

WATER, SANITATION AND HYGIENE IN PROTRACTED CRISES: LEARNING THROUGH EVALUATION

Why are water and sanitation important?

Water is life. It is essential to health, poverty reduction, food security, peace and human rights, ecosystems and education. Recognizing this reality, the world is making progress on achieving the availability and sustainable management of safe water and sanitation for all, as per [Sustainable Development Goal 6](#) of the [2030 Agenda](#). Despite progress, 2.2 billion people lack access to safely managed water and 4.2 lack safely managed sanitation. Meeting water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) needs is even more challenging in contexts where there are protracted crises. To this end, UNICEF is called to sustain and increase operation and strategic capacity to deliver and lead the sector.

In 2019, UNICEF Evaluation Office responded to the call by commissioning the Global Evaluation of UNICEF's WASH Programming in Protracted Crises (WiPC), the first UNICEF global thematic evaluation focusing specifically on protracted crisis contexts. This evaluation provides both accountability for UNICEF's performance but also learning and practical solutions for how UNICEF can adapt its WASH programming and ways of working to better meet the unique challenges of providing appropriate and sustainable WASH services in protracted crises. The period under consideration for this evaluation is 2014 - 2019.

How did we evaluate WASH programming in protracted crises?

The evaluation used a mixed-methods approach. Initial data gathering focused on extensive document reviews and quantitative monitoring data. Key informant interviews were undertaken with UNICEF, partner, and donor staff at both country and global level. Data from the perspective of the affected populations were collected via a series of transect walks. UNICEF country offices, which took part in case studies, submitted self-assessments, and a global online survey was circulated to UNICEF and partner staff. Such data were collated in separate products including four field-based country case studies (Cameroon, Lebanon, Somalia, South Sudan) and two desk-based thematic case studies. All these sources formed the evidence base for the global evaluation report.



© UNICEF/UN0304525/English

Who is this evaluation for?

This evaluation is for UNICEF decision makers across levels, with focus on WASH specialists working at headquarters and in country offices. We also hope to engage a range of external stakeholders including other United Nations agencies and initiatives, development partners and implementers, governments and the private sector.

What did we learn?

Some of the most important findings¹ include the following points:

- UNICEF is successful in meeting targets for water supply but there has been less success in sanitation and hygiene
- UNICEF's ability to be truly accountable to affected populations is limited by the difficulty in articulating expected outcomes or changes in lives
- UNICEF collects extensive output data, but outcome data are insufficient, which makes it challenging to truly understand programme effectiveness and respond appropriately
- There is a significant emphasis on standards and norms for service provision and coverage, but equal priority is not given to standards relating to equity and quality
- Partnerships are a core strength and appear to be generally well managed, especially relationships with government and local authorities
- The Global WASH Cluster's leadership is well recognized but, UNICEF was seen to have ground in thought leadership
- UNICEF is still developing its strategy and capacity in urban WASH interventions
- UNICEF has set out a transformational agenda on linking humanitarian and development but some pillars – risk-informed programming, integrated needs assessment and analysis, and user engagement – are currently at preliminary stages
- WASH sections of country offices in protracted crises are typically stretched in ensuring the ongoing provision of basic WASH services, and sometime experience challenges in implementing changes at country level.

What do we recommend?

Given what we have learned, we recommend to:

- Develop an organizational definition of protracted crises
- Ensure an equal focus on water and sanitation/hygiene
- Articulate the changes that are expected as result of WASH programming
- Improve the collection and use of data for WASH programming
- Give quality and equity considerations equal weight with coverage
- Build partnerships which fully embrace localization
- Reclaim thought leadership
- Strengthen coordination
- Build on UNICEF's core strengths in urban WASH
- Ensure that WiPC programmes align with UNICEF's commitments to LHD
- Build country office capacity for new ways of working.

The Global Evaluation of UNICEF's WASH Programming in Protracted Crises is accessible [here](#).

Laura Gagliardone is an Evaluation Specialist in UNICEF Evaluation Office and Author of this Blog
Mona Fetouh is an Evaluation Specialist in UNICEF Evaluation Office and Manager of this Evaluation.

¹ UNICEF WASH has started responding to some of the challenges noted, through current and future programming.