



Annual Report
Water+ 2023: Retrospective Report

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Cover Photo: Sedra is very happy to have water nearby and of good quality. Fokontany Androy, Haute Matsiatra Region ©RANO WASH (Dahery Razaka Rafenomanana)



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Acknowledgements

This report was written and consolidated by members of the CARE Water+ Team in collaboration with CARE country office teams. Authors include: Kelly Alexander, Paul DeMerritt, Sara Hoffman, James Labadia, Stephanie Ogden, Ntsoa Ranaivoson, Avo Ratoarijaona, Dr. Adugnaw Tadesse, Marie Nicaise Ugabinema, and Liliane Uwineza with additional inputs from teams at CARE Madagascar, CARE Rwanda, CARE Guatemala, CARE Ecuador, CARE Ethiopia, and CARE South Sudan. Many thanks to our Food and Water Systems KML colleagues, Tahmina Haque and Emily Janoch, for their support, and to Paul DeMerritt for their skilled leadership in pulling this together. We are grateful to the Osprey Foundation for continuing to encourage learning and sharing across our programs and across the WASH sector.

Introduction

More than half of the world's population experiences severe water scarcity for some portion of the year. More than 2.2 billion people – about 25% of the world's population - lack access to safe and reliable water for daily use, and 3.5 billion people – about 40% of the world's population - lack access to safe, clean toilets in or near their home. Lack of access to water and sanitation impacts health, education, food security and migration, dignity, gender equality, and well-being. While WASH-related diarrheal disease has decreased in the last decades, roughly 6-10 times more people die of diarrheal disease each year than from violence and conflict, combined¹.

Water, sanitation and hygiene are central to CARE's work. CARE's Water+ programs play a critical role in fulfilling CARE's Vision, contribute directly to Sustainable Development Goal 6, and link directly to CARE's impact strategies for Food, Water & Nutrition, Climate Justice, and Humanitarian Assistance. Our Water+ programs encompass work across five inter-related domains: WASH in emergencies, WASH Systems Strengthening, Water Smart Agriculture, Water Resources Management and Protection, and Water and Gender. Within and across these domains, CARE focuses on strengthening local WASH systems, including the conditions and capacities, for sustainable and equitable services. **In all of our Water+ work, CARE works to advance gender equality** by building the agency of women and girls, changing relations that reinforce gender norms, and transforming the structures that perpetuate inequalities.

Each year in celebration of World Water Day, our Water+ Team publishes a Retrospective report – a small selection of case studies and lessons learned across CARE's work throughout the previous year, with an attempt to focus on how CARE teams are influencing and impacting various components of WASH systems. This year, we have included 7 case studies from our Water+ work that explore:

- How taking **a systems approach in the RANO WASH program in Madagascar led to delayed but magnified and accelerating results** in later years of the project in terms of water and sanitation access, and impact that will continue to grow by an additional 40% over the next 5 years.
- How **the Isoko y'Ubuzima team in Rwanda revised their strategy and increased rural toilet sales 10-fold** across 10 of 20 districts in Rwanda, increasing women's incomes along the way
- How **three of our Water+ programs have engaged with Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLA)**, and how this has impacted WASH, conservation, financial access and other outcomes
- How CARE is **influencing and measuring change in gender and social norms in South Sudan** using CARE's Social Analysis and Action approach in the Afia WASH project
- How **communities in Zambia describe water-related risks** and opportunities in community-led Climate Adaptation Planning processes
- How **two program evaluations in Guatemala and Ethiopia used WASH Building Blocks assessments**, and show where and how CARE helped to strengthen WASH systems and government capacities, and where we faced challenges

As always, this report represents only a snapshot of CARE's global Water+ work in 2023. Thank you to all of our CARE teams, partners, and participants for their tireless work to strengthen the conditions and capacities for sustainable WASH services and water resources management that protect the health, dignity, resilience, and well-being of everyone.

Happy reading!

