

40th WEDC International Conference, Loughborough, UK, 2017

LOCAL ACTION WITH INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION TO IMPROVE AND
SUSTAIN WATER, SANITATION AND HYGIENE SERVICES

**Improving the fit between development and humanitarian
WASH in protracted crises**

Mason, N., Mosello, B., Shah, J. & Grieve, T. (UK)

PAPER 2609

The worlds of humanitarian and development WASH (water supply, sanitation and hygiene) too often operate separately, increasing the vulnerability of poor and marginalised people to disease and missed socio-economic opportunities. This is especially the case in protracted crises marked by weak governance and conflict. Research undertaken at global level and in South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo identifies the challenges but also positive stories of where and how WASH service providers are overcoming the separation. While a hierarchy of perceived and real differences act as a wedge to drive the humanitarian and development communities apart, action is possible and can be led from the ground up by WASH agencies working at the operational level.

Introduction

Humanitarian emergencies are increasingly protracted. 60% of countries with annual humanitarian appeals in 2014 issued appeals for eight or more of the last years (Bennet 2015). At the same time, development actors are increasingly having to engage in such contexts, rather than handing over to humanitarian counterparts in the face of short-term emergencies. Challenges to effective response in protracted crises abound, marked as they often are by insecurity, extreme and unpredictable need, and breakdown of trust between populations, government and external agencies (Mosel and Levine 2014). In such contexts, a lack of complementarity and collaboration between humanitarian and development WASH actors has heavy consequences, making it more costly to provide WASH services, reducing effectiveness of targeting and sustainability, and ultimately increasing the vulnerability of poor and marginalised people to disease and missed socio-economic opportunities. This division compounds other, well recognised gaps in institutional mandates – for example between urban and rural WASH, and between water supply, sanitation and hygiene. It extends also to Government agencies responsible for provision of WASH services: for example, Ministries of Water rarely having the mandate, resources or human capacity for emergency response, beyond rehabilitation of their own systems.

Research undertaken by the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) and supported by UNICEF and the World Bank Water and Sanitation Program examined why a disconnect between humanitarian and development WASH persists, and what can be done about it. The study draws on extensive consultation with global experts, a literature review, and two in-depth case studies in South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Yet we also find and look at positive stories of where, and how, agencies, donors and governments are managing to achieve greater cooperation and complementarity.¹

We argue that the solutions are available, and it is in the power of WASH practitioners on both humanitarian and development sides of the fence to lead real change. The task is to remove the wedge that currently drives the two worlds apart – building on the strengths and capacities of existing organisations and sector structures from the ground up, rather than inventing new global initiatives from the top down.

The research

There is limited pre-existing research on what prevents better collaboration and complementarity between humanitarian and development WASH. We therefore took a largely inductive approach in place of a pre-

defined analytical framework, adjusting the research design iteratively to address the core research questions, including:

