

Solving complex problems through systems strengthening

The Sustainable Services Initiative of Welthungerhilfe in the WASH sector



If this is lasting water supply...



... then this is reliable local transport.

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Problem

Despite substantial gains in access to water, sanitation, and hygiene services over the past thirty years, it is estimated that **2.3 billion people worldwide still lack access to these basic human necessities**. For those who have gained access, monitoring trends show that over time, **WASH services consistently fail to function as intended**. In Sub-Saharan African countries alone, up to 70% of rural water schemes are estimated to be non-functional or intermittently functional at any given time. Worldwide, **low service sustainability contributes to nearly two million preventable deaths**. These impacts disproportionately affect communities that are rural, poor, and resource-limited. Accordingly, **service sustainability is identified as a key challenge** to be addressed for WASH-investments to deliver their intended public health impacts.

Given the interconnected nature of financial, institutional, environmental, technological, and social factors that influence sustained service delivery, the sector has started to advocate for a **'systems' approach**¹ to sustain WASH service delivery.

The Sustainable Services Initiative (SSI) is an internal initiative of **Welthungerhilfe**, in partnership with **Aguaconsult** and **German Toilet Organization** (GTO) and financially supported by **Viva Con Agua** (VcA). Launched in 2016, the SSI seeks to improve the **sustainability of WHH's WASH programmes**, primarily through encouraging the uptake of a **systems strengthening** approach on the part of WHH programmes, and to advocate in the sector and partner countries for a more sustainable approach to WASH programming.

A systems approach for WASH

In practice, the systems approach leads to a shift in the focus from WASH projects only building infrastructure (pumps and latrines) to also **supporting service authorities in the planning process**. The approach also focuses on strengthening and using **national systems** instead of creating parallel ones, **using only one monitoring and mutual accountability platform** and thinking about **sustainable financing strategies**. Since no one organization can do it all, the systems approach also increases the potential for **collaboration between external support agencies**. By implementing the SSI approach in other WASH priority countries from 2019 onwards, SSI makes an effective contribution to achieving the **Water Sustainability Goal (SDG6)**.

¹Systems thinking has been adopted for some time in other development sectors such as health and education. In the WASH sector, systems thinking and approaches to applying this in practice are still relatively new. A 'WASH system' can be defined as the entire network of people, organizations and institutions (**actors**) plus infrastructure, resources and behaviors (**factors**) that deliver WASH services.

SSI Partners

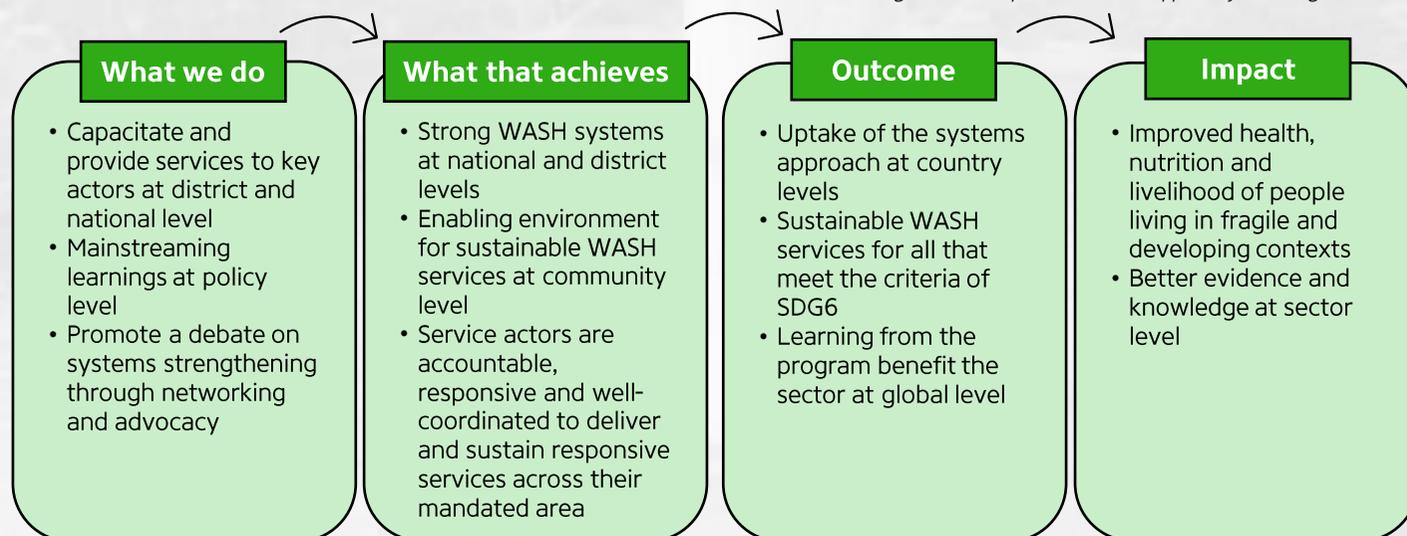


The SSI conceptual framework Building Blocks of a strong wash system

The figure below presents the **nine building blocks** Welthungerhilfe uses in the Sustainable Services Initiative, which need to be strengthened to ensure the existence of **robust WASH systems** that ensure **the sustainable provision of universal WASH services**. The figure also highlights the **other systems** (education, health, agriculture and environment, humanitarian) closely connected to WASH systems and **key actors** per each level of the system: national, service authority, service provider, user.



Building Block Conceptual Framework applied by Welthungerhilfe.



WASH System Building Blocks Zoom-In



Institutional Arrangements & Coordination

- » Clarity in mandates and roles, coordination, institutional capacity, incentives, legal status of service providers, policies and legislation



Inclusive Planning

- » Participation and accountability of process, inclusion, evidence basis, targets and strategy focus, resilience



Water Resources & Environment

- » Management & allocation of resource, resource monitoring and protection, dialogue platforms, balancing of interests, resource recovery



Service Delivery Infrastructure

- » Service delivery models, technologies, infrastructure guidance, standards, quality, maintenance and parts, asset management



Finance

- » Budgeting and financing mechanisms, life cycle and service chain-wide costing, flows and responsibilities, revenue collection, tariffs, subsidies



Learning & Adaptation

- » Platforms for sharing & readiness to share, upwards/downwards flows, tailored trainings, link to planning



Regulation & Accountability

- » Regulatory framework and enforcement, accountability mechanisms and processes, service standards, capacity, social norms



Monitoring

- » Monitoring framework and routine implementation, information management, harmonisation of monitoring, usage of data



Demand, Behaviour & Political Will

- » User demand/behaviour, behaviour change, social norms, political commitment (for sustainable, quality WASH services for all)