The CARE Water+ Team

¹ Lancet Infectious Diseases, 2018; UN data

2023 Water+ Impact Snapshot: What the 2023 Numbers Tell Us

By 2030, CARE commits to work with partners around the world to support **75 million people, the majority of which are women and girls, to fulfill their right to food, water and nutrition**. CARE's intent is to directly reach at least 25 million people from 2020 to 2023. In FY23, our water portfolio directly **reached 4.3 million participants, 51% of them women, across 42 countries through 132 projects**. These were development projects (not inclusive of humanitarian response), lasting 3 years on average.

Impact by indicators

Systems strengthening is an essential part of sustainable WASH programming and includes working with government, communities, and the private sector; considering components including maintenance, access to finance, supply chain, planning and natural resources management. In FY23, 63% of Water+ projects reported working on systems strengthening or social accountability. Advocating for policy change to institutionalize WASH gains is also an important aspect of strengthening systems. 57% of Water+ projects integrated advocacy activities and goals into their work. Within the global Water+ development portfolio, 42% of projects in FY23, up from 26% in FY22 report that they “challenged or changed” existing policies and structures to encourage greater inclusion and strengthen government capacities.



Integrated Gender Approach

CARE is committed to achieving gender equality and empowerment for women and girls through our humanitarian and development programming using the Gender Equality and Women's Voice approach. **In FY23, 32% of Water+ development projects were reported as Gender Transformative and 30% as Gender Responsive** (the highest rankings). 32% were Gender Sensitive. The remaining 6% were gender neutral. While this proportion of gender transformative and gender-responsive programming is relatively high and demonstrates a commitment to structural change, it also suggests room to strengthen gender transformative WASH approaches.

Across CARE's global Water+ development portfolio:

- **39% of projects** include technical assistance or support to local organizations, demonstrating an emphasis on localization and strengthening local actors.
- **2 million people** gained access to at least basic drinking water services.
- **1.6 million people** gained access to at least basic sanitation services.
- CARE worked with **1.2 million people** to gain access to water for agriculture through irrigation or other technologies.
- **45% of projects** implemented activities with partners.
- **56% of projects** partially or fully integrated adaptations or climate change resilience activities.

The RANO WASH Program at Close-Out: Estimating Future Impact

The RANO WASH Program closed out in July 2023, after 6 years of implementation to increase rural water, sanitation, and hygiene access – including through the tumultuous time of the global COVID pandemic.

RANO WASH exceeded nearly all project targets, and was tremendously impactful. At endline in June 2023:

- More than 312,000 people gained access to safe water
- More than 700,000 people gained access to a safe household toilet
- More than 1M people live in a certified open defecation-free commune

The RANO WASH program strengthened government capacities and private sector engagement in WASH service provision, and supported private water operators to build, operate and maintain water infrastructure and market water services in contract with local government. By the end of the project, 22 water operators were supplying water to more than 300,000 customers across 40 different sites. The RANO WASH program used a systems approach to strengthen conditions and capacities within each of the WASH building blocks. At project endline, significant gains were evident:

- **Taking a systems approach led to measurable change at Ministry and Commune levels including:**
 - Increased public budget allocation and utilization for WASH at the Commune Government level:
 - Commune governments committed more than \$2M USD in investments to increase WASH services in their jurisdictions as part of their annual budgeting processes. This represents a substantial increase in public funding for WASH services in Madagascar, where the funding gap remains significant.
 - Increased private investment in WASH services:
 - Private operators and construction companies invested more than \$600,000 USD in capital towards commune-owned water infrastructure, as a contribution to future earnings as water operators
 - Strengthened planning, monitoring and coordination capacities:
 - The government at regional and commune levels improved their planning, budgeting, and monitoring capacities ensuring more efficient and sustainable WASH service delivery.
 - Madagascar's national WASH monitoring platform has played a crucial role in achieving a commendable 97-percent reporting rate from RANO WASH communes. This high reporting rate reflects the effectiveness of governance structures and monitoring systems in place.
 - Active coordination mechanisms between national, regional, and communal governments, as well as with communities and stakeholders, facilitated joint review and planning at various levels of governance.
 - Local governments able to operationalize WASH policies and strategic plans:
 - The Government of Madagascar has set ambitious targets to eliminate Open Defecation by 2025 given that as of 2023, an estimated 40% of rural households in Madagascar still practice open defecation. Thanks to stronger leadership and clear action plans at the regional and commune levels, 85 communes (over 1M people) have achieved ODF status.
 - The RANO WASH program demonstrated tremendous and sustained gains in sanitation – with more than 742,500 people gaining or improving access to a household latrine, including 315,651 people that shifted from open defecation using an improved or shared latrine.

