

EXECUTIVE BRIEF

Formative Evaluation of the UNICEF WASH regional and country programming strategies in the East Asia and Pacific Islands Region 2014-2017/8

This independent formative evaluation shows that UNICEF's presence and contribution in the WASH Sector is highly valued and relevant across a diverse region. Programming is adapting towards more 'upstream' work, but UNICEF faces significant knowledge management and organisational challenges in developing modalities to deliver sustainable change and meet the 'safely managed' indicators of Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 6.1 and 6.2. UNICEF will need to review its approach to partnerships and build on promising examples of 'pilot to scale' interventions.

Introduction and background

UNICEF's East Asia and the Pacific Islands (EAP) region is composed of countries¹ that host about half of the global population, and around 580 million children.² Countries in the region have experienced significant accelerated economic growth in the last two decades and significant falls in poverty.

WASH service provision is on an upward trend and most governments in the region have improved their financial, technical and human capacities to deliver water supply, sanitation and hygiene (WASH). The population using basic drinking water facilities has increased from 78 per cent to 94 per cent between 2000-2017 and more than 83% of the population now use basic sanitation.³

These averages mask significant differences across and within countries. Regional variations and disparities still persist, with 8/14 countries reporting high levels of open defecation and unsafe drinking water.⁴ The impact of poor access to safe and sustainable WASH contributes to high child mortality, under-nutrition and stunting with large disparities between urban and rural households.

The main outstanding challenges in the region are inequities in service provision, sustainability and the need to move from basic to safely managed services.

The East Asia and Pacific Islands Region is one of the most disaster-prone regions of the world. The increased impact of natural hazards and emergencies,

exacerbated through climate change, make the challenge of addressing them complex and resource intensive. In addition, countries and regions within them face challenges of conflict and fragility.

UNICEF is a central actor within the region with WASH programmes in 12 of the 14 countries where it has offices.⁵ It also plays a key role as lead of the WASH cluster in emergency situations and supporting the transition between emergency needs and sustainable long-term programming.

Evaluation purpose, scope and approach

This formative evaluation assesses UNICEF's WASH regional and country programming strategies in the EAP region from 2014-2017 with a focus on relevance, effectiveness and sustainability. Its purpose is to inform future WASH strategies at country and regional level.

The evaluation is a synthesis and analysis of the strategies of the 12 countries with WASH programmes. Data was collected using a mixed methods approach, with the primary tool being secondary data analysis of UNICEF documentation. This was supplemented with semi-structured qualitative stakeholder interviews an online survey and three short country visits to Cambodia, China and Indonesia.

As well as looking at country specific strategies, the evaluation considered the role of the Regional Office, and how it supported the development and implementation of country strategies and provided opportunities for cross country learning and collaboration.

¹ Cambodia, China, DPR Korea, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Mongolia, Myanmar, Pacific Islands, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Thailand, Timor Leste, Vietnam.

² Statistics extracted from the ToR for this assignment.

³ JMP 2017

⁴ Cambodia, China, DPR Korea, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Mongolia, Myanmar, Timor Leste report >30%+ rural unimproved or open defecation and poor water quality

⁵ There is no WASH programme in Malaysia or Thailand

Findings and conclusions

Relevance

UNICEF strategies are seen to be well aligned to local context and national government strategies. UNICEF is a highly valued partner who listens to what national governments want, and designs programmes that fit with a locally driven agenda.

Country strategies align relatively well with the UNICEF global WASH strategy. However, it would be difficult for any WASH programme/set of activities not to align with the Global Strategy as it is extremely broad. There is more programming in the region in the *sanitation* and *WASH in institutions* (schools and health centres) results areas and less in *water supply* and *hygiene*. In terms of programming modalities, country offices show the highest degree of coherence in *delivering services and supplies* and in *strengthening enabling environments*. There is less programming in *leveraging financial resources* and *building sustainable markets*.

The Global WASH Strategy outlines where UNICEF wishes to continue learning and adapting, those it wishes to do better and new areas in which it wants to work.



