accepted by the users; and minimizing, and mitigating the impact of, errors that could cause harm. The design of quality WASH programming will consider gender and protection issues, for example, to reduce women's and girls' exposure to gender-based violence when accessing water and sanitation facilities.[34] Poor-quality, or wholly absent, WASH services have both immediate and longer-term effects on health and nutrition and may also have negative impacts on education and inequalities.[35] Quality WASH programming must involve meaningful community participation and critical thinking in design and implementation as much as technical standards and quality technical implementation.[36]

Several key informants to the capacity study underlined the fact that most studies dealing with Humanitarian System-Wide Level 3 Emergencies and protracted crises conclude that it is extremely challenging to achieve a high quality of WASH programming.[37] Respecting minimum standards and monitoring quality in these contexts is very difficult, jeopardizing the quality of WASH programmes.

A joint quality monitoring system has thus far been lacking. Recently, the Global WASH Cluster (GWC) has taken the initiative to develop guidance for National Humanitarian WASH Coordination Platforms to enable them to set up quality assurance and accountability systems.[38] Use of this guidance will help to ensure that WASH responses both meet relevant standards frameworks and realize obligations in regard to accountability to affected populations, gender mainstreaming and vulnerability-based targeting.[39]

"The WASH sector struggles to move out of its comfort zone; assessments and response targets are carried out in easy-to-reach areas where the response can be tailor-made. This creates competition amongst organizations, and results in areas which are highly covered and others where there is no one."

– Humanitarian worker[40]

3. Bottlenecks to building capacity

The emergency response capacity of the WASH sector is constrained by factors including significant human resource issues; security and access; logistics and aid bureaucracy; and insufficient and inflexible funding.

Though considerable effort has been made to improve coordination and, ultimately, service quality and coverage, this has not always been successful. Each of the main bottlenecks to building capacity to deliver a predictable, quality humanitarian WASH response is discussed in turn below.

A series of three case studies from Yemen, Cox's Bazar (Bangladesh) and the Syrian Arab Republic follows. These examples reveal the on-the-ground realities of responding to emergencies in the most difficult contexts – and point to the changes the sector must make to consistently deliver quality WASH responses.

3.1 Human resources and technical skills

Only a handful of United Nations agencies and INGOs, complemented by a number of critically important medium-sized organizations, seem to have the relevant scale, culture and business systems to actively and predictably deliver core WASH capacity. These large and medium-sized agencies and organizations are responsible for providing the WASH sector surge and response capacity in the short and medium term when national capacity is unable to cope.

Core capacity must reflect growth in activity

GWC itself has a Coordination Unit comprising four office-based staff supported by nine Field Support Team members who are deployed as required to assist with humanitarian WASH coordination in country. Since 2010, GWC – through cluster lead agency UNICEF – has trained more than 1,300 individuals in skills required for coordinating humanitarian WASH responses (e.g., leadership, operational and information management skills; cash transfer and market-based programming).

Some of the biggest agencies and INGOs have drastically expanded their WASH programmes, but the limited available data on mid-level and senior staff (who comprise the regional and headquarters surge capacity) suggest that core WASH human resource capacity has not grown to the same extent. It should be noted that to deliver and sustain an emergency WASH programme, human resources will also be drawn from national and local WASH actors, along with the management, logistics and finance staff. It is therefore critically important that WASH actors help to build the capacity of local staff within country offices, but this is not sufficiently addressed in most organizations. There is also a desire to correct the gender imbalance in the sector, and increase diversity and inclusion in all respects, through improved recruitment and talent management.

In the past five years, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has grown its core WASH staff in line with its expanded budgets year on year, while Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) and Save the Children have expanded overall in number – though, in Save the Children's case, not nearly enough to keep pace with its major programme expansion. The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) has a small team in Geneva; its main surge capacity comes from Red Cross/Red Crescent societies with Emergency Response Units (ERUs) and its network of WASH staff members of national societies who can be deployed through regional disaster response teams.

UNICEF has noted that its own internal surge mechanisms are key to the delivery of WASH responses, as evidenced by the training delivered to its own staff – and the staff of its GWC partners – as mentioned above. Similarly, the WASH human resource capacity of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has grown along with the increase in WASH budgets since 2015. The number of support staff located at regional and headquarters levels has, however, decreased during the same time frame. Nearly three quarters of UNHCR WASH staff are located in sub-offices or field offices.

While the International Organization for Migration (IOM) is still relatively new to the sector, it has added three further WASH staff at headquarters level and is deploying more and more people in the field, at the same time as working on systems (i.e., internal roster) to improve surge capacity. ICRC has significantly increased and diversified the profiles of its core staff in order to be better equipped to deal with large-scale urban crises. Lastly, while Action Against Hunger continues to provide surge support through its emergency rosters, it is working to scale up prevention and readiness efforts, including through activities with identified partner organizations.

Establishing a system-wide approach to global and local capacity development will be necessary to ensure that capacity can keep pace with the demands placed upon the sector. The harmonized approach should take into

account the insights gained from the various learning and development opportunities (formal and informal) already open to WASH professionals.[41] Instituting a core curriculum to create a consolidated pathway for learning will provide a means by which to professionalize the WASH sector. The capacity development approach should also promote 'localization' efforts among international, national and local actors, in line with the United Nations commitment "to making humanitarian action as local as possible and as international as necessary."[42]

Local capacity building requires greater investment

Localization is crucial, particularly to support vulnerable children and families in hard-to-reach areas, as previously noted. It also adds value by ensuring a greater likelihood of local procurement of goods and materials and, when combined with training on quality assurance, it can deliver results for both the WASH sector and the local economy.

Although local actors' capacity can vary a great deal – with corresponding consequences for the quality of WASH programmes – they are central to the WASH response and contribute to sustainable and effective results due to their knowledge of the contexts and their access. Thus far, it is felt that there has been insufficient investment by international actors in local capacity building (except in Asia and in countries such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where the decades-long presence of humanitarian WASH workers has made it possible to train many national staff).

While there is very little time for proper training in a rapid-onset disaster context, it should be done more systematically in protracted crisis contexts, as part of efforts to transcend the humanitarian–development divide.[43]

Some promising initiatives have emerged in recent years such as the ongoing development of a Graduate Professional Diploma Programme in Humanitarian WASH at IHE Delft Institute for Water Education – the world's largest international institution for graduate education in the field of water – with the support of UNICEF and the GWC partners. Others include the setting up of the Institut Bioforce regional training centre for Africa in Dakar, Senegal, and the Humanitarian WASH Master's degree at Institut International d'Ingénierie de l'Eau et de l'Environnement (2ie), University of Ougadougou, Burkina Faso, which has produced more than 180 qualified humanitarian WASH

programme managers to date. A comprehensive collaboration between Action Against Hunger and the German Jordanian University in Madaba, Jordan, led to the launch, in October 2020, of a new Humanitarian WASH Master's degree. It is hoped that the MSc programme, which is delivered in English, will fulfil the Middle East region's needs for humanitarian WASH coordinators, as the first project of this nature in the region.[44]

Among other valuable initiatives, GWC developed a detailed Learning and Training Strategy in 2017, and created a series of strategic training packages around leadership, coordination, information management and key technical areas (such as epidemiology for WASH practitioners and market-based programming for WASH in emergencies).[45] All of these packages are available on Agora, the UNICEF global hub for learning and development.[46]

The localization debate must also look beyond non-governmental organizations (NGOs): Local private WASH actors represent another major but largely untapped resource (beyond water trucking operations), while in many conflict-affected middle-income countries, municipal actors are often among the few that know how to manage WASH in the specific technical and socio-economic environment.

Ensuring the right balance for rapid response

On the other hand, full localization would remove global surge capacity, limiting the ability to provide a rapid response to national and regional mechanisms. There is concern within the sector that the localization agenda will be taken too far, too fast. The existing expertise, funding flexibility and business model of certain Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) agencies provides them with a reach that it would take a decade of investment to replicate among local actors.

Agencies such as UNICEF and UNHCR also rely on standby mechanisms, drawing from rosters for their surge capacity, while all agencies and INGOs covered in the capacity study have ad hoc contract staff, for which few data are available.