Despite these promising outcomes, **early results in impacting WASH services were slow under a systems approach**. As the RANO WASH program laid the groundwork with national and regional government and set to changing paradigms and ways of working with private sector partners – only a few thousand people had gained

access to water services during the first years of the project. **Had access increased in a linear manner, RANO WASH would never have hit project targets, let alone exceed them.**

However, once local governments and private operators had stronger tools and capacities to provide, maintain, and market reliable services, and once households were willing and able to pay for water services – results against key project indicators accelerated and access to water services – particularly safely-managed services – increased exponentially. As private operators began to scale their services, we saw more customers opt for or upgrade to more expensive in-home water connections, and fewer customers choosing basic services. Thus, we saw a dramatic increase in access to safely managed services in the final 1.5 years of the project (2022-2023), while there was a relatively modest increase in access to basic services during that same period.

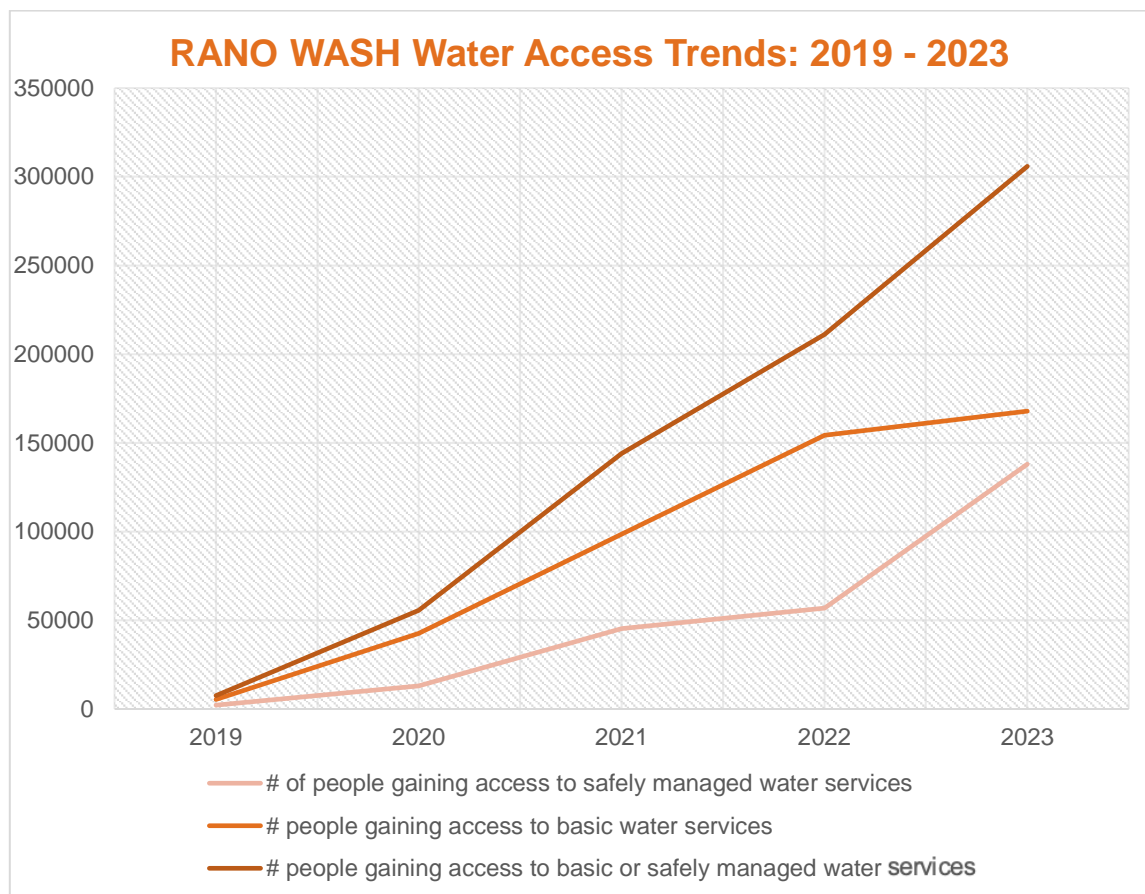


Figure 1: Growth of Water Access in years 2-6 of the RANO WASH project (2019-2023). Progress against water access indicators during the first 2 years of the project (2017-2019) were very low.

More importantly, and a more impactful indicator of the value of a systems approach, **we project that water access will continue to grow by an additional 40% in RANO WASH communes by 2030**, even without further project inputs. We attribute this promising projection of increased WASH access to:

- Public-Private water utilities continuing to expand existing services to new customers:
 - Based on technical studies, business plans of existing private operators, and operator progress against business plans to date, our projections suggest existing operators will continue to scale access to water services, with an estimated increase in water access from 312,000 people at project close-out in June 2023, to an estimated 423,000 people by 2030.
- Water Operators beginning to finance new utilities on their own:

- In the final 2 years of the RANO WASH program, three private water operators worked directly with commune governments to contract and finance three additional PPP utilities and scale water services in communes where RANO WASH was unable to. These three additional PPPs are currently serving over 13,000 people, and this organic growth of utilities demonstrates what scale could look like, and how it can be financed.