UNICEF is seen as effectively working in humanitarian and emergency setting but has a stronger presence in sanitation than in water and hygiene. In the 'do better' areas there is evidence of a general move from service delivery towards influencing the enabling environment and some evidence of intersectoral working. Understanding and capability in leveraging finance is limited. At present programming in Urban WASH, working with the Private Sector and Climate resilient WASH is quite limited with only a few nascent programmes.

UNICEF are only partially aligned to the SDG agenda. The greatest area of challenge is a limited focus on achieving the 'safely managed' services outlined in the indicators for SDG 6.1 and SDG 6.2. In rural sanitation, UNICEF's largest WASH programming area, there is still a focus on basic level sanitation, despite those with middle-income status focusing their

country policies on progressing further up the sanitation ladder. UNICEF's current programme is still rooted in Community Lead Total Sanitation (CLTS) and the achievement of Open Defecation Free (ODF). A shift in both fundamental thinking and capability is required to develop a more integrated demand and supply based modality with a greater focus on improved latrines, faecal sludge management, the role of the private sector, and access to finance for safely managed services. There are examples of progress in this but a CLTS, demand driven mindset still holds sway despite only limited evidence that it can form the basis for sustainable and equitable movement 'up the ladder'.

In water there is a need for greater focus on water quality and the effective provision and finance for operations and maintenance and developing the private sector.

Effectiveness

Underpinning UNICEF's strategy are two key elements: the need to support change at scale and to be able to support the achievement of the SDGs. **At present there are no clear validated operational models/modalities of how scale up can be achieved, or tested programmatic models where UNICEF achieves sustainable, SDG-level change.** There are promising examples, but these need to be effectively reviewed and analysed.

The move to more 'upstream' working and alignment with SDG 6's indicators requires a significant operational shift in programme design implementation and performance measurement. This will require a mindset shift, more inter-sectoral working and a broader set of technical knowledge, skills and organisational practices.

From evaluations undertaken, community-based interventions, particularly CATS/CLTS, are seen as the most effective of UNICEF's WASH interventions in the region, and there is some evidence that upstream advocacy is contributing to positive change though the evidence is less strong. Approaches which don't include exit strategies or post project follow up are seen as least effective and limited staff numbers affects what UNICEF is able to achieve.

Regional office support is most valued **when it focuses on providing access to timely, high quality technical advice and training.** Countries want more help on inter-sectoral working and learning. There are clear limitations in UNICEF's technical knowledge, skills and experience – and staff resources - at a country level which constrain effective programme design and implementation.

Sustainability, Equity and Scalability

There is limited evidence that UNICEF's WASH work in the region is sustainable. The independent evaluations done in the region suggest that though

community focused sanitation interventions (CATS/CLTS) are effective there are major concerns over their sustainability. In particular there is consistent slippage from ODF particularly amongst the most poor and vulnerable. There is also limited, if any, validated evidence of progress up the sanitation ladder towards safely managed services.

There is internal debate as to whether UNICEF should be focusing on the SDG 6 targets – which include ending open defecation – or the indicators, which measure safely managed services. Given that in the region a number of country governments are committed to safely managed services, an approach which provides a pathway towards this level should be developed.

There does seem to be good emerging evidence that WASH in Schools programmes are leading to sustainable behavioural change.

Partnerships are central to UNICEF's operating model. **Evidence suggests that UNICEF's strongest partnerships are with local and national governments. Partnerships with NGOs and CSOs are mixed, with examples of effective partnership working, but others where they are just seen as transactional contractual relationships.**

At present examples of good operational relationships with the private sector or financial organisations are limited. However, UNICEF uses “partnership” as a blanket term to describe a range of quite different relationships with very different dynamics. Developing a model of partnership, and an associated framework with clear levels of mutual accountability for different types of partnerships alongside an effective monitoring framework, would help facilitate and track effective partnership working.

There is limited validated evidence of effective models for taking pilots to scale, though there are promising approaches being implemented in China, Philippines and Indonesia. However, at present, there is limited detail or analysis of scale up approaches or dynamics and whether change is based on replication or involves more systemic processes. In addition, there is no systemic model that guides scale up – type, form and ways of understanding success - across the Region.

Recommendations

UNICEF EAPRO and Country Offices to review their WASH strategies and areas of focus in line with the Global WASH Strategy and SDG 6.1 and 6.2.