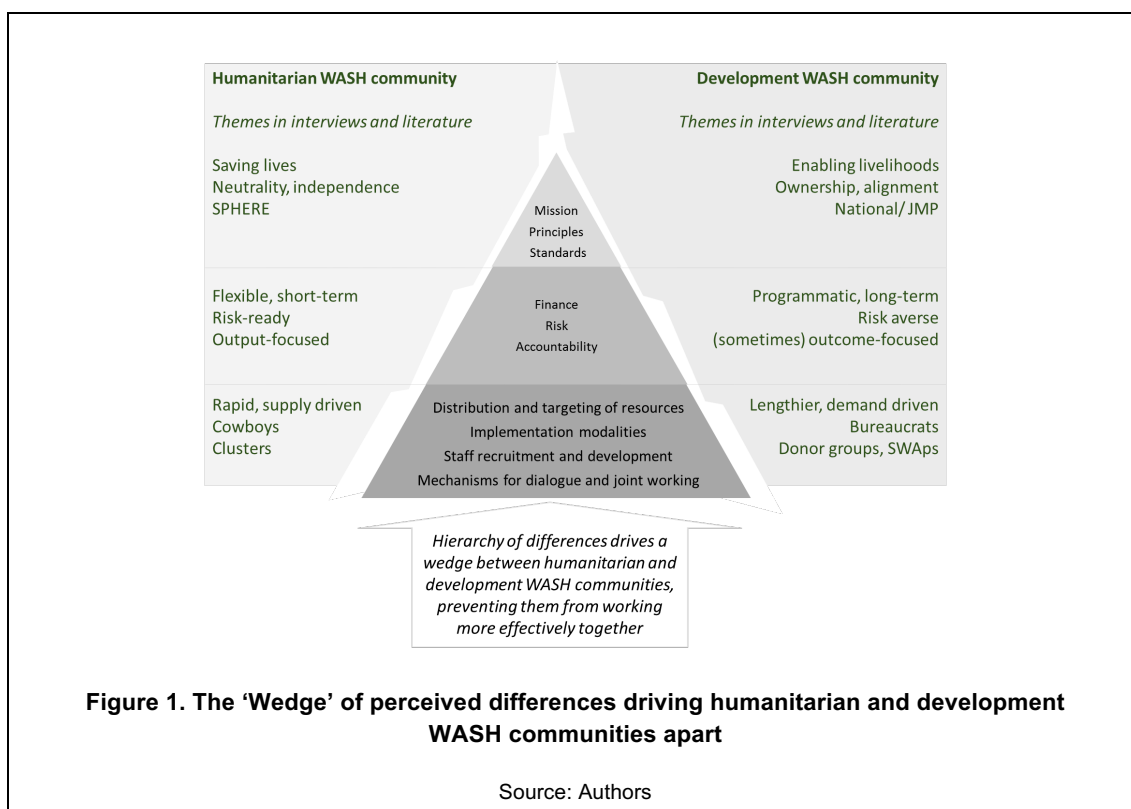
- How do humanitarian and development WASH communities, programmes and approaches interact currently, and historically?
- How are decisions made around programming and policy, within and between humanitarian and development WASH communities, and do decisions lead to effective action on the ground?
- What windows of opportunity exist to ensure a better connection and complementarity between development and humanitarian WASH at all levels?

Data were gathered through a literature review, interviews with 26 key informants at global level, purposively selected for their expertise in the area, and the case studies in South Sudan and DRC, which in turn mainly relied on further key informant interviews with representatives of donors, UN agencies, national and international non-governmental organisations, and Government (25 interviews in Juba, South Sudan, August 2015; 35 interviews in Kinshasa and Lubumbashi, DRC, September 2015). Key limitations of the research include the small sample of countries experiencing protracted crises, and reliance on key informant interviews as main source of data. Wherever possible, we attempted to use information from our various sources review to triangulate. The diagnosis and solutions we offer could be subject to further empirical testing.

Framing the problem

Our key finding is that the siloes between humanitarian and development WASH are sustained by a hierarchy of perceived differences, which can be visualised as a wedge driving the communities apart (Figure 1). This includes differences, contradictions and tensions in:

- High-level norms, which are expressed in the two communities’ mission statements, principles and standards;
- Incentives, rooted in the international architecture for humanitarian and development assistance and the related signals given by funding and accountability arrangements as well as engrained attitudes to risk.
- Operational processes, including procedures and systems for targeting effort; for implementing new services and sustaining existing ones; for recruiting and developing staff; and for dialogue.



Towards the top of the wedge, norms and incentives relate to deeply embedded attitudes and ways of working that persist across sectors, not just WASH. They can appear insurmountable for those working on the ground in a given sector, leaving them powerless to address how resources are allocated and targeted in a particular country or province, or to change the day-to-day operational procedures for communication or recruitment. But our research uncovered promising examples of how, in spite of the ‘wedge’ being so structural, humanitarian and development WASH stakeholders are finding ways to work across the gap, under very challenging circumstances. Indeed, this underlies our main argument – that operational staff and practitioners can take the initiative to find ways to increase complementarity, without waiting for grand global agreements to reform the wider humanitarian and development aid agendas.