- Based on planned growth of water operators, our projections suggest that water operators will work directly with local governments to contract and finance 2-4 additional utilities in RANO WASH communes, without additional project investments. We estimate these additional utilities will provide safely managed services for an additional 8,000 – 15,000 people by 2030.
- Technical support provided to all stakeholders under RANO WASH, including government at regional and commune levels, private operators, and civil society organizations, has fostered collaboration and a shared vision for continued progress beyond the project's support.

All of this means that by 2030, an additional 120,000+ people are expected to have basic or safely managed water access in RANO WASH regions even without further project engagement. We expect that the impact of the RANO WASH project measured in 2030 will demonstrate not only sustainability of services after project-close out, but **continued growth in the years after project close-out.**

As a sector, we talk often of sustainability and impact, but we don't often model or measure the growth of services once a project ends. The RANO WASH experience begs the questions:

- How do we better understand the trajectory of change under a systems approach? What does that growth curve look like in terms of water and sanitation services over time?
- How can we look ahead to the next 5, 10, 20 years, and measure our success - and the strength of our investments – by how many people have access in later years, rather than at project end?





5-Minutes of Inspiration: How the Rwanda Isoko y'Ubuzima Team increased rural sanitation sales by 10X

Access to sanitation is key to healthy, dignified, and productive lives. That's why the Government of Rwanda has prioritized household sanitation and set ambitious targets to reach 100% coverage of basic sanitation by 2024, and 100% coverage of safely managed sanitation by 2030.

The Isoko y'Ubuzima Project is a 5-year project (2021 – 2026) funded by USAID, and implemented by a consortium that includes Water for People, IRC WASH, VEI, CARE, and African Evangelical Enterprises, in collaboration with government institutions, communities, and partners across 10 of 20 districts of Rwanda. The Isoko y'Ubuzima project contributes to the Government of Rwanda's water and sanitation strategy, with three objectives: 1) strengthening the capacity of government and private sector to scale, sustain, and improve WASH services; 2) strengthen supply of affordable WASH products and services; and 3) improve sanitation and hygiene behaviors.

Under Objective 3 of the project, CARE seeks to increase the use of safe, clean toilets by ensuring that rural households are able and motivated to improve hygiene and sanitation behaviors, and that they have affordable and desirable sanitation options and access to finance to help them upgrade and maintain their toilet over time. A key indicator is sales of sanitation products and services at community showrooms and District Sanitation Centers.

