



Saddam Mohamed/CARE



Water+ WASH Systems Award: Strengthening WASH Systems in Emergency and Nexus Settings

Introduction and Context

Globally, humanitarian crises now last more than nine years, and refugee and internal displacement camps are, on average, in place for 17-20 years.¹ For CARE, this means that 59% of the countries where we operate have ongoing humanitarian responses in response to acute and recurrent disasters, or significant political or economic instability.² **Water security is strongly and highly associated with acute food insecurity—a leading trigger of humanitarian responses globally.**³ Recurrent droughts and floods are triggers for humanitarian response, and climate change often manifests as water-related impacts requiring adaptation measures to address acute and chronic water insecurity. Women and marginalized groups are disproportionately impacted by conflict, climate, and displacement. For example, in 2018, women comprised 75% of all people displaced due to natural disasters such as droughts and floods.⁴ Equally significant is the strong link between gender-based violence and overall state stability and security.⁵

¹ OCHA. (2019). US\$21.9 billion needed in 2019 as average length of humanitarian crises climbs. Available at: <https://www.unocha.org/story/us219-billion-needed-2019-average-length-humanitarian-crises-climbs>

² CARE. (2023). Global Humanitarian Update FY23.

³ Young et al. (2023). Concurrency of Water & Food Security in 25 LMICs.

⁴ UNHCR. (2019). Global Trends in Forced Displacement. Available at: <https://www.unhcr.org/be/wp-content/uploads/sites/46/2020/07/Global-Trends-Report-2019.pdf>

⁵ Alliance for Peacebuilding (2014). Secure Women, Secure States, Building Peace: A Forum for Peace and Security in the 21st Century: <http://buildingpeaceforum.com>.

It's increasingly recognized that historic patterns and approaches to humanitarian and development partnership will not break the cycles of disaster, instability, and humanitarian crisis. **The causes of these crises are structural and systemic, and the remedy needs to be equally systems-driven.** CARE's Water+ team and the global WASH sector are thought leaders in systems strengthening and governance as foundational approaches to improve the access and sustainability of water and sanitation services. In this way WASH teams and WASH programming—particularly those within large, multi-sector organizations with dual humanitarian-development mandates—are best positioned to recognize and begin planning and operationalizing holistic, systems approaches to WASH in fragile contexts.

In the spirit of this year's World Water Day theme—*Accelerating Change*—CARE is proud to award our Annual WASH Systems Award to our CARE teams and programs working in crisis and disaster-affected contexts with long-term humanitarian programming. While we are highlighting case studies in Somalia, Sudan, and Yemen, this award is in recognition of all CARE teams working tirelessly to ensure WASH as a basic service in the wake of humanitarian crises, and their efforts to challenge themselves and their partners to begin addressing the structural and systems barriers to WASH in fragile contexts.

CARE Somalia/Somaliland

Somaliland is located in one of the most disaster-prone regions of the world and is regularly faced with drought and conflict driven emergencies. At baseline (2015), over 83% of people in the target villages, accounting for more than 187,000 people, traveled *more than* half a kilometer to collect water. The Water Infrastructure Development Program for Resilience in Somaliland (WIDR) aimed to build a sustainable water and sanitation sector that meets the needs of all users in Somaliland. This included increasing access to water for productive use (cattle, irrigation) and domestic use, as well as sanitation facilities in health centers and schools. **When the project ended over 80% of people accessed water within less than a kilometer of their home.** But the project was more than just improving access to water. Central to the project was the institutional strengthening of the Ministry of Water Resources Development (MoWRD). In fact, the MoWRD and CARE worked hand in hand for the entirety of the project, from planning to implementation to monitoring and evaluation. **During the 5.5 year project CARE improved internal operating systems in four departments of the MoWRD, continually trained and mentored 18 staff, jointly developed 41 structural designs,** set-up equipment and trained personnel for running a water quality lab and supported the development of both the National WASH Sector Strategic plan and Environmental and Social Mitigation Measures plan. CARE Somalia/Somaliland is continually integrating long-term systems strengthening approaches within their WASH program scope.

CARE Yemen

Humanitarian actors and approaches have dominated the international response to the protracted crisis and conflicts in Yemen for more than five years — averting further loss of life and livelihoods, but making little progress in establishing the long-term, foundational structures needed for rebuilding and resilience. In this context, CARE Yemen challenged itself to think critically about the short and long-term WASH needs, and to develop a strategy that bridges humanitarian and development approaches under the USAID-funded 'H2O Yemen' activity, which address WASH service provision and systems strengthening in eight conflict-affected districts within the Governates of Sana'a and Taiz (2018-2023). The objectives of the H2O Yemen project are to support vulnerable, conflict-affected Yemenis in rural and urban areas to: (1) improve access to safe water, sanitation, and hygiene services; (2) strengthen WASH institutions and service providers to operate and manage WASH systems; and (3) to conduct research and pilot testing of methods to improve cost recovery and water efficiency and conservation.