Experience shows that managing rosters is extremely expensive; unless supported by donors, their use may be unsustainable. Equally, it appears that the quality of the people seconded through either internal or external rosters varies drastically from one deployment to another, and therefore the predictability of the response is not always guaranteed. The result is that the most difficult contexts do

not necessarily have the benefit of the most experienced WASH staff (including coordinators with leadership skills). In addition, high turnover due to short contract lengths (often three to six months) leads to both a 'confidence gap' and a loss of project memory. Quality of response is correspondingly affected.

New challenges demand a broader skill set

Proficiency in both traditional and emerging WASH activities is a key determinant of an agency's or organization's ability to respond in an ever more complex, insecure and urbanized world.

To overcome today's technical challenges, personnel require experience and skills in urban WASH (such as expertise in electromechanics, pipe network design and urban management – not part of the classic humanitarian WASH skill set and sometimes only available via niche rosters); in faecal sludge management; to anticipate and prepare for environmental and technological disasters; to employ new aid delivery methods (cash and vouchers, subcontracting private services, etc.); and to contain vector-borne and emergent diseases. COVID-19 has highlighted the WASH sector's role as a survival sector in responding to emerging public health threats. There is also a growing need for engineering

sciences, hydrogeology and environmental competencies within the humanitarian sector – for example, to prevent cross-aquifer contamination when drilling boreholes, and to correctly site latrines to avoid the contamination of water sources.

Gender, disability, other vulnerabilities and protection concerns must also be actively integrated into responses to ensure that WASH services *leave no one behind*. In large-scale emergencies such as the Rohingya refugee crisis in Bangladesh, where all sectors must step up to provide services to a huge new caseload, the situation for vulnerable groups can remain unsatisfactory for a long time; the challenges of providing latrine facilities that worked for adolescent girls and women, for example, were highlighted in the evaluation of the UNICEF response from August 2017 to April 2018.[47] Skills in social and behaviour change communication and in sociology need to be more readily available to the WASH sector.

Donors and other humanitarian stakeholders today expect a more comprehensive response from the WASH sector, which affects actors' capacity to focus on the core WASH response. The increased demands on teams and on their wider organizations typically revolve around accountability and reporting as well as the cross-cutting issues to be addressed simultaneously during WASH operations.

3.2 Strategic development and coordination

The ability of the WASH sector to work collectively and make the most of the combined potential of agencies and INGOs depends a great deal on work being commissioned on behalf of the collective and shared. Strategic development is still too piecemeal, progresses too slowly and does not provide a bridge between humanitarian and development work.

Coherent sector strategies are key

The financial and technical capacity to produce baselines, carry out needs assessments and develop sector strategies (including for hard-to-reach areas) needs to be further explored. UNICEF – as cluster lead agency – and its GWC partners are fully aware of this problem and are currently examining ways to address it so that the humanitarian WASH response in any country can be based on a coherent, agreed strategy rather than on the sum of individual organizations' plans.

There also needs to be a mechanism for the predictable development of intermediate (two to five years) strategic master planning that sits within the wider camp/settlement/ urban environment spatial planning process and which includes all built environment aspects. The scale of the Rohingya refugee camps in Bangladesh and the sheer number of actors involved meant that, early in the response, a number of strategic and technical studies were undertaken at the same time – but these were not always commissioned on behalf of the collective WASH sector and made available to it.

More effective coordination in all contexts

Many of the coordination challenges that affect the WASH sector are similar to those encountered in other sectors. The critical importance of WASH to the survival and well-being of affected people makes the quality of WASH coordination even more essential, however – both for WASH as a sector in its own right and as an essential component of health-centred multisectoral coordination. Effective coordination enhances gap-filling, timeliness and coverage, and is one of a number of factors that can improve disease control and quality of life in human settlements, contributing to life-saving and basic dignity.

INGOs involved in WASH typically sit under either the UNICEF-led GWC or the UNHCR-led refugee coordination model – except ICRC and MSF. To a great extent, these IASC mechanisms operate independently of development

mechanisms, although new avenues are being explored by GWC and Sanitation and Water for All in line with the 'new way of working' first launched at the World Humanitarian Summit 2016.

In various contexts, WASH cluster coordination platforms are unable to fully carry out all six of the core functions of clusters and UNICEF cannot always take on the role of 'provider of last resort'.[48] There are a number of reasons for this: significant human resource gaps due to the difficulty of recruiting experienced staff for coordination and information management, especially in difficult contexts; the reliance on short-term contracts for cluster coordinators, which does not allow sufficient time to build and sustain coordination mechanisms; dual responsibilities (involving emergency response responsibilities) making the role of cluster coordinator very complicated; and insufficient training of co-lead agencies in the cluster coordination role. Put simply, we are asking too much of cluster and sector coordinators given the resources available to them.

Emergency preparedness as a fundamental pillar to build capacity

National governments have the primary responsibility both to prepare and coordinate emergency responses in the WASH sector, and to ensure a well-coordinated, strategic, adequate, coherent and effective response to a humanitarian crisis occurring in country.[49] In 2016, the largest donors and humanitarian organizations reaffirmed their commitments, within the framework of the Grand Bargain initiative, to better localize humanitarian coordination and to strengthen the role of national and local government and civil society actors in leading, coordinating, implementing and monitoring the humanitarian WASH response.

In fragile states, the capacity of government to strategically plan the development of the WASH sector is limited. UNICEF has developed the WASH Bottleneck Analysis Tool (WASH-BAT) to support governments to structure the dialogue in the sector and better diagnose and solve the key challenges it faces. The principal user of the tool is expected to be line ministries responsible for WASH services. The application of the tool is expected to be a collaborative effort that stimulates dialogue and solution building, involving a range of sector stakeholders and external partners. The tool provides a rational, evidence-based approach for formulating an investment strategy that meets multiple sector aims of efficiency, equity and sustainability.

WASH-BAT has been implemented in Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Haiti, Iraq, Liberia, Pakistan, Somalia, the State of Palestine, the Syrian Arab Republic and Zimbabwe since 2016.[50] In 2019, UNICEF and GWC adapted the tool to reinforce the capacity of national governments to prepare and coordinate emergency responses in the WASH sector.

For a detailed discussion of how WASH sector resilience can be strengthened across the humanitarian–development divide, see *Water Under Fire Volume 1: Emergencies, development and peace in fragile and conflict-affected contexts*. Section 5 examines the new ways of working needed to better connect emergency preparedness and response with sustainable development programmes, based on a set of internationally agreed WASH sector 'building blocks'.[51]

Maximizing impact through multisectoral linkages

WASH is increasingly seen as a central pillar of public health in high-density areas (camps, slums, fragile settlements in densely populated urban areas) or in places where a high level of cleanliness is essential (public health institutions, hospitals). And there is now a greater understanding of the relationships between environmental conditions, health and nutrition.

In Yemen, there has been joint operational coordination between health and WASH, while health–WASH–nutrition working groups have been set up in many other countries. WASH programming to support the establishment and functioning of health institutions is central to the work of the MSF Water and Sanitation and ICRC Water and Habitat teams – though by no means their sole focus – as seen in the Central African Republic and South Sudan.[52] WASH activities and public health works are the two main pillars of outbreak control and epidemic management, as seen in action in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Yemen, for example.

The issue of WASH in public health does not always receive sufficient attention, however. In addition, WASH is often underused as a way to reduce the spread of disease, though it should actually be seen as the cornerstone of disease control (especially for deadly waterborne and vector-borne diseases). While there is limited evidence of the positive impact of WASH services on nutrition outcomes,

observational data often find a link between WASH factors and chronic malnutrition such as stunting, with a growing body of evidence supporting links with acute malnutrition.[53]

Improved multisectoral coordination will help to maximize the positive impact – and avoid negative effects – of WASH activities on health, nutrition, education, protection and standards of living. But proper information sharing between the health and WASH sectors is frequently missing.

In the Rohingya refugee camps in Bangladesh, for example, there is inadequate sharing of health and nutrition data with the WASH sector and joint analysis is lacking, in part because of a non-alignment of geospatial catchment areas between the sectors. In some cases, WASH actors fail to take the initiative to request the data required to inform strategic decision-making. This is exacerbated by the fact that there is a lack of clarity around the roles and responsibilities of the main actors involved in humanitarian response.[54] In all camps for displaced persons, there is a need to coordinate WASH with shelter and camp coordination and camp management (CCCM); the Sphere Handbook 2018 guidelines point to the importance of involving WASH actors in camp layout design.[55] For actors involved in WASH in urban areas and host communities, data can typically be acquired through local water and sanitation service providers.[56] Coordinating closely with the education sector is crucial too: children are known to be effective agents of hygiene behaviour change.[57]

Introducing some conceptual prioritization based on strong epidemiological evidence could help the WASH sector to make the tough decisions that must always be made about where to focus efforts in an emergency response.