Norms

A norm can be defined as “an established standard of behaviour shared by members of a social group to which each member is expected to conform” (CED 2017). Norms of the humanitarian and development communities are given expression at different levels, from high-level mission statements to detailed implementation standards for individual sectors like WASH. They permeate the cultures of the respective communities and feature in how individuals identify themselves and others. In the words of two of our interviewees: “humanitarians are saving life, development [specialists] are bureaucrats - it attracts different people”; “it is very difficult to have development people understand about humanitarian work, and humanitarian 'cowboys' understand about development work”. Examining different expressions of norms, however, we find that while simplistic interpretations tend to reinforce a division, through opposing stereotypes, there may be more commonality than is often assumed (Table 1).

Table 1. How norms divide but could unite humanitarian and development WASH		
Norm	Sign of difference	Potential for complementarity
Mission	Perceived differences in mission: humanitarian WASH to ‘save lives’. Purpose of development WASH has strong health dimension but extends to other considerations e.g. socio-economic opportunity	Differences largely self-defined; there are key similarities too e.g. necessity of WASH for safeguarding public health across emergency and non-emergency contexts
Principles	Humanitarian principles such as neutrality and independence sometimes perceived as incompatible with development principles such as government ownership, especially in politically charged contexts	Principles do not prevent compromise e.g. neutrality and independence does not prohibit engaging with government entirely. Even in more challenging contexts, collaboration at the local level may be possible as an interim step towards sector leadership and ownership with the Government e.g. through the Healthy Schools and Villages Programme (<i>Ecoles et Villages Assainies</i> , EVA/ VEA) in DRC
Standards	Separate sector standards for development (MDGs, JMP indicators) and humanitarian (Sphere standards) WASH	Opportunities to find complementarity between technical standards with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) WASH monitoring; e.g. inclusion of refugee camps as extra-household settings in SDG monitoring

Incentives

If norms inform how people answer the question ‘What should be done?’, incentives provide direction as to *why* something should be done. Many of the key incentives reinforcing a feeling of separation between humanitarian and development WASH appear to relate to how funding is organised. On the humanitarian side, for example, unpredictability and annual budgeting cycles conspire to incentivise short cycles of planning. In the words of one interviewee for the South Sudan study: “funding for humanitarian interventions is short, 1 year, 18 months if you are lucky! Therefore, you come in and you have to spend your money and hit your targets quickly, otherwise the donor will give money to the next agency. We are too busy to strategise with the development sector, and thus we miss opportunities.” This also suggests that it is not just funding modalities, but accountability (for what and to whom) which prevents a more coherent and strategic approach. Different attitude to risk, or the costs and benefits associated with action, is also apparent. In the words of one donor representative: “in conflict environments and for humanitarian

programmes... there is quite a high discount for future benefits. For humanitarian programmes, it is much better to have 100 people having access tomorrow [than] to make sure 500 have access in 3 years' time.”

From our inductive analysis we discerned three broad categories of incentive to act, or not act, which appeared to operate differently, in many instances, for stakeholders in the development and humanitarian communities – the **finance** and related resources to act; the extent of **accountability** for any action; and the **risks** of action producing negative outcomes (Table 2).

Table 2. How incentives divide but could unite humanitarian and development WASH		
Incentive	Sign of difference	Potential for commonality
Finance	Different degrees of coherence of development and humanitarian funds: more coordination at country level in protracted crises for humanitarian WASH within cluster architecture; Different timeframe and flexibility of funding streams: 'short-sighted, unpredictable' for humanitarian WASH, longer timeframes but limited flexibility for development WASH; Perceived competition for finance between humanitarian and development interventions.	Humanitarian pooled funds and the associated coherence lent by the cluster architecture has the potential to incentivise a more strategic approach to sector issues; Some donors are trying out mechanisms to better enable reprogramming of funds in crisis situations e.g. World Bank Immediate Response Mechanism; Decreasing funding availability could equally encourage rationalisation and partnerships rather than competition.
Accountability	Existing accountability and reporting systems to donors (in turn, based on visibility of the crisis/public pressure and geopolitical considerations) discourage longer term approach focused on end-impact, for both humanitarian and development agencies; Perceived greater emphasis among development programmes for accountability to national government.	Accountability to beneficiaries acknowledged as a shared goal for both humanitarian and development WASH communities; Examples of more effective involvement of and accountability to national government exist especially in response to specific challenges, e.g. cholera containment and prevention in South Sudan.
Risk	High levels of risk (or perceptions of it) reinforce the short termism and inflexibility of both humanitarian and development programmes; skew resource allocations; and further incentivise a tendency to resort to familiar, separate ways of working	Examples of risk-based programming to retain ability to reallocate for emergency response where a crisis re-occurs, e.g. DRC WASH Consortium cholera rapid response mechanism. In more stable contexts, examples of national governments leading on emergency preparedness.