The evaluation team recommend all countries in the region have explicit WASH strategies which include clear Theories of Change articulating country, regional and SDG 6 relevant outcomes.

Engaging in ‘new directions’ where UNICEF does not currently have technical expertise or experience, such as FSM and engagement with the private sector for example, may be critical for UNICEF to remain relevant in the future. Other areas, such as urban sanitation may not be the best way for UNICEF to leverage their comparative advantage, given likely resource levels and comparative advantage in different country contexts.

The evaluation team suggest that UNICEF set up working groups from across the region looking at methodologies for addressing FSM and urban programming which aim to provide recommendations as to how or whether UNICEF should improve its capabilities in these areas.

UNICEF Headquarters and the Regional Office review the existing M&E framework to ensure it so it can a) effectively track system level change and b) is aligned with SDG 6.1. and 6.2. indicators so can assess progress towards safely managed services.

This will require UNICEF in sanitation to start seeing ODF as an intermediate outcome towards a higher level of service delivery rather than an outcome in itself.

The Regional Office WASH section, with the support of the HR section, should develop a framework of core skills and competencies needed to deliver WASH programmes within the region.

Skills and competencies should cover not just technical WASH skills but also programmatic approaches and working at both downstream and upstream level, and at country HQ, field offices and provincial/district levels.

The Regional office and Headquarters should initiate the development of a partnership framework which outlines the range of partnerships UNICEF has, their characteristics, what makes them successful and what role UNICEF and its partners are expected to play.

It is particularly important that this framework distinguishes between ‘transactional’ partnerships where UNICEF works with smaller sub-contractors and the range of partnerships which involve more complex power relationships. It is important to include structured inquiry processes where UNICEF staff engage with existing and future possible partners.

The Regional Office should support Country Offices to review their own partnerships and ensure they have a mechanism to monitor their effectiveness and give and receive feedback on how well they are working. It is suggested that this process be led from HQ who should create a global task force, including advisers from a range of countries and sectors to work on this.

The Regional Office should review its regional Knowledge Management (KM) Strategy and look to develop a specific section/chapter which focuses on WASH.

The current 2018 EAPRO KM strategy is weak and generic - it makes no attempt to focus on capturing tacit knowledge and focuses primarily on external reviews, products, evaluations and training rather than balancing this with internal monitoring, sharing, organisation development and reflection. The WASH KM strategy chapter should follow the identification of WASH core skills and competencies proposed in recommendation 3 and aim to support these. This initiative should involve collaboration amongst all regional advisers, so it covers intersectoral working that is relevant to WASH.

UNICEF Headquarters and the Regional Office should purposefully support the further development and critical review of scale up models which show potential for achieving SDG indicator level service delivery.

These models should include an appreciation of whether going to scale involves replication (horizontal scale up) of small-scale improved service delivery models, or changes in operational approach as UNICEF aims to influence the expansion of demonstrated WASH approaches at different institutional levels (vertical scale up). This should build on experiences to date and move beyond designing and implementing demonstrations or pilots and then presenting them to the government to take to scale.

Given increasing demand for inter-sector programming approaches, the Regional Office should review experiences of inter-sectoral programming to date and document/assess which have been most effective and of benefit to the delivery of SDG 6.1. and 6.2 - for example reviewing the impact on programmes and performance of the theories of change joint planning undertaken between nutrition and WASH.

Country offices should place an increased level of emphasis on reporting and generating evidence on equity and inclusion, and ensuring they are targeting the 'hard to reach' population and areas. This work should include advocacy to national and local governments to ensure that evidence can where possible be drawn from government managed M&E systems. The evaluation team suggest that WASH leads, and heads of COs be brought together at the next regional meeting to create an action plan on how to take this forward.

The Regional Office should initiate a regional meeting or workshop amongst key development partner WASH actors in the region. This meeting should look to compare strategic approaches and look to see where there is synergy or potential overlap in approach. The Regional WASH adviser should talk to country and HQ colleagues as to who to invite but the evaluation team recommend that at a minimum, the World Bank, Asia Development Bank, WaterAid, DFAT and Plan international should attend.