3.3 Quality control and monitoring

Achieving and maintaining WASH programming of a sufficient quality remains elusive. Not only is the sector hindered by an ongoing debate about how even to define quality in humanitarian settings, given that each emergency context is unique and that predefined approaches/standards are inappropriate. But the continued tendency to establish detailed, fixed agreements in the midst of acute crises – as opposed to more flexible outline/in principle agreements – also has a negative impact on quality.

It is hoped that the Quality Assurance and Accountability Initiative, an initiative led by GWC, and the Humanitarian Action Review – a mechanism to review WASH responses

in countries, mobilized by UNICEF – will offer useful pathways towards improving programme quality.[58]

The Quality Assurance and Accountability Initiative aims to support countries to set up quality assurance and accountability systems that enable quality and accountability in humanitarian WASH responses to be managed effectively at the sector level in country, and allow GWC to monitor quality performance across countries (*see Figure 1*). Humanitarian Action Reviews aim to support the WASH sector in country to collectively identify, and focus on, the main issues related to the humanitarian WASH response and facilitate a discussion on how best to take good practices to scale and overcome any constraints.

Similarly, there is an unresolved tension between adopting pre-agreed universal protocols (i.e., standard operating procedures or standardized designs) and the default tendency to reinvent WASH interventions on the spot because of the implied uniqueness of each situation. Unfortunately, this tendency combines with the sector pattern of staff churn to result in delays in response, variations in quality and an inability to consistently convey to national partners, contractors and others what is expected.

Anecdotal evidence from some key interviewees suggests that other sectors have stricter/more refined standard operating procedures, enabling them to be more certain about expected ways of doing work. For example, medical protocols and malnutrition treatment procedures are well established and widely disseminated. These are based on human biology, however, while WASH solutions are dependent on less predictable factors: the environment and context.

Monitoring quality, and having the means to highlight inadequate quality, remains a challenge for the WASH sector (as it does for other sectors). While the humanitarian system as a whole has made some incremental progress in improving monitoring, inherent difficulties still exist, including the lack of integration of parallel donor and humanitarian organization systems, insufficient collaboration with governments, and the requirements of longer-term monitoring of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The SDG framework, with its aims to leave no one behind and to include people affected by crisis, provides scope for humanitarian monitoring efforts to be framed as a subset of the SDGs and so feed into the SDG process. But the focus on quantity is a distraction that diverts attention away

from quality and outcomes. Equally, while the Humanitarian Response Plans sometimes examine outcomes, this approach is sidelined by Who does What, Where, When and for Whom (5W) reporting, which tends to focus on activity level, without considering whether adequate quality has been achieved.

The key questions are therefore whether the WASH sector monitors the most relevant aspects to determine quality and whether the WASH sector has the required expertise and capacity to do so.
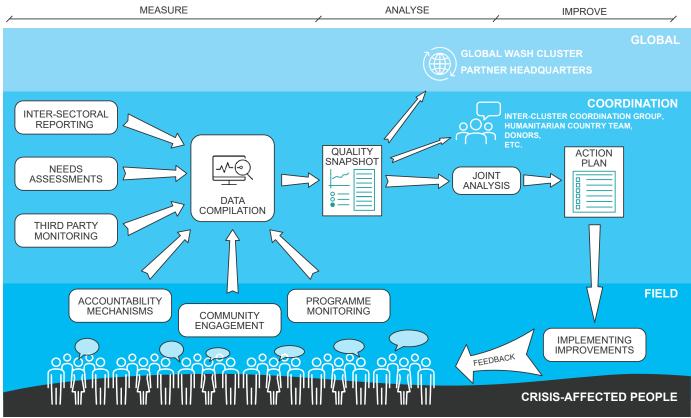
3.4 Security and access

Loss of access due to the increase in conflicts, and the changing nature of conflict, threatens the WASH sector response. The nature of crises is evolving, with protracted conflicts characterized by longevity, intractability and immutability. Protracted conflicts usually involve both immediate, direct suffering and fatalities as a result of attacks – including attacks on water and sanitation infrastructure – and also reverberating effects. The latter include deprivation and displacement, and indirect suffering due to the cumulative deterioration of basic services, lack of access to repair broken or damaged infrastructure, and reduced life expectancy and livelihoods.

Violations of international humanitarian law and instances of non-respect for the Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability are on the rise, which also has an impact on the safety of humanitarian workers and water and sanitation service provider personnel.[59] In some contexts, such as Yemen, a specific mechanism has been established to notify parties to conflict of the location of civilian objects that fulfil a humanitarian function, and critical civilian infrastructure; and movements of humanitarian personnel and supplies. Humanitarian notifications can, however, also create additional risks and, as a result, organizations tend to limit their mobility. Conflict has resulted in significant direct damage to WASH infrastructure (e.g., in Lebanon, the State of Palestine and Yemen) and accelerates the deterioration of networks and services, as maintenance and repairs are interrupted or even halted.[60]

Figure 1. Information flow of quality assurance and accountability systems

Source: Global WASH Cluster.

Another important development is the increasing number of parties involved in each conflict, as seen in the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Mali.[61] Asymmetric warfare and violent acts have resulted in a sharp reduction in access by WASH actors to territories and their populations due to a deterioration in the security situation, although some agencies and organizations – ICRC and MSF in particular – have managed to negotiate access with armed groups and continue operations in some of these difficult contexts (Central African Republic, Mali, South Sudan). Most others are absent or act through local actors and remote management mechanisms.[62]

Many interviewees described their experience of significantly reduced risk-taking by organizations, which considerably limits WASH operations and effectiveness. Some key informants, however, described how local actors in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mali and Yemen were prepared to take the risk of working in difficult areas on behalf of international actors. And yet there continues to be insufficient investment in building local actors' technical and organizational capacity.

There are notable exceptions, however, such as the local capacity-building efforts by ICRC in the Syrian Arab Republic. Since the outbreak of conflict in 2011, local service providers have faced huge challenges in restoring or simply stabilizing

damaged and deteriorating water supply infrastructure, with systems in many areas at risk of collapse. As WASH needs quickly exceeded the collective humanitarian response, ICRC sought to draw on local capacity to react in the most sustainable way. In 2012, ICRC began to support – with significant financial resources and the input of skilled personnel – the institutional development of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC), which was committed to establishing a Water and Sanitation (WatSan) department.

As of 2020, ICRC provides support to cover the cost of 15 WatSan offices, 5 warehouses and 52 vehicles, plus uniforms and tools. It has also helped SARC to set up systems to manage WatSan human resources, finances and fleet. An ICRC-designed training programme on WASH in emergencies has developed the capacity of over 1,500 SARC volunteers since 2013. Volunteers can now carry out tasks ranging from basic WASH assessments of local community water needs and assembly of bladder stands to water trucking programme planning. When the need for technical engineering expertise in SARC became evident, ICRC supported it to recruit over 100 Syrian engineers and 150 to 200 technical volunteers (mostly young engineering graduates). While ICRC and many other humanitarian actors do not always have direct access to every part of the Syrian Arab Republic, these front-line responders have been present in all 14 governorates since 2014.

"**Many local actors in DRC [the Democratic Republic of the Congo] can and are often willing to take the risk of going to hard-to-reach areas on behalf of international actors but we do not necessarily receive enough investment in our capacity building – technical and organizational.**"

– Local NGO representative[63]

Even where security is not an immediate concern, the poor physical condition of roads and tracks can severely limit access to affected populations for some or all of the year. Responding in remote areas requires more funds and may not necessarily meet the 'beneficiary-to-cost' ratio pushed by donors. In some situations, sending WASH equipment and deploying teams by air may be possible – albeit at considerable expense – to ensure an operational presence.

Travel and access by humanitarian actors is also being restricted by some governments. Several countries in Asia, the Middle East and Africa have established limits on the entry of (new) organizations and/or international surge staff. Indonesia, for example, did so following the 2018 Sulawesi earthquake and tsunami, but the trend began some years ago in Rwanda, the Sudan and Ethiopia. It is less of a concern where organizations have an in-country presence.