Operational processes

The operational level at which interventions are planned, implemented and managed day to day, shows many examples of separation. In view of differences in norms and incentives described above, they may seem unmoveable. Ways of working, for example community-based approaches that now dominate WASH in 'development mode', can seem unfeasible when there is an immediate risk of cholera outbreak – prompting water trucking and subsidised latrines. The day-to-day opportunities for experts in humanitarian and development WASH to interact can also be infrequent. One global-level interviewee argued that “there can be schizophrenia” even within the same organisation: “In general, it is very difficult to have a meaningful transition from one category to the other.” A donor organisation in South Sudan emphasised the simple step of appointing a programme manager with a development background in an organisation primarily doing emergency interventions, to help maintain a focus on long-term sustainability, community participation, and involvement of government authorities. Perhaps an even bigger issue here is that many humanitarian *and* development WASH agencies still fail to involve locally based organisations with contextual experience to navigate complex crises.

Such operational challenges, of implementation modalities and human resource practices, are summarised in Table 3. Others include differences in how resources are targeted and the structures that are intended to allow for coordination, but still too often run in parallel between humanitarian and development WASH communities. In all cases, as much as we identified challenges at the operational level, our case studies offered many suggestions and examples of solutions to increase complementarity, as can be seen also from the Box which follows.

Table 3. How operational processes divide but could unite humanitarian and development WASH		
Operational process	Sign of difference	Potential for complementarity
Implementation modalities	Perceived polarisation between rapid, supply-driven and lengthier, demand-driven approaches for humanitarian and development WASH interventions, respectively; tensions can arise on ways to approach and involve communities (especially around sanitation) and use of financial incentives/ subsidies.	Examples of agencies working to invest in stimulating demand and supporting community capacities to meet their own WASH needs including in emergency contexts – e.g. agreeing a minimum package of support for poorest households in post-earthquake Nepal, to avoid disrupting CLTS-inspired norms around open defecation
Staff recruitment and development	Separate career paths reduce potential for interaction and finding common ground; short-term contracts and performance objectives (especially for humanitarian agencies) do not incentivise long-term perspectives; limited use of locally based organisations with contextual experience to navigate complex emergencies.	Some moves to increase collaboration across the divide, at least within the same organisation e.g. through staff training and exchange within UNICEF WASH Programme Division
Distribution and targeting of resources	Geographic and thematic compartmentalisation of humanitarian and development WASH actors and interventions reduces the scope for day to day interactions, and risks leaving gaps in delivery; mechanistic and often ad hoc definition of what constitutes an emergency skews allocation of resources.	Protracted displacement situations in cities, are starting to steer attempts at bridging humanitarian and development work – see studies by ICRC (2015)
Mechanisms for dialogue and co-working	Disconnect between strategic decision-making at headquarters and operational management in country reinforces siloes and inhibits potential for locally-based workarounds; differing involvement of national government; limited cross-sector dialogue (sectoral siloes overlaid on development-humanitarian siloes)	Increasing emphasis on managing transition between WASH clusters and government processes, with pragmatic consideration of national systems' vulnerability to, and ability to prevent and manage, shocks and conflict threats.

