IS THERE A WASH CAPACITY GAP?

Unless there is adequate provision of safe drinking water and good sanitation, populations affected by conflict or disaster will suffer significantly. The WASH sector is still struggling to do the basics: providing clean water and sanitation in contexts of mass displacement or when people do not have access to WASH services. It is not in a position to meet the many challenges ahead. With the connection between WASH, accelerated urbanisation, new epidemic dynamics, climate change, accelerated demographic pressure and technological risk, people will have to pay a high price if WASH responses are insufficient. The concept of “Survival WASH” is based on this analysis.

This study is based on more than 160 interviews (1/4 at HQ level, ¾ in the field), more than 100 reports, articles and evaluations, 6 case studies (Yemen, Mali, DRC, South Sudan, Myanmar, CAR) and a web-based survey. The following initial findings, conclusions and recommendations have been prepared for discussion and further refinement. If several factors affect emergency response overall (insecurity, difficult logistics and unbalanced funding, bureaucracy and staff, etc.), these common weaknesses on the WASH sector can have a significant impact on affected populations in view of the centrality of WASH for basic survival and public health. Several findings are however specific to the WASH sector and require a dedicated approach.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Summary of the Key Recommendations</th>
<th>Timing</th>
<th>Target Audience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Survival WASH</td>
<td>Redefine and implement WASH as a public health priority and advocate in favour of the concept of survival WASH at the global and national levels.</td>
<td>Medium term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working in insecure contexts</td>
<td>Change agency attitudes to risk management.</td>
<td>Medium term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donor engagement</td>
<td>Engage donor leadership to establish prominence of WASH.</td>
<td>Short term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surge capacity</td>
<td>Maintain/expand core global capacity to surge and sustain responses. Improve proactive availability and agile use of resources. Strengthen core WASH capacity for rapid and sustained deployment. Develop planning capacity to deal with post-acute phase. Enhance and consolidate the level of preparedness. Create a dedicated fast-reacting pool fund for survival WASH.</td>
<td>Short to medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coordination and coherence</td>
<td>Reinforce the capacity of GWC to be more predictable. Core WASH agencies should work with greater determination to strengthen WASH programme coherence and effectiveness.</td>
<td>Short term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ready for the future</td>
<td>WASH agencies need to be prepared for many new challenges and have to expand agency capacity to undertake the full range of WASH response mechanisms that may be necessary.</td>
<td>Medium to long term</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
MAKING THE WASH SECTOR FIT FOR PURPOSE: INITIAL FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Survival WASH

The increasingly high expectations that the aid system should be able to simultaneously address multiple issues, such as the humanitarian-development nexus, coordinating with all sectors and addressing many different types of vulnerability, is making it harder for the WASH sector (and other survival sectors) to retain their survival focus when the situation dictates. In an environment where every concern and all human rights are hotly contested, there are no objective and agreed ways to moderate this predictably. The WASH sector needs to focus on its core survival/public health mandate when there is clear epidemiological evidence that this is required and programme more closely/jointly with the Health/Nutrition sectors in outbreak (ref GTFCC) or outbreak prevention mode to achieve this. However, in other humanitarian situations, where acute public health risks are lower, it needs to prioritise working with a wider range of sectors in a service delivery/facilitation mode, such as with the Shelter/ Settlements sectors to enable recovery/ returns, and supporting education, dignity and improving protection and quality of life, particularly for women.

Recommendations:

N°1: Redefine and implement WASH as a public health priority: Redefine WASH prioritisation based on knowledge of epidemiological risks and patterns and, where available, on real-time data. Three types of response are possible: i) an outbreak focus, ii) a public health focus, or iii) a service enabling focus. The Health and Nutrition sectors will be at the heart of outbreak and public health responses. Regular and timely data exchange protocols are required at the global and national levels between the WASH, Health and Nutrition sectors.

N°2: Advocate/communicate at the global and national levels in favour of the concept of ‘survival WASH’: Evidence-based advocacy should take place within the humanitarian system and more widely. Other WASH benefits such as protection, dignity, quality of life, education, and livelihoods (agriculture and pastoralism) should also be measured and communicated.

2. Risk management

The WASH sector requires a significant and dispersed presence on the ground and so is particularly exposed to insecurity and fraud. By restricting/ limiting programmes to mitigate the risk of incidents, humanitarian organisations reduce access to WASH services. Many WASH sector Directors and some Emergency Directors feel that there is overzealous risk management (in relation to risks of insecurity, fraud, etc…) thus reducing the ability to respond effectively in the most challenging environments. This impacts the survival sectors more than others. In insecure areas, there is an ethical dilemma between staff safety and the risks faced by those affected by crisis. This can inadvertently lead to greater agency inaction and the transfer of risk to those most in need.