Government restrictions can hinder WASH deployment when new humanitarian crises take place in fragile and turbulent countries. In Yemen, bureaucratic control over the granting of visas and travel permits remains a significant hindrance to humanitarian operations, as seen during the recent cholera outbreaks. Sanctions in some countries may also limit the import of spare parts for essential water and sanitation infrastructure repairs. Developing proper outbreak management operations is very difficult when access to areas of concern is hampered by lengthy, and often unsuccessful, travel authorization processes. In South Sudan, where humanitarian aid is seen as a potential

source of revenue, the government has set increasingly high fees on many administrative transactions (e.g., work permits), which can also be time-consuming. Such steps can, however, help to reduce the mass arrival of actors – sometimes referred to as the 'humanitarian circus'.

3.5 Logistics and aid bureaucracy

More so than in other sectors, WASH operations often involve the moving of equipment, teams and consumables into areas that lack infrastructure and where access is difficult. Humanitarian WASH response logistics in low-income countries, rural areas and camp settings can be complicated, risky and expensive as a result. Responses in urban areas of middle-income countries face a different set of challenges. For example, the repair of complex infrastructure may call for the import of customized parts, necessitating technical input to the procurement process and involving lengthy manufacturing lead times.

The interviews and case studies for the capacity study underlined the difficulty of moving WASH equipment and valuable commodities by road. Air transportation is sometimes possible but very expensive. Local markets can provide some items, but only when the enabling conditions are met,[64] and purchasing quality spare parts or equipment will likely lead to an increase in prices, making them less affordable for local people. Importing the required goods is therefore the fallback position, but delays in procurement, customs procedures and dispatch are often significant, paralysing field operations. In the longer term, the time and financial costs related to importing equipment and spare parts pose sustainability challenges to the operation and maintenance of WASH services. This is why building or strengthening the resilience of local markets has increasingly become a central element of WASH strategies.

Where setbacks of any sort have sometimes prevented equipment from being delivered in good time prior to the rainy season, this has led to further delays and complications in WASH operations and, on occasion, greater expense.

For example, WASH activities as part of the UNHCR response to the Sudanese refugee emergency in South Sudan in 2012 were hampered by floods in the rainy season. Unable to move a vital drilling rig by road, it had to be "eventually airlifted at a very high cost and with great logistical difficulty."[65] And while ICRC was able to put in place 14km of pipeline despite the rains, other organizations struggled to deliver a

timely WASH response due to lack of capacity.[66] Despite such lessons, actors involved in the response continued to experience difficulties accessing funding in time to pre-position supplies prior to the next rainy season.[67] In South Sudan, 60 per cent of roads are out of action during this season – which lasts for five months.[68] The humanitarian WASH response has continued to encounter similar rain delays since, in Burkina Faso, the Central African Republic, north-east Nigeria and the Sudan, among other contexts.[69]

Aid bureaucracy also has an impact on operational efficiency, according to interviewees. The humanitarian system has evolved from a simple, three-layer delivery system, comprising donor, agency and beneficiaries, to much more complex systems involving numerous intermediaries – whether consortia, INGOs, NGOs, local actors (including local authorities and water and sanitation service providers) and/or private sector actors. Every organization at each level must set up its own system of financial management, monitoring and reporting, affecting how much money is left over to fund direct operations.

In WASH operations, this means that the cost of a single latrine varies significantly depending on the agencies and organizations involved and their aggregate support costs. While higher management costs may be incurred, channelling funds through a cascade of intermediaries can reduce donors' own transaction costs and achieve economies of scale, particularly in contexts where WASH programmes are well structured.

This was the case in Mali in 2013, where the majority of the required funding for the WASH cluster response was for six priority projects: one led by UNICEF requiring just over $19 million, and five projects led by other partners requiring just under $12 million in total.[70] The amount requested by UNICEF was budgeted to cover multiple initiatives from partners coordinated by the WASH cluster in Mali. Providing these funds to a single agency – UNICEF, in charge of WASH cluster coordination – allowed for a coherent response, with substantial cost savings realized. These savings were possible as WASH cluster partners' resources were mutualized; interventions were carefully planned and monitored under a unified framework, avoiding/mitigating risks of duplication, and contributing to improved response efficiency; and, notably, supply needs were estimated jointly by the WASH cluster partners and purchased/transported by UNICEF (through UNICEF Supply Division in Copenhagen and UNICEF supply teams in Mali and in neighbouring countries such as the Niger, to also cover the needs of communities close to the Mali–Niger border).

This was also the case to some extent in post-earthquake Haiti, where in the early months of the response, UNICEF had the capacity to cover all water trucking operations in Port-au-Prince for several million US dollars. Elsewhere, the added value for donors may be offset by agencies' relatively high management costs, leading some donors to report that they are considering limiting how many intermediaries they work with.

Increased running costs are adversely affecting the efficiency of WASH programmes and of humanitarian programmes in general. Some costs are the result of external issues, such as security management, while others stem from enacting system-wide policies, such as the zero-tolerance approach to fraud and sexual exploitation. Cumbersome and time-consuming processes, including those related to coordination, can also cause inefficiencies in the WASH sector. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, many actors have observed a decrease in effectiveness when United Nations agencies lead the coordination of the Rapid Response Mechanism; this seems to be significantly more efficient in the Central African Republic, however, where the Rapid Response Mechanism involves two sectors only (WASH and non-food items) – fewer than in other contexts.[71]

Adjusting to rapidly changing circumstances is extremely challenging but often necessary in hard-to-reach, complex and often dangerous contexts. But donor conditions and organizations' internal procedures seem to have hampered agility in the humanitarian sector in general. Moving away from operations described in the logical framework is discouraged by managers out of fear of incurring 'ineligible costs' that the donor may refuse to pay for. Only agencies and INGOs with sufficient means to cover such expenses can afford to stray from the pre-agreed programme.

Agility and adaptive management tools have emerged in recent years to help more organizations manage programmes in unpredictable, fast-moving contexts. The Rapid Response Mechanism is one such tool used by the WASH sector, in conjunction with other sectors.

3.6 Insufficient and inflexible funding

Since 2010, the WASH sector has been among the less well-funded sectors in terms of humanitarian aid, consistently achieving just under 50 per cent of its response plan/appeal funding requirements annually.[72] Moreover, "since 2009,
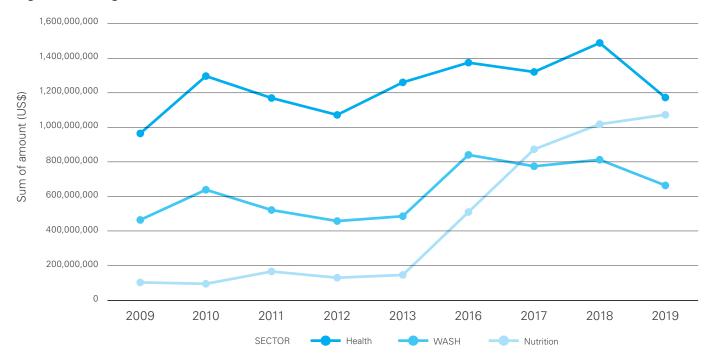
Figure 2. Funding trends for humanitarian health, nutrition and WASH sectors, 2009–2019

Note: *2014 and 2015 are excluded because of unusually high levels of funding directed to the health sector for the Ebola response. **Source**: Global WASH Cluster analysis of data from the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) Financial Tracking Service, as cited in: Global WASH Cluster, *Delivering Humanitarian Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) at Scale, Anywhere and Any Time: Road map for 2020–2025*, GWC, Geneva, 2020.

less than 4 per cent of all reported funding registered in the humanitarian Financial Tracking Service (FTS) has been dedicated to the humanitarian WASH response."[73]

The relative stagnation of funding for the WASH sector suggests it has "slipped off the radar" as a survival sector.[74] GWC data also show that investment in humanitarian WASH has remained relatively flat from 2009 to 2019, compared with funding for health and nutrition (*see Figure 2*). Yet, without access to safe water and sanitation, disease proliferates, nutrition suffers, protection concerns such as vulnerability to sexual violence may increase, and life itself is at risk.

All sectors face significant funding shortages against appeals targets, though to what extent depends on location, crisis type and phase. Globally, the WASH sector is regularly faced with insufficient funding, despite its critical importance as a survival sector. Over the five-year period 2015–2019, less than 45 per cent of annual WASH sector funding requirements have been covered. Some WASH funding has been channelled through other sectors such as health, for example, as part of the Ebola response in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and also contributes to multisectoral funding.