Box 1. Learning from what has worked: examples of complementarity in practice

- **Overcoming normative differences:** In South Sudan, the Cholera Task Force has shown how a specific challenge like cholera can offer a starting point for joint-working, bringing together a range of external agencies with Government representatives from both the health and water sectors, for cholera mitigation and prevention.
- **Working with risk:** In Northern Bahr el-Ghazal State, South Sudan, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation maintained its development programmes after the outbreak of renewed conflict through engagement with local partners and careful contextual analysis.
- **Getting finance to support flexibility:** The DRC WASH Consortium has built rapid response mechanisms into what is ostensibly a development programme, in order to cope with sudden onset emergencies – with the support of its donor, the UK Department for International Development.
- **Finding mechanisms for joint working:** At Lubumbashi, DRC's second city and centre of the ex-province of Katanga, development partners are invited to WASH Cluster meetings to share information and improve complementarity.

Conclusions and recommendations

The above is a very high level summary of the key findings from our review, presented according to the framework that we developed, iteratively, to describe a hierarchy of differences. Together, these differences act as a wedge driving the humanitarian and development WASH communities apart – but in each case there are opportunities to turn perceived difference into the seeds for complementarity and collaboration. Differences must ultimately be addressed at all levels, and certainly, some needs go well beyond the WASH sector. Reform of the wider development and humanitarian aid architectures to respond to an increasing

concentration of poverty and disease in fragile contexts remains essential. And donors must continue with the difficult task of providing aid that supports inclusive governments and societies in the countries they support, while managing the expectations of their electorates at home. But we would argue that this should not prevent action by those focused on WASH – and that there are key opportunities for those working directly in implementation and operations to kick-start real change. As such, we recommend:

- *To increase complementarity at operational level:* In the short term, WASH implementing agencies operating in protracted crises should collaborate to identify their ‘shared priorities’ - a set of 5-10 short, actionable statements that both humanitarian and development WASH actors can fully commit to around their ways of working.
- *To tackle underlying incentives that inhibit complementarity:* In the medium term, WASH implementing agencies should advocate that their donors route the majority of their funds via multi-year but flexible mechanisms that permit rapid reallocation in emergencies
- *To challenge the cultural and systemic barriers that exist beyond the WASH sector:* In the longer term, WASH implementing agencies should encourage the key coordination bodies of which they are members, such as Sanitation and Water for All or the Global WASH Cluster, to build coalitions with other sector platforms to share lessons on improving complementarity and advocate more systemic, cross-sectoral change.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to extend thanks to the contributors to the field research (particularly Richard Aludra, Patrick Mbay, Modeste Zihindula and Victoria Chambers) and the many contributors and reviewers. A full list is provided in the Synthesis Report.

References

- BENNETT, C. 2015 *The development agency of the future: Fit for protracted crises*. Overseas Development Institute: London.
- CED 2017 *Definition of ‘norm’* [online]. Collins English Dictionary. [viewed 28/04/2017]. Available from: <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/norm>
- ICRC 2015 *Urban services during protracted armed conflict: a call for a better approach to assisting affected people*, International Committee of the Red Cross: Geneva.
- MOSEL, I. and LEVINE, S. 2014 *Remaking the case for linking relief, rehabilitation and development: How LRRD can become a practically useful concept for assistance in difficult places*. HPG Commissioned Report, Overseas Development Institute: London.

Note

¹ A policy brief and synthesis report are available at <https://www.odi.org/publications/10532-making-humanitarian-and-development-wash-work-better-together> as well as links to the country case studies

Contact details

Nathaniel Mason is a Senior Research Fellow, Water Policy, at ODI. Beatrice Mosello is a Research Fellow, Water Policy. Jamal Shah is WASH Specialist (Emergencies) for UNICEF. Timothy Grieve is Senior Advisor, Emergency Water, Sanitation and Hygiene for UNICEF.

Nathaniel Mason/ Beatrice Mosello
ODI, 203 Blackfriars Road London, SE1 8NJ, UK
Tel: +44(0)207 922 8238
Email: n.mason@odi.org.uk
www: www.odi.org/wpp

Jamal Shah/ Timothy Grieve
UNICEF, 3 UN Plaza, New York, NY 10017, USA
Tel: +1 212 326 6593
E-mail: jshah@unicef.org
www: www.unicef.org/wash