Recommendations:

N°3: Agencies should change their attitude to risk management. Large and medium-sized agencies that have the commitment, scale and reach to work in the most demanding environments should review their risk management policies to ensure that the risks to staff are balanced against the risks to the population. Given the importance of local partners, risks and responsibilities should be shared between partners and funding organisations. Agencies working in these environments should work with donors, the media and others to mitigate the effects of a public backlash due to negotiations with specific belligerents or if any security incidents take place.
3. Donor funding

WASH is not the only sector where international funding is insufficient in relation to appeals, but the percentage going to the WASH sector has been falling in the last 5 years, despite rising needs. In many crises, significant numbers of people (millions of people) do not have adequate WASH services, and this has repercussions on other sectors. It is essential to increase the financial capacity of the sector to ensure that it is predictable, responsive and agile.

Recommendations:

N°4. Establish donor leadership to promote the prominence of WASH alongside other survival sectors. With the support of the GWC Donor Consultative Group, donors should convene a high-level working group, with a donor champion for WASH, to establish the equal importance of WASH alongside other survival sectors. More specifically, donors should find a way to reduce the gap in funding between the different survival sectors, rather than continue to allow WASH (and shelter) to consistently lag behind. Donors should work with the SDG 6 leadership and key UN assembly members to ensure that both national and international bodies give priority to WASH, particularly for long term/chronic crisis.

N°5: Enhance proactive availability and agile use of financial resources. Strengthen and accelerate ongoing reforms in line with the recommendations of the Good Humanitarian Donorship Initiative (GHDI) and with the findings of many evaluations, to ensure rapid and flexible funding systems are used by donors to support the immediate response.

N°6: Create a dedicated rapid reaction pooled fund for survival WASH operations, this WASH CERF like fund would support prequalified organisations who have demonstrated their capacity to operate very quickly in different difficult contexts.

4. Human resources

WASH staffing levels have significantly lagged behind increases in programme spending over the last 7-8 years. Agencies such as UNICEF and ICRC have kept pace with programme expansion, while others have not grown or not grown fast enough to meet their expanded programming. Moreover, this relative reduction in capacity has taken place at a time when demands upon all staff to programme more comprehensively are increasing. External surge mechanisms do exist but cannot cope with the growing demand. The following recommendations aim to ensure that there are predictable human resources so that the WASH sector is able to deal with increased and changing needs.

Recommendations:

N°7: Further develop technical capacities and the capacity to deal with new challenges: Expand the range of key WASH staff able to manage the full range of delivery mechanisms for WASH programming. Expand the range of specialists and/or WASH staff who can respond to new technical challenges among which faecal sludge mechanisms, work in urban areas, solid waste management, emerging global environmental disease threats, risks of highly toxic pollution resulting from disasters or conflicts in industrial settings. This will mean revising standards, which can be done at the agency level and more globally, for the sector at large, by linking with the research sector.

N°8: Strengthen core WASH capacity for rapid and sustained deployment: In order to maintain and bolster it's global capacity to surge and sustain responses, agencies have to redevelop their internal and predictable surge capacity. Across the key agencies that face a shortfall in the staff to programme ratio, expand the number of senior and mid-level WASH staff to meet the needs for both acute and chronic
programming, including both health promoters as well as engineers. Each agency needs to find their own ways to ensure they have HR policies with fast-track recruitment mechanisms, training strategies for career pathways and strategies to retain surge staff and staff able to work in difficult roles and countries. In addition, the difficulties seen in existing collective rosters (IARRM surge, MSB, DRC, NorCap, SDC, etc.) need to be further analysed, so that measures can be taken to remedy the HR shortfall, so that the WASH sector expands and is made as reactive as possible. This could involve innovative partnerships with national institutions and the private sector.

5. Preparedness

Coordination and programme capacity within key IASC agencies to surge and sustain responses in the most challenging situations is still required to complement national capacity development and deployment. Yet this has clearly been insufficient in some of the most difficult environments looked at. WASH needs to expand its global capacity to surge and sustain responses as it is not keeping up with increased funding, let alone demands. There are only a handful of large agencies and some medium-sized agencies that have the required capacity, organisational culture and business systems to constitute the necessary core capacity. However, it is important that the agencies that are currently well positioned to fulfil this role have a ‘no regrets’ policy and do not assume that others will carry this burden.