Humanitarian funding has become focused on fewer countries over recent years. *The State of the Humanitarian System* 2018 report indicates that in both 2015 and 2016 just 10 countries shared 60 per cent of the total humanitarian funding and that long-term crises continued to receive the vast majority of funding.[75] Though the funding available for humanitarian operations significantly increased in the Middle East (Iraq, Syrian Arab Republic, Yemen), the proportion of humanitarian assistance directed to countries in sub-Saharan Africa dramatically decreased.[76] In these situations, it is difficult to ensure basic predictability and to maintain the capacity to respond quickly to events taking place in parallel to the main crises. Furthermore, this gravely affects the impartiality of humanitarian action, which should take a strictly needs-based approach.

Lack of funding of the WASH sector (and sometimes conditions imposed by donors) not only affects preparedness and capacity for humanitarian response – the funding shortfall also has implications for progress towards the SDGs for water and sanitation.

According to the United Nations Water (UN-Water) Global Analysis and Assessment of Sanitation and Drinking-Water (GLAAS) 2019 report, led by the World Health Organization:

"The cost to reach SDG Targets 6.1 and 6.2 has been estimated at US$ 114 billion per year, with capital investment needs alone three times higher than current investment levels (1). New quantitative data from countries responding to the GLAAS 2018/2019 survey confirm that available financing is insufficient to meet national targets for WASH."[77]

The quality of funding is also crucial. There is great demand, among both the large agencies and INGOs and the smaller WASH NGOs interviewed for the capacity study, for unearmarked funding that enables more flexible programming choices and risk management. Key informants report that emergency funding modalities are not always relevant to the delivery of strategic responses by the WASH sector, particularly in protracted crisis contexts such as the Central African Republic and South Sudan. It remains difficult to reallocate budget lines when the situation on the ground changes. The short duration of contracts and the insufficient flexibility of funding are other significant problems.
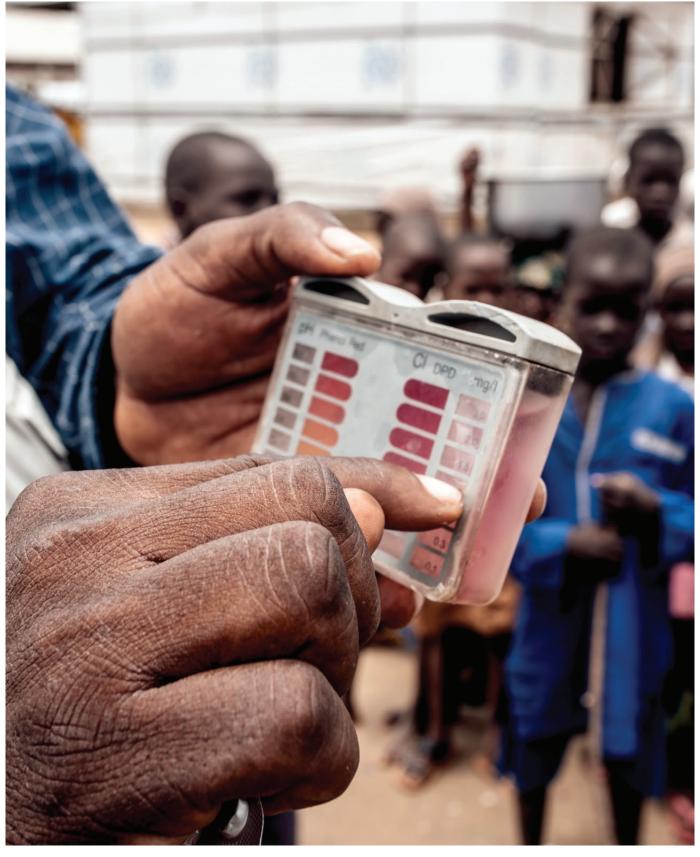
Although more and more agencies and INGOs are trying to develop rapidly available financial reserves, only a limited number can mobilize sufficient resources to make a difference in the field. IFRC, with its Disaster Relief Emergency Fund; ICRC, with its significant unearmarked funds; MSF, with its rapid mobilization capacity; and UNICEF, with its own internal mechanisms, have a significant comparative advantage over most organizations, which must write and submit proposals and await donor responses. Three key informants described the Cyclone Idai response (in Malawi, Mozambique and Zimbabwe) in which the majority of WASH actors had to wait for external funding. All WASH actors that can be relied upon to deliver a predictable response should have access to their own emergency funds.

Globally, funding flows over the past five years show a certain level of consistency, though they involve cumbersome procedures and delays. Many actors report, however, that the lack of multi-year funding agreements or opportunities reduces the predictability of schedules and the sustainability of WASH responses.

Humanitarian appeals are typically made on an annual basis and most humanitarian funds cover a time frame of less than one year. This short-term approach is most damaging to resilience strengthening efforts during protracted crises, as it leads to insufficient time frames to either lessen the impacts of disasters or to strengthen the

Globally, funding flows over the past five years show a certain level of consistency, though they involve cumbersome procedures and delays. Many actors report, however, that the lack of multi-year funding agreements or opportunities reduces the predictability of schedules and the sustainability of WASH responses.

capacity for an effective humanitarian response should a disaster overwhelm both the emergency preparedness and prevention measures.[78] Grand Bargain commitments by donors and aid organizations to direct 25 per cent of global humanitarian funding to national and local responders by 2020, together with more unearmarked funds, and to boost multi-year funding for greater predictability and continuity in humanitarian response are a positive way forward.[79]

Case study
Prioritizing critical needs and capacity for a more effective response in Yemen[80]

A recent bottleneck analysis revealed that the WASH humanitarian response in Yemen could be more effective.
As well as prioritizing the most critical needs, WASH partners must ensure the right capacity in the right place to provide a predictable, quality response.

Yemen represents a protracted emergency with multiple crises, resulting in an estimated 4 million internally displaced persons (as at December 2019).[81] Its population is affected by conflict and continued displacement, cholera/acute watery diarrhoea (AWD) and malnutrition, natural disaster and water scarcity. As at May 2020, 24.3 million people in Yemen are in need, with 20.4 million people lacking sufficient access to WASH.[82]

During 2019, more than 357,200 children under 5 with severe acute malnutrition and nearly 861,000 cases of AWD/suspected cholera were treated.[83] Only 56 per cent of cholera hot spots had an established WASH response as at May 2019. Time frames to deliver emergency response were slow and, in many cases, meeting minimum standards took more than three months. Just 4 per cent of sites for internally displaced persons met minimum basic standards for WASH and only 20 per cent of such sites had any WASH response.

And yet Yemen is not an underfunded emergency, and a huge number of WASH partners (72 as at July 2019) are active in country (as defined by GWC criteria). A bottleneck analysis on capacity to deliver emergency WASH response, conducted in 2019 by the Yemen WASH Cluster across WASH humanitarian organizations operating in Yemen, revealed weaknesses in the quality and effectiveness of the response. The bottleneck analysis and stakeholder consultation together highlighted a number of key challenges affecting the WASH sector's capacity to provide a quality response to emergencies.

Yemen

Greater depth for a sharper focus

The tendency in Yemen to focus on targeting through a WASH infrastructure lens risks losing sight of beneficiary targeting and potentially overlooks the identification of vulnerabilities and risks. Using a contractor approach, without engaging with communities, puts at risk the ownership and acceptance of WASH solutions by the very people they seek to help. Switching to a people-centred approach to emergency response, focusing on vulnerabilities and risks, would serve to prioritize the most critical needs.

Programmes typically have significant geographical coverage, but this can compromise the quality, depth and comprehensiveness of programming for impact. Programming must be rationalized and prioritized among organizations geographically to allow the programmes to go deeper for improved quality and sustained impact. To offer a comprehensive and sustainable WASH response that follows public health approaches and focuses on reductions in WASH-related diseases, there is a need to understand the community and the context. WASH partners must also break down silos and integrate programmes with health, nutrition, education and other sectors to have a greater impact.

Stronger staffing and collaboration

Appropriate management and supervision in the field is very weak in Yemen, affecting decision-making ability. Putting the right capacity in the right place means having the decision-making and troubleshooting capacity at field level, rather than largely based in the capital city, Sana'a. Without this capacity in the field, there is a huge gap in ensuring quality control and on-site monitoring, and a reduced ability to be adaptive and to find solutions.

