



R-WASH

MIDLINE
EVALUATION
BRIEF
(2022-2025)



Implemented by:



1. Introduction

The Regional WASH Programme for Refugees, Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and Host Communities in East Africa (R-WASH) is a multi-country initiative implemented by UNICEF in partnership with UNHCR, national authorities, and local stakeholders, with financial support from BMZ/KfW, Xylem and partners. Launched in 2021, the programme aims to deliver sustainable, climate-resilient, and inclusive WASH services to refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs), and host communities in fragile and displacement-affected areas of Ethiopia, Somalia, and Sudan by December 2028.

R-WASH is designed as a systems-strengthening intervention that supports the transition from emergency WASH provision to utility-managed service delivery, while promoting long-term sustainability, institutional capacity, and social cohesion. During programme design, funding constraints led to a strategic prioritization of water supply investments, shaping a primary focus on water infrastructure development while placing comparatively less emphasis on the comprehensive sanitation and solid waste management components.

At the midline, the programme remains in a transition phase. While emergency water services continue to meet immediate needs, investments in sustainable service systems are still under development. Water sources have been secured across all programme locations; however, major infrastructure works are at an early stage. Construction progress was approximately 30% in Aw-Barre, Shedder, and Kebribeyah (Ethiopia) and 10% in Girba (Sudan). In Wad Sharifey (Sudan) and Dollow (Somalia), system design processes were still underway at the time of the evaluation.

Consequently, the midline findings primarily reflect the performance of emergency service delivery arrangements and the early progress made towards establishing sustainable, utility-managed water systems. The evaluation therefore provides an assessment of whether the programme is laying the necessary foundations to achieve its long-term objectives rather than measuring the full impact of completed infrastructure investments.



2. Purpose of the Evaluation

The purpose of the midline evaluation is to:



Assess progress toward achieving R-WASH outcomes across relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, and equity



Determine whether the programme is on track to deliver sustainable and integrated WASH outcomes



Provide evidence-based recommendations for course correction and strategic decision-making



Inform future funding and scale-up decisions by UNICEF, UNHCR, BMZ/ KfW and partners

Evaluation Scope

Time: 2022 (baseline year) - 2025 (midline)

Geographic: All programme sites in Ethiopia, Somalia and Sudan

Programme: All programme components

3. Methodology

R-WASH Midline Methodology

Mixed Methods	Theory Based	OECD-DAC Criteria
Data Sources	Sample and Coverage	Analytical Approach
Household surveys	1,296 households	Evidence Triangulation
Remote Monitoring System Data	247 Businesses	Baseline vs Midline
Utility Reports	24 schools/facilities	Equity Assessment
Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)	35 KIIs	Cost efficiency
Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)	61 FGDs	
In Depth Interviews (IDIs)	17 IDIs	
Limitations:		
→ Incomplete Infrastructure limiting assessment		
→ Limited attribution		
→ Data gaps in sanitation and long-term outcomes		

Despite these constraints, the evaluation provides robust evidence on progress, gaps, and emerging trajectories.

Key Midline Results

Water access has expanded significantly

R-WASH has substantially increased water access through a combination of emergency service delivery and investments in sustainable water systems. By midline, 243,518 people (132,017 female; 111,501 males; 12,298 people with disabilities) had been reached with emergency water services against a target of 200,000. Innovations such as the use of solar pumps in water supply systems helped increase reach.

The improved access to safe water contributed to reducing 24-hour water interruptions, with the overall rate declining from high baseline levels to 57.8%. Somalia demonstrates the strongest improvement (83.1% to 37.5%), while Sudan shows moderate gains (68.6% to 60.4%). Ethiopia has improved slightly (87.8% to 78.8%) but still reports the highest interruption levels. Overall, trends are positive, though further effort is needed to reach the 25% target.

These results demonstrate that linking humanitarian service delivery with long-term systems development is feasible in fragile contexts. However, service reliability remains uneven in some locations as major water infrastructure investments are still under construction.

Equity is improving, but displaced populations still lag behind

R-WASH is successfully reaching both host and displaced populations, supporting its social cohesion objectives.

However, significant equity gaps remain. At midline, 65.3% of host households had access to safe and reliable water services compared with 41.2% of refugee and IDP households. Addressing these disparities will be critical to ensuring equitable service delivery and strengthening trust and social cohesion across communities.

