

How to achieve the SDGs: A road map for strengthening WASH Systems

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Thanks to the widely agreed Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as a sector we know where we are going in water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH). We are seeking to ensure consistent, affordable and safe water supplies for everyone, everywhere.

But how are we going to get there? This was the challenge faced by Millennium Water Alliance (MWA) members working together in Ethiopia. The SDGs change the level of ambition and require new ways of thinking and working. The Conrad N. Hilton Foundation (CNHF) challenged the MWA partnership, in strong collaboration with local government partners, to think and plan together for how to make this happen in three woredas (districts) of Ethiopia.

MWA has convened a program in Ethiopia including MWA members CARE, World Vision, Food for the Hungry, WaterAid, Catholic Relief Services and IRC WASH. This program seeks to pool resources and raise the bar on delivering WASH services using system strengthening approaches. During 2018-2019, a series of baseline assessments in three target woredas of the Amhara National Regional State provided a better understanding of the current situation, built partnerships with government and other stakeholders, and led to long-term, woreda wide WASH plans.

Building on this baseline information, and to work out what is needed to achieve the SDGs, MWA members in Ethiopia developed a series of five position papers which help to chart a path forward. The position papers represent the collective voice of seven organizations who work in over 110 woredas and spent approximately 15% of the combined United Nations and Civil Society Organization funding on WASH in Ethiopia during 2016ⁱ.

The series of position papers focuses on:

1. Water service-delivery models
2. Government-led WASH monitoring systems
3. Long-term, district-wide WASH planning
4. Financing to achieve the SDGs
5. Capacities across the WASH sector

All five papers can be found on the [MWA website](#).

The process

The process of developing the position papers was iterative. Initial discussions took place during the program start-up workshop among members of the program's Core Design Teamⁱⁱ, including representatives from each partner organization. The five topics were identified as critical areas where change is required to make significant and sustained progress.

Over the following months, during meetings of the Core Design Team, one or two position paper topics were discussed per meeting. The aim was to capitalize on the years of knowledge and expertise held by

the team. IRC WASH and MWA divided the responsibility of compiling information based on literature and in-country knowledge. These starting points were shared with the group who then discussed and debated key points, challenges and recommendations to be included in the applicable paper. MWA and IRC WASH shared the writing responsibilities. After initial draft preparation, each paper was sent to all partners for review and comment. Partners were encouraged to share and discuss with others in their home organizations. Before finalizing and publishing, all partners were given the opportunity to review further to ensure that each organization wanted its name as part of the collective voice of the papers. All organizations signed off on each of the papers and they were published between May and November, 2019.

Next steps

The Conrad N. Hilton Foundation has provided a five-year grant for systems strengthening work. This work is based on the ideas in the position papers, which we hope we also inspire and influence others. We would like your feedback!

MWA would like to thank the Conrad N. Hilton for continued funding of this critical work and all of our great members and partners without whom this work and learning would not be possible.

ⁱ Alvarez-Sala, J. Resourcing WASH presentation at the Multi-Stakeholder Forum 9 in 2018 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia and a survey of MWA members' contributions to WASH in Ethiopia.

ⁱⁱ The Core Design Team included one or more representatives from each of the seven MWA member organizations who served as the leaders and champions of the program. This group met frequently throughout the duration of the program and served as thought leaders of the position papers.