Due to the operational complexities, field staff are often overwhelmed, and despite strong technical capacities may have limited experience in humanitarian programming, restricting their ability to rapidly adapt and identify solutions. Capacity mapping also revealed the need for further skills development on public health approaches, inclusive WASH (gender, age, protection, disability) and urban WASH.

The humanitarian space in Yemen is shrinking. On top of operational and access constraints due to security, which constrict safe access to deliver programmes, obtaining the required approvals and 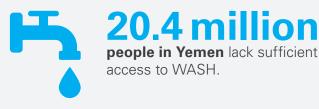permits for travel and programming is increasingly complex, serving to entrench power dynamics and reduce the timeliness of a response. There is also a risk that WASH partners, in the face of increasing risk aversion and desperate to implement their programmes, may be forced to compromise on certain humanitarian principles, which may affect the relevance, inclusivity and impact of a response. For example, it may be a security requirement that humanitarian personnel are accompanied by armed vehicles. At other times, INGOs rely on local NGOs to access zones deemed too dangerous for expatriates, with the effect that national personnel are exposed to risks that international personnel are unwilling to take, and quality monitoring is limited.

Openness to improvements

Though it is more than four years into Yemen's cholera crisis, and over five years since the start of the new conflict in 2015, the WASH sector still faces multiple challenges to meet minimum emergency standards in a timely manner. There are huge time delays in responding to outbreaks, increasing the risk of the spread of disease. For instance, at the start of 2019, when suspected cholera cases peaked rapidly, the WASH response – beyond the Rapid Response Teams – took several months to mobilize to the necessary scale.

WASH partners in Yemen are very willing to make changes to improve quality, however, and have been doing so since July 2019. To avoid an over-reliance on emergency resources, flexible and predictable emergency response modalities have been built into WASH programming, including for internally displaced persons and for cholera response. There is an increased field presence and simplified checklists are in use to monitor quality. The biggest obstacles now are the bureaucratic and security-related access restrictions imposed by the authorities.

Change is needed on a large scale, and it will be important for all actors, both humanitarian and development, to work together in a complementary and coordinated way. While such change cannot happen overnight, the process has begun, and the commitment to change among senior management and the WASH sector as a whole means that the new modalities are improving the emergency response.

20.4 million **people in Yemen** lack sufficient access to WASH.

Case study
Limited preparedness and surge capacity at the onset of the Rohingya crisis[84]

At the onset of the crisis, WASH partners in Bangladesh had limited preparedness and capacity to scale up to the magnitude of the 2017 influx of Rohingya refugees to Cox's Bazar. This resulted in unforeseen technological challenges, environmental impacts and delays in response.

The Rohingya refugee crisis of 2017 brought 730,000 new refugees to Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, by the end of 2018, swelling the existing refugee population of about 200,000. This placed huge pressure on the land, forest and water resources, and created challenges for the 40+ WASH partners and the humanitarian sector as a whole. Dedicated funding for the WASH sector response to the crisis in 2018 was considerably less than needed, with only $36.6 million of the $136.7 million WASH appeal met (26.8 per cent coverage) – though 71.4 per cent coverage of the $950.8 million Joint Response Plan was achieved overall.[85]

Necessary skills in short supply

An immediate but long-term response was required to meet the needs of the almost 1 million people (400,000 of them children) living in 27 camps across 6,000 acres. Such congested conditions called for an urban approach to WASH, in particular to meet the complex waste removal requirements. Technological options for WASH programming were limited, a problem that was compounded by the very challenging terrain with its many areas of unstable ground and high water tables. The required technical skills were in short supply among the limited surge capacity.

Though an extensive network of WASH services has since been created, the challenges in planning and construction – and the widely neglected problem of faecal sludge management – meant that a trial-and-error approach was necessary. In particular, multiple faecal sludge designs were trialled (with the support of academia and private operators). But their environmental impact was not always tested

Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh

Technological options for WASH programming were limited, a problem that was compounded by the very challenging terrain with its many areas of unstable ground and high water tables. The required technical skills were in short supply among the limited surge capacity.

thoroughly enough given the scale of the displacement and the nature of the settlement because of the urgent need to deal with the faecal sludge. A first draft of the water supply master plan was put forward in June 2018, following a period of mass extraction/delivery. Thousands of suction pumps were haphazardly installed in the initial months of the response, often by actors outside of the coordination mechanism, with no comprehensive understanding of the groundwater system.

Partners' limited capacity for hygiene promotion in emergencies meant that this aspect was largely overlooked in favour of a focus on hardware. Accountability to affected populations, gender-specific consultations, and complaints and feedback mechanisms were almost completely lacking at the start of the emergency and for many months into the response.

A better-informed response

Institutional reference to the previous influxes of refugees to the same area in 1978, 1991–1992 and 2016 was largely lacking – for example, with respect to latrine designs, faecal sludge management, and community engagement on operation and maintenance. This represents a missed opportunity to follow trends and predict what works for large-scale and long-term displacements in similar contexts.

Overcoming challenges regarding the pre-positioning of supplies and skills would have helped to deliver a more predictable, quality response. There is also a need to ensure compliance with international technical standards

(e.g., Sphere Standards) and national standards to ensure ongoing service quality. Various contextualized standards enabled WASH partners to deal with challenges on the ground, but the use of multiple standards hinders service quality monitoring and accountability.

Advocacy and government engagement were not fully supported due to the complex coordination architecture in Bangladesh, in which a cluster system was used at the capital level with little or no interaction with the sector system used in Cox's Bazar. The initial months of the response saw partners working in silos and planting more flags and visibility in a bid to gain operational space. The area-based (mid-level) coordination and partner rationalization was adopted to ensure that accountability for geographical areas was shared between partners.

Similarly, greater consultation with the refugee and host communities could have ensured that accountability to affected populations, gender-based violence in emergencies, inclusion and other cross-cutting issues were prioritized from the outset.

1 million
people living in 27 camps
across 6,000 acres.

$36.6 million
of the $136.7 million
WASH appeal was met
(only 26.8 per cent coverage).

Case study
How more flexible funding and stronger synergies could improve the Syrian response[86]

In the Syrian Arab Republic, more timely and flexible funding would increase the capacity of the WASH sector to respond effectively to ongoing large displacements. Closer links between humanitarian and development work could lead to safer, sustainable services.

The war in the Syrian Arab Republic is now in its tenth year, with military activity ongoing at the time of writing. Conflict has led to major loss of life, massive and multiple displacements, and extensive destruction of infrastructure. Numerous international and national NGOs and private partners are involved in the Whole of Syria response, with operations originating from inside and outside of the country.

As at June 2019, the population of the Syrian Arab Republic is 20 million, including 6 million internally displaced persons, with an additional 6 million Syrian refugees hosted in neighbouring countries. Of the 15.5 million people in need of better WASH services, 6.2 million are in acute need of WASH services. The $35 million in WASH funding received by mid-2019 was only 12 per cent of the $277 million requested in the 2019 Humanitarian Response Plan to meet these considerable needs.[87]

Impacts of the funding gap and conditions

This WASH funding gap limits the sector's capacity to timeously and adequately respond to large displacements, as was recently the case with the sudden influx of more than 63,000 people to the al-Hol displacement camp from December 2018 to end March 2019, taking the camp's population to over 73,000.[88]

Donor conditions related to a highly politicized and complex environment may in some circumstances hinder access to timely funding. There is huge pressure from donors to target interventions at more vulnerable groups, driving the creation of vulnerability maps and scales – a good practice,

Syrian Arab Republic

Lack of strategic thinking has led to investments in unsustainable and low-quality solutions as well as poor linkages between emergency response and early transition towards recovery/stabilization. The value of the water trucking market in the Syrian Arab Republic was roughly estimated at $145 million in 2018.

but one that currently cannot consider the dynamic situation on the ground. Also, if the military control of a certain area changes, donors may no longer be willing to provide the funding – although the needs remain the same or may even have increased. It is thus problematic to ensure a minimum level of services, as well as their continuity, in areas subject to change of control (e.g., the south and north-east).

Security, access and approval processes are complex in the Syrian Arab Republic, further reducing WASH partners' ability to deliver a timely response.

Multi-year funding for sustainable solutions

Before the war, the Syrian Arab Republic had extensive water and sanitation infrastructure, with piped water for 98 per cent of the population in 2010. In 2018, up to 55 per cent of Syrians were forced to supplement water received from the network with, or fully rely on, alternative, and often unsafe, water sources to meet their needs due to the destruction and lack of maintenance of infrastructure.