Recommendations:

N°9 Maintain/expand core global capacity to surge and sustain response across a number of key WASH agencies as the backbone of a predictable global WASH response. Draw this capacity from the larger and medium-sized WASH agencies across all 3 IASC humanitarian pillars (i.e. UN, Red Cross/Crescent Movement, INGOs) for the coming 5 years+. This must be supported by expanding dedicated financial reserves with the capacity to mobilise more internal funding before donors provide emergency funding.

N°10: Preparedness requires further strengthening because it is inconsistently implemented. There are clearly some systemic blockages, including limited anticipation capacity, low priority given to preparedness when the focus is mainly on response, and cumbersome recruitment and procurement procedures.

N°11: Reinforce the capacity of the GWC to reliably and predictably strengthen leadership, decision making, strategic planning and support services in challenging contexts. Further develop the capacity of coordination mechanisms to rapidly support operations in difficult environments: Invest in establishing rapid deployment capacity of coordination staff, tested for the quality of their leadership, in order to facilitate collective direction setting, enhanced sectoral fund raising and the capacity to plan holistically to support multi-disciplinary interventions.

6. Protracted crises and the humanitarian-development nexus

Today, crises tend to last longer and post-conflict situations are always uncertain. The fact that these situations affect large numbers of people living in high risk environments for extended periods of time puts all sectors, including WASH, under pressure. The capacity to surge, remain engaged and deliver in these difficult situations is often very challenging. In addition, WASH infrastructure that is put in place often rapidly becomes idle. When the population starts to recover or the situation stabilises, there is a recognised gap between emergency and development (the nexus) across all sectors. The ability of the WASH sector to bridge the gap between relief and development is severely limited. This is further hampered by different humanitarian coordination modalities led by different UN agencies, rivalries and
ANALYSIS OF THE CAPACITY OF THE WASH SECTOR

constant churn of staff across key agencies.

The WASH sector needs to have a more holistic / integrated approach and avoid a siloed approach among organizations leading the sector. Currently, water in emergency situations are “lead” by different organizations (UNICEF in terms water related to public health, FAO for water and irrigation, UNESCO/UNEP in some context for the underground water) undermining the possibility to develop integrated strategies. Greater efforts need to be made to ensure that WASH actors evaluate their impact on the environment and implement the adequate corrective measures.

Recommendations:

N°12: There is a need to build bridges between acute humanitarian situations, protracted contexts and development. Develop a new capacity to develop intermediate (2-4 years) master plans at the sector level that is able to coordinate with other sectors and to strengthen the humanitarian-development nexus. This is likely to be based upon internationally recognised high-level consultants in order to transcend the limitations of UN agency mandates, and have enough clout to be acceptable to national Governments and development banks.

N°13: Core WASH agencies work with greater determination to strengthen WASH programme coherence and effectiveness. This could be done through a global compact to determine and adopt pre-agreed universal protocols/approaches/SOPs, that would help not only to respond better in the acute phase of the crisis, but also adapt to its evolution and towards the post crisis situation.

N°14: There is a need to build bridges between the different actors involved in water management which include water for irrigation / animals. In addition WASH actors need to ensure environmental impact assessments are carried in a more systematic way to minimise the impact of their interventions on the environment.

7. Global WASH leadership to look beyond the horizon

The ability of the Global WASH sector to direct and adapt WASH programme policy at the country level based upon good practice remains limited. Programme delivery mechanisms are diversifying more into cash/ use of contractors/ working with municipal authorities and the private sector, beyond the traditional mechanisms of direct service delivery or working through local partners which were more dominant 10 years ago. This requires a broader skill set and agency capacity. Global initiatives related to peer review, standards and quality, conducted under the lead of the WASH Cluster, may be making incremental progress but are not transformational. The global WASH sector should seek management and donor support to direct and adapt WASH programme more assertively.

Recommendations:

N°15: WASH agencies need to equip themselves to deal with upcoming challenges and work in new areas with a complete range of mechanisms to respond to an ever-changing, complex and urbanised world, where water scarcity will be a growing threat to security and increasingly high levels of pollution, including toxic waste, will be a constant threat to basic survival. Expand agency capacity to undertake the full range of WASH response mechanisms to deliver high quality WASH programmes. This will also mean that the sector as a whole will need to explore many new areas and will need to work in close collaboration with research bodies.