In its first year, H2O Yemen, in coordination with the General Authority for Rural Water Projects, rehabilitated six rural water systems and **built local capacities in budgeting, regular O&M, and water quality analysis**, which ultimately led to the successful handover of all systems to local water management committees (WMCs). In collaboration with other INGOs and local authorities, **CARE rehabilitated sewerage systems in urban Taiz to reach more than 8,000 people with improved services**—a significant gap in ongoing programming and source of diarrheal disease and cholera. H2O Yemen also addresses some of the most critical systemic barriers to WASH service provision, including supporting the WASH supply chain by strategically linking local suppliers with local authorities, integrating financial training for WMCs to improve financial solvency, and increasing customer trust in WASH systems through the establishment of accountability mechanisms and engagement with local technical representatives. By providing these resources and capacity building, government staff has been able to re-establish basic WASH services, with an eye towards sustaining services.

Q: Why are these approaches so important in contexts where conflicts and acute humanitarian crises are persistent issues?

CARE Yemen: The level of financial transfers to the water service sector is substantial and these transfers over time must support systems-level changes that restore the previous structures supported by the government before the conflict. For example, re-establishing the collection of tariffs and taxes is necessary to contribute to improved water service provision, government budgets for financing WASH and WASH infrastructure, and for expanding services to those in need. Private sector investment over time gradually grows and becomes a critical component of systems strengthening but requires the establishment of legal frameworks, reduction of associated risks, and increased returns for WASH service provision. These approaches can then guide the development of a roadmap indicating the critical points of WASH investment and lead the alignment of actors for a concerted effort that is not grossly fragmented like what we see in Yemen now.

CARE Sudan

In September 2019, CARE recognized the challenges associated with long-term maintenance and governance of water systems in rural Sudan—a politically volatile and conflict-affected context. After conducting an analysis to identify the most significant barriers to the functionality of small water systems in East Darfur State, CARE designed and piloted a **Circuit Rider model** to address these challenges. CARE provided technical training, transportation assistance, and tools for repairs to Circuit Rider teams comprised of community-based technicians who perform monthly preventative maintenance visits to small and rural water systems. These Circuit Rider teams are critical resources for rural communities who lack real-time responses to repair requests. In addition to the provision of training and resources, CARE helped ensure the sustainability of this model by working with communities and the East Darfur State Water Corporation to establish water tariff systems that finance general O&M activities and salaries for the Circuit Rider teams.

An evaluation of the Circuit Rider model in September 2021 revealed significant improvements as **monthly breakdowns of water systems decreased from 67.7% to 17.4%**, and households reported that the time required for repairs decreased significantly: 67% of repairs required > 7 days prior to intervention, and post-intervention 39% and 44% of repairs were completed in less than one day and 2-3 days, respectively. **Overall, 84% of households reported an improvement in water service provision.** The success and sustainability of the model were especially promising results as the State Water Corporation (SWC) in East Darfur replicated the Circuit Rider model in 5 other localities. Now, between CARE and SWC, 100% of East Darfur territory is served by circuit riders. CARE's Circuit Rider model in Sudan provides an excellent example of how to diagnose the barriers impeding WASH systems change and work with communities and public sector partners to create a sustainable and replicable model that directly addresses those barriers, even under conditions of crisis and conflict.

Q: What do you see as your most foundational or operational barriers to more fully addressing WASH systems and sustainability?

CARE Sudan:

- Lack of commitment from the government and local authorities to improve the systems and poor financial resources management by the committees in charge of WASH services
- Lack of transparency and accountability among the different actors who support the system strengthening
- Many NGOs using different intervention approaches in their WASH programming, contributing to weak WASH sector coordination

Q: What have you learned by trying to use systems strengthening approaches in humanitarian contexts?

CARE Sudan: Providing WASH services without strengthening the underlying systems is insufficient and will not address the sustainability for the provided WASH services. System strengthening reduces the cost of WASH-related services as well as the operation and maintenance costs of sanitation facilities. We have learned system strengthening approaches are very useful, valuable and has very huge positive impacts on the ground.

These case studies provide practical examples of how systems strengthening approaches bridge the humanitarian and development nexus by establishing the institutional structures and building the capacities necessary to create and sustain WASH services for all – no matter the context.

Thank you to CARE teams working to strengthen WASH systems across fragile and nexus settings around the world. For World Water Day, 2023 - We celebrate you!



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