Lack of strategic thinking has led to investments in unsustainable and low-quality solutions as well as poor linkages between emergency response and early transition towards recovery/stabilization. The value of the water trucking market in the Syrian Arab Republic was roughly estimated at $145 million in 2018. This money could be invested in more sustainable and safer means of service delivery – if multi-year funding is made (more) available.

Water distribution (and related systems) needs to be at the centre of future reconciliation processes between the communities. If not managed properly, it will become the origin of new conflicts in the Syrian Arab Republic.

15.5 million
people are in need of better WASH services.

98 per cent
of the population had piped water in 2010, before the war.

4. Change agenda

The change agenda that follows was endorsed almost without reservation by the emergency directors who attended the 24th Global WASH Cluster meeting on the 'Capacity of the WASH Sector'.

4.1 Endorsement of change agenda recommendations

In June 2019, more than 120 WASH sector experts and 15 emergency directors from the world's most active organizations engaged in emergency WASH convened in Geneva. The objective was to develop a set of concrete and actionable recommendations based on the capacity study sponsored by GWC and the Inter-Agency WASH Group.

The five recommendations developed during the meeting were presented to the emergency directors by senior WASH advisers from ICRC, IFRC, the International Rescue Committee (IRC), MSF and UNHCR. The emergency directors – representing United Nations agencies, INGOs and Red Cross and Red Crescent societies as well as donors and other observers – were then invited to discuss the recommendations and to endorse them as a progressive way forward, which they did.

A road map has subsequently been developed based on the meeting outputs (*see section 5*). This elaborates how the WASH sector can collectively realize the five recommendations, which are set out overleaf.

The five recommendations developed during the meeting were presented to the emergency directors, who were invited to endorse them as a progressive way forward, which they did.

Change agenda

4.2 Change agenda: Improving WASH sector capacity to deal with humanitarian situations

Keeping the water flowing in turbulent times calls for a more predictable WASH response. Humanitarian organizations and WASH actors are called upon to make the following strategic and operational changes to build a WASH sector that can consistently and predictably provide high-quality water and sanitation services in large-scale emergencies.

To provide comprehensive and life-saving services, while proactively working to safeguard public health, the WASH sector must build technical, operational and personnel capacity to address increasingly complex and protracted crises. The sector must improve and reach out to more children and families by increasing both its coverage and the quality of services.

Reposition WASH as a core sector for survival and protection.

To get our fundamentals right:

- while it is integral that the WASH sector ensures that human rights, protection, safety and dignity, accountability and inclusion, and gender equality are mainstreaming into all responses, the **WASH response must be prioritized using a public health risk-based approach** (considering epidemiological data)

- we must consistently advocate internally and externally at the global and national levels for **better linkages between the health, nutrition, shelter and other sectors and the WASH sector**.

Quality WASH responses should be timely and efficient and reach the most inaccessible and difficult places.

To get our capacity right:

- **in humanitarian organizations**, we must expand and strengthen core WASH technical, managerial and coordination capacity; invest in establishing rapid deployment capacity, maintaining or expanding generic and flexible surge WASH teams; and expand WASH rosters (including with the private sector) to ensure a minimum level of predictable global WASH response

- **across the WASH sector**, we must launch capacity-building initiatives to reliably and predictably strengthen leadership and coordination, decision-making, strategic planning and WASH services, especially in challenging contexts; and further develop the capacity of WASH coordination mechanisms to rapidly support operations in difficult environments.

WASH responses are predictable and effective when robust protocols are in place. Prioritize preparedness and surge at all levels for WASH – and keep it simple.

To prioritize preparedness and surge capacity, we must:

- systematically develop and test **risk-based preparedness/contingency plans** (wherever possible aligned with government plans) and surge capacity

- **foster strategic partnerships** with local organizations and the private sector

- constantly advocate to **mobilize funding for preparedness** from governments and donors.

The predictability of the WASH response depends on the timeliness and flexibility of financial resources. Funding should bridge the gap between humanitarian response and development financing.

To get our funding right, we must:

- continue to advocate to receive **multi-year funding** for humanitarian WASH response and coordination as well as **larger sums** and **more flexible funding** from donor agencies, requesting that they no longer distinguish between funding for humanitarian response and development in fragile contexts, and ensuring that key preparedness actions are financed during times of peace

- continue to advocate for more **unearmarked funding**, to allow the WASH sector to allocate resources in a neutral, impartial and independent manner

- work on **new financing models** for humanitarian WASH response, enabling the development of a phasing approach to address sustainability and quality concerns

- in partnership with financial development institutions and global development platforms, hold a **global pledging conference** on emergency WASH funding (linked to the SDGs and funding mechanisms for fragile contexts, and to attract and recommit new and existing donors and partners to humanitarian WASH response).

Build synergies between acute humanitarian situations, protracted conflict contexts and development.

To initiate a paradigm shift in the WASH sector's way of working, we must:

- **strengthen partnerships**, by encouraging dialogue between the WASH humanitarian and development global coordination platforms (e.g., GWC and Sanitation and Water for All) and boost the development of humanitarian, development and private sector alliances

- **adopt common frameworks for WASH sector development** that can be applied equally to humanitarian and development contexts, when formulating preparedness response plans, conducting assessments or planning responses, to ensure both humanitarian and development key actors are engaged

- **ensure a sustainable impact from the beginning, and ensure that we reduce the risk of negative effects** (environmental, social and economic).

5. A road map for 2020–2025

By 2025, the WASH sector will have the capacity and resources to deliver in emergencies at scale, anywhere and at any time.

This is the vision of *Delivering Humanitarian Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) at Scale, Anywhere and Any Time: Road map for 2020–2025*. The road map was developed by GWC and the Inter-Agency WASH Group, with input from various partner agencies, in response to the outputs of the 24th Global WASH Cluster meeting.[89]

Released in July 2020, the road map not only identifies how to implement the strategic and operational recommendations of the change agenda, but it also serves as a declaration of intent by the entire humanitarian WASH community. In doing so, it provides the WASH sector with clear direction and impetus to rebuild its capacity to respond to emergencies.

The three axes of the road map are supported by the three pillars of capacity, coordination and partnership, and financing (*see Figure 3*). A condensed description of these six road map elements is set out overleaf.[90]

The road map is underpinned by the expectation that the four fundamentals that guide humanitarian action to save lives, alleviate suffering and preserve human dignity are firmly in place.[91] Humanitarian WASH responses must encompass the principles of human rights, protection, safety and dignity, accountability and inclusion, and gender equality. And the sector must build upon global frameworks such as the Agenda for Humanity, and strategic partnerships that span the humanitarian–development nexus, to support a swift transition from emergency life-saving interventions to continued progress towards achieving the SDGs. Climate change adaptation is a critical focus, and emergency solutions should be environmentally sound, sustainable and address resilience to climate change.

By pursuing the road map, the WASH sector can together deliver a predictable, quality humanitarian response, even in the most difficult contexts, at the time it is most needed.

> **Humanitarian WASH responses must encompass the principles of human rights, protection, safety and dignity, accountability and inclusion, and gender equality. And the sector must build upon global frameworks such as the Agenda for Humanity, and strategic partnerships that span the humanitarian–development nexus, to support a swift transition from emergency life-saving interventions to continued progress towards achieving the SDGs.**

Road map

Axis 1: The humanitarian WASH response is life-saving and is driven by public and environmental health outcomes

We will embed humanitarian WASH as an integral part of public and environmental health priorities, while maintaining a life-saving mandate and mainstreaming cross-cutting themes. We will:

- roll out and document the systematic use of epidemiological and environmental data, as available, as a driver to target emergency responses by the WASH sector[92]

- create a protocol for the systematic design and documentation of humanitarian WASH responses based on the health outcomes, including the impact on lives saved and the reduction of the burden of disease

- develop agreements reinforcing and outlining the linkages between WASH and health outcomes in emergencies[93]

- expand the capacity of the sector to systematically tackle environmental health risks and impact, including the hierarchical linkages between WASH interventions, public health outcomes and environmental health interventions.

Axis 2: The humanitarian WASH response consistently meets agreed accountability systems and the highest quality standards

We will shape the capacity of the WASH sector to deliver accountability and high-quality responses in emergencies, while maintaining public and environmental health as core objectives. We will:

- develop and roll out a system to mainstream quality assurance and accountability in all humanitarian WASH responses with national governments and local actors, based on core humanitarian standards[94]

- establish a framework to support the mainstreaming of safe programming and cross-cutting issues for the humanitarian WASH response, while maintaining public and environmental health as core objectives

- create a set of operational toolkits and frameworks to support coordination and programming on quality assurance and accountability

- set up a global monitoring system to measure compliance with the roll-out of quality assurance and accountability systems across countries by the global and national coordination mechanisms, including dissemination through an online dashboard.[95]

Axis 3: The humanitarian WASH response is predictable and results in sustainable impacts rooted in preparedness and resilience

We will link humanitarian and development WASH programming through new and innovative approaches aimed at overcoming the 'siloed' and 'business-as-usual' approach. We will:

- advocate for engagement by development donors to strengthen a resilient and risk-informed WASH sector (allowing for quick transition and linking humanitarian response and development)

- explore, expand and develop diverse operational models that support sustainable investments and strategic partnerships to reinforce a resilient, prepared and risk-informed WASH sector

- strengthen engagement and commitment across development and humanitarian WASH by all stakeholders to reinforce a resilient, prepared and risk-informed WASH sector.

Pillar 1: Capacity – The humanitarian WASH response has the right systems, at the right place, at the right time

We will increase humanitarian response capacity in the WASH sector to enable a more predictable, effective and elevated level of quality programming and coordination. We will:

- develop a harmonized, system-wide approach for capacity development in humanitarian WASH (i.e., WASH severity index, quality assurance and accountability system, competency framework, consolidation of tools and guidance)[96]

- proactively enhance the capacity of WASH professionals to lead on and systematically address and tackle public and environmental health risks as part of humanitarian WASH responses

- consolidate a predictable pool of competent and skilled WASH professionals that can be mobilized to respond in emergencies (i.e., surge, talent pools, rosters)

- embed surge capacity as a key aspect in preparedness and response planning at global and institutional levels (including with national governments, local actors and service providers)

- strengthen the capacity of national governments to prepare for, lead and coordinate a more predictable, effective and high-quality humanitarian WASH response.

Pillar 2: Coordination and partnership – The humanitarian WASH response is sustained by effective leadership and strategic partnerships

We will establish strategic partnerships and reinforce effective leadership and coordination mechanisms to further enhance the WASH sector's capacity to respond to humanitarian emergencies. We will:

- establish new and enhanced strategic partnerships among diverse stakeholders across the humanitarian–development nexus in fragile contexts, as a priority

- reinforce coordination mechanisms and information management systems among partners within the WASH sector and with other sectors

- develop operational partnerships at regional and country levels focusing on specific initiatives (i.e., preparedness, Ebola and cholera response as priorities)

- elaborate new and enhanced partnerships with academic institutions to support capacity development in operational research and knowledge management.

Pillar 3: Financing – The humanitarian WASH response is supported by innovative, flexible and predictable funding

We will identify and advocate for innovative and alternative funding opportunities and financing mechanisms (including multi-year) to support the WASH sector to respond to emergencies, while reducing risks and vulnerabilities and increasing resilience. We will:

- diversify and increase funding opportunities to attract political commitments and engagement by new and existing donors for the humanitarian WASH response[97]

- strengthen sector-financing and investments of development WASH stakeholders (including the private sector) in humanitarian WASH to reinforce resilience, emergency preparedness, and risk-informed WASH service delivery

- advocate for the establishment of a global fund dedicated to sector-financing and investments for the humanitarian WASH response (e.g., organizing a global pledging event).

Figure 3. Road map 2020–2025

Vision

By 2025, the WASH sector will have the capacity and resources to deliver in emergencies at scale, anywhere and any time

IMPROVED OPERATING METHODS IN THE HUMANITARIAN WASH SECTOR

Axis 1

The humanitarian WASH response is life-saving and driven by public and environmental health outcomes.

Axis 2

The humanitarian WASH response consistently meets agreed accountability systems and the highest quality standards.

Axis 3

The humanitarian WASH response is predictable and results in sustainable impacts rooted in preparedness and resilience.

Strategic initiatives (axes)
• protocols and systems development • interlinkages with other sectors • knowledge management • thematic capacity building • quality assurance and accountability systems • mainstreaming of safe programming and cross-cutting issues • operational toolkit development • global monitoring system set-up • priorities on resilience and preparedness identified based on risks • engagement of development stakeholders

PREREQUISITE PILLARS FOR A FUNCTIONAL CAPACITY IN THE HUMANITARIAN WASH SECTOR

Pillar 1
Capacity

The humanitarian WASH response has the right systems, at the right place, at the right time.

Pillar 2
Coordination and partnership

The humanitarian WASH response is sustained by effective leadership and strategic partnerships.

Pillar 3
Financing

The humanitarian WASH response is supported by innovative, flexible and predictable funding.

Strategic initiatives (pillars)
• structural capacity building (international/local actors, service providers) • harmonized, system-wide approach • coordination mechanisms and information management systems • strategic and operational partnerships • sector-financing and investments • dedicated global fund

Source: Global WASH Cluster, *Delivering Humanitarian Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) at Scale, Anywhere and Any Time: Road map for 2020–2025*, GWC, Geneva, 2020.

6. Conclusion: Keeping the water flowing in turbulent times

Ensuring rapid access to safe water and sanitation is a fundamental aspect of life-saving humanitarian response. But the WASH sector has struggled to meet the humanitarian WASH needs of children and communities wherever and whenever emergencies arise.

As crises become increasingly protracted and complex, the WASH sector simply cannot carry on as usual. Humanitarian needs will remain extremely high, and operating in dangerous and hard-to-reach areas could feasibly become even more challenging. Yet, already the humanitarian WASH response is deemed critically inadequate in many crisis-hit areas. The WASH capacity gap has major consequences for the survival, health and well-being of communities caught up in crisis – especially for children and other vulnerable groups.

It is time to close the gap.

Drawing on the in-depth capacity study, this report has identified the main bottlenecks to building the capacity of the WASH sector to respond to emergencies. It has described the on-the-ground realities of working to provide access to safe water and sanitation in some of the most difficult contexts anywhere. And it has set out what must be done to resolve the technical, operational and personnel issues that so often stand in the way of delivering a predictable, quality humanitarian WASH response.

The change agenda outlines strategic and operational recommendations for rebuilding capacity, and the road map provides a clear route to their implementation. The WASH sector's collective pursuit of the road map, which had a soft launch prior to its July 2020 release, has already begun. There is no time to lose. In communities caught up in crises, access to safe water and sanitation and safe hygiene practices can make the difference between life and death. Together we can keep the water flowing in turbulent times.

The WASH capacity gap has major consequences for the survival, health and well-being of communities caught up in crisis – especially for children and other vulnerable groups.

Endnotes

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14 This includes joint initiatives such as the one by the Global Health Cluster and GWC on cholera.

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16 Discussions around the set-up of certification systems for quality assurance and accountability systems in the WASH sector are taking place among donors. The scope of this goes beyond the WASH sector, however. The set-up of such certification systems should be addressed systematically for all of the humanitarian sectors and applied at agency/organization level.

17 This includes the consolidation of tools and guidance, use of competency frameworks and talent and people management approaches, and support for the setting up of quality assurance and accountability systems.

18 This includes documentation of a series of case studies that generates evidence for innovative and alternative funding and financing opportunities and mechanisms for sector-financing and investments for the humanitarian WASH response.

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95 Discussions around the set-up of certification systems for quality assurance and accountability systems in the WASH sector are taking place among donors. The scope of this goes beyond the WASH sector, however. The set-up of such certification systems should be addressed systematically for all of the humanitarian sectors and applied at agency/organization level.

96 This includes the consolidation of tools and guidance, use of competency frameworks and talent and people management approaches, and support for the setting up of quality assurance and accountability systems.

97 This includes documentation of a series of case studies that generates evidence for innovative and alternative funding and financing opportunities and mechanisms for sector-financing and investments for the humanitarian WASH response.

Inside back cover: Marina Mbiya, 13, washes her hands at the Mama Mwilu Health Center, Kananga, Kasai-Occidental province, Democratic Republic of the Congo. As of 31 October 2018, UNICEF had provided basic WASH services to more than 828,000 people affected by conflict and natural disasters and responded to the unprecedented cholera and Ebola outbreaks by providing WASH response packages to nearly 2.4 million people in Ebola-prone zones.

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