Sanitation Remains a Critical Programme Gap

Improvements in water access are not yet translating into full health, and wellbeing outcomes because sanitation and hygiene services remain underdeveloped. At midline, 83.4% of refugee and IDP households relied on unimproved sanitation facilities, compared with 59.7% of host households. Open defecation was reported by up to 10.7% of displaced households.

This is a significant risk. Without stronger investment in sanitation and hygiene, R-WASH is unlikely to fully realize its intended health, gender, and well-being outcomes.

Efficiency gains are emerging, including affordability gains

R-WASH is demonstrating early efficiency gains, particularly in locations where solarization has been implemented. Investments in more durable water infrastructure are reducing unit costs and providing a sustainable alternative to high-cost delivery models such as water trucking.

In Sudan, average water costs declined from USD 2.63/m³ to USD 2.06/m³ after water network rehabilitation, distribution points construction and replacement of water pumps and provision of water quality chemicals and solarization (a 21.7% reduction). In Somalia, costs decreased from USD 1.60/m³ to USD 1.35/m³ (15.6%). In Ethiopia (Itang), transitioning from emergency supply and water trucking to a piped network supported by a utility management model reduced cost significantly—from USD 11.38/m³ to USD 0.93/m³. In Jijiga (Ethiopia), short-term investments, including solarization of water sources and booster stations, have also contributed to lower operation and maintenance costs.



The results at midline demonstrate that once fully operational across all sites, R-WASH piped water systems could further reduce consumer water costs to approximately USD 0.61–1.10/m³ by 2033, substantially improving affordability for both host and displaced communities. However, implementation delays, inflation, and contractor underperformance continue to erode value for money.

Sustainability foundations are developing, but key risks remain

R-WASH has made important progress in building the foundations for long-term sustainability through utility strengthening, government engagement, environmental and social safeguards and cost-recovery mechanisms. While these achievements position the programme well for long-term impact, sustainability is not yet guaranteed.

Utility transition remains incomplete in several programme locations, affordability challenges continue to affect vulnerable households, and community ownership and participation are uneven across sites. Long-term financial sustainability will depend on the effective implementation of metering, billing and tariff systems, targeted subsidies for vulnerable populations, reliable operation and maintenance arrangements, and responsive customer service. Continued attention to these areas will be critical to ensuring that service gains achieved under R-WASH are sustained beyond the programme period.

Stakeholder Engagement found as a programme strength, but more inclusiveness is needed

The programme demonstrated strong stakeholder engagement, with effective coordination across government, implementing partners, and communities, supporting delivery and ownership of results.

Engagement mechanisms enable consistent information flow and alignment with national priorities. However, participation of vulnerable groups, particularly women, persons with disabilities, and IDP communities, was not systematically embedded in decision-making processes. This limits inclusiveness and risks uneven benefit distribution. Strategic strengthening of structured engagement platforms and more intentional inclusion of underrepresented groups would enhance accountability, equity, and long-term sustainability of programme outcomes.

Key Messages /Priorities

The midline evidence points to five priorities:



1. Consolidate and sustain gains in water access while improving reliability by completing critical infrastructure and strengthening operation and maintenance systems.



2. Rebalance programme investments towards sanitation and hygiene to achieve integrated WASH and health outcomes.



3. Close equity and participation gaps by improving access for refugees, IDPs, women, persons with disabilities, and other vulnerable groups, while strengthening their role in decision-making and accountability.



4. Complete the transition to sustainable utility-managed services by strengthening cost recovery, asset management, and institutional capacity including affordability safeguards and targeted subsidies



5. Enhance implementation efficiency and value for money through stronger procurement, contractor performance management, technical oversight, and risk management.

Strategic Takeaway

R-WASH is demonstrating the viability of a systems-based approach to WASH service delivery in displacement settings, with notable progress in water access, utility strengthening, and the transition away from costly emergency service models.

The next phase should focus on consolidating these gains by ensuring that improved access translates into reliable, affordable, and sustainable services. Addressing sanitation, service reliability, equity, and long-term financial sustainability will be critical to establishing R-WASH as a scalable model for WASH systems reform in fragile and displacement-affected contexts.

Implemented by



GOVERNMENT OF ETHIOPIA



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