But despite a robust behavior change strategy and high reported demand for better toilet options among households, sales of sanitation products were still modest two years into the project. That is, until CARE Rwanda partnered with a sales consultant, Whitten and Roy Partnership (WRP), to help sanitation entrepreneurs and rural sales agents change their sales strategy. **In the three months after the training, latrine sales increased 10-fold, from an average of 71 sanitation products sold per month, to the current average of 737 SATO products per month!** To date, more than 39,000 sanitation products have been sold, and more than 30,000 households have improved their toilet.

How did they do it?

The team started with a robust behavior change strategy

The project created and refined a robust social behavior change and demand creation strategy that identified and appealed to key drivers, norms, and feedback mechanisms for sanitation and hygiene behaviors; strengthened and aligned messaging for sanitation and hygiene across key stakeholders and social behavior change agents; helped families to plan for and save for WASH investments; strengthened the supply and proximity of affordable and desirable hygiene and sanitation products; and strengthened capacities of sanitation entrepreneurs and sales agents.

Key activities within this strategy include:

- Identifying key drivers, norms, and feedback mechanisms for sanitation and hygiene behaviors through baseline assessments, formative research, and Human-Centered Design processes.
- Engaging district and municipal governments to ensure common priorities, goals, and key messages, and facilitate local government investment in WASH businesses and services.
- Providing additional training for established Hygiene Focal Points and Social Behavior Change (SBC) agents to ensure effective messaging.
- Supporting District Sanitation Centers (DSCs) and Community Showrooms, shops in District Centers and communities that act as information centers and storefronts for available sanitation and hygiene products. DSCs are rent-subsidized by municipal governments, and managed by entrepreneurs who make a profit on the sales of products sold in contribution to municipal sanitation goals.
- Training rural sales agents: sales agents market products from DSCs and Community Showrooms in rural communities and make a commission off of products sold.
- Engaging CARE's network of Villages Savings and Loans Associations (VSLA): VSLA members discuss and exchange information about hygiene and sanitation, hold each other accountable to jointly established social and norms that include sanitation and hygiene norms, discuss households budgets, and save money in regular savings and pay-out cycles – including for the purchase of WASH products and services. VSLAs also offer lower-interest loans for the purchase of WASH products and services.

The team identified a key challenge and adapted their approach

The team identified that many sanitation entrepreneurs and sales agents were making too few sales and insufficient income to stay motivated. This meant that, though the project might reach its sanitation goals, sanitation entrepreneurs wouldn't be able to scale their services to meet the Government of Rwanda's larger sanitation targets. The Isoko y'Ubuzima team hired a sales consultant, Whitten and Roy Partnership, to identify how to improve sales, and then immediately refined their sales strategy.

What changed?

- Strengthening sales and marketing skills of entrepreneurs and sales agents, including:
 - Training and coaching sales agents and District Sanitation Center entrepreneurs in Decision Intelligence sales techniques, which include customer-focused and problem-focused selling sales conversations.
 - Creating a sales-book to walk sales agents and households through a problem-centered conversation that framed sanitation and hygiene products as solutions to felt household needs
 - Helping sales agents talk with families about budgeting and cost of sanitation and hygiene products and services, and break costs down into comparative terms for households.
- Reducing the number of products being marketed to rural households
 - This was counter-intuitive, but reducing the focus of sales agents to a single product helped reduce decision fatigue and focused on one high-impact and desirable product (the SATO pan).

- Reduced the number of sales agents in each District to 10% of the original number
 - The original assumption was that more sales agents equal more sales. In 2023, Isoko y’Ubuzima had more than 1,900 SBC agents who doubled as sales agents working across 10 districts. This contributed to disjointed messaging, too much oversight for DSCs, and too limited a sales territory for sales agents to maintain a viable business. WRP helped to identify sales agents with the greatest potential and focused on strengthening their capacities. The team reduced the number of sales agents from more than 150 in each district to 15.
- Emphasized Door-to-door sales and knocking on every door:
 - Before adaptation of the strategy, all SBC agents were responsible for selling to the general population, primarily focusing on mass communication, community meetings, group mobilization, and limited household visits. Now, all 150 trained sales agents conduct door-to-door sales, talking families through a problem-centered sales conversation, and covering each village systematically, starting from their own.
 - Sales agents ensure they conduct door-to-door visits without skipping any household, and engage with both partners in the household, promoting joint decision-making in sanitation investment.

As a result of these changes, nearly 4,500 SATO-brand sanitation products have been sold between Oct. 18, 2023 – March 24, 2024, roughly 10X the pace of previous sales.

What did we learn?

- **Sales and marketing are critical skills.** Entrepreneurs are often motivated, but if they don’t have the skills to talk with customers about their needs, they aren’t necessarily successful. There are many challenges to market-based sanitation approaches, and while we often focus on strengthening entrepreneurs’ broader business skills, we often don’t focus enough on strengthening marketing and sales skills.
- **Using a problem-centered sales approach helps increase not just toilet sales, but also other sanitation and hygiene products** that meet the specific needs of a diversity of customers and help advance inclusive sanitation. The team’s updated sales approach increased sales of SATO pans for improved toilets, but also sales of SATO stools for people with disabilities or illness, the elderly, and pregnant women.
- **Donation of products and inconsistent pricing of products can negatively affect market-based sanitation efforts.** When Isoko y’Ubuzima received a donation of SATO products, they were distributed across the supply chain from DSC to SBC agents before DQ sales training. This led to a disruption in pricing and inconsistent pricing of products, which still affects sales conversations.
- **Strengthening sanitation sales skills is good for women.** Among the top 30 best-performing sales agents (of 150), 25 are women. Women in particular see this as a valuable income generating opportunity in an employment market often dominated by men.
- **Adaptation is key.** Identifying gaps in the team’s strategy, seeking the right expertise, and then adapting recommendations quickly to revise their strategy was critical. This required the team to take a learning and adaptive approach, and not cling to initial assumptions or strategies that weren’t working.



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The Role of Village Savings and Loans Associations in Water+ Programs

Introduction

Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs) have emerged as powerful vehicles for transformative change, particularly in addressing pressing WASH issues such as water scarcity, lack of investment for WASH improvements, and a need for improved hygiene practices. Three case studies highlight the significant impact of VSLAs in diverse contexts of CARE's Water+ programming, showcasing their ability to catalyze positive changes at the local level while supplementing larger goals for WASH systems strengthening. From financing Water Smart Agriculture (WaSA) practices in Ghana to bolstering resilience and WASH practices in Ethiopia, VSLAs have proven instrumental in driving sustainability and ownership in WASH interventions. These case studies underscore the multifaceted benefits of VSLAs beyond economic empowerment, shedding light on their pivotal role in fostering gender equality, community engagement, and addressing persistent challenges in the WASH sector.

How working with VSLAs influenced RANO WASH Outcomes

The RANO WASH program conducted an assessment in 2022 to understand how VSLA groups were influencing the provision and purchase of WASH products and services. The assessment showed that savings groups help members purchase WASH products and services and enable small WASH entrepreneurs (such as latrine builders and seamstresses of reusable sanitary pads) to access small loans to advance their businesses. The RANO WASH program in Madagascar piloted the use of a specific WASH fund within VSLAs, in which members could access no-interest 3-month loans for the purchase of WASH products. Groups reported that this loan mechanism helped

multiple members to purchase WASH products and services. Over the course of the RANO WASH project, VSLAs provided more than 7,700 WASH loans to members worth a total of nearly \$170,000 USD².

This separate WASH fund was created as few members took loans from the main VSLA fund for the purchase of WASH products and services. This is expected and aligned with larger literature on inclusive finance, as families have expressed reluctance to take loans for non-revenue-generating activities. There may also be a powerful indirect link between VSLA membership and adoption of WASH services. Even households that did not take a loan to purchase WASH products and services reported higher investment in WASH. Interviews suggest that this is partly due to a larger social accountability reinforced by VSLA among members and within the broader community, but also that being members of VSLA makes them more confident to purchase WASH products and services even without taking a loan specifically for this purpose.

In RANO WASH, small entrepreneurs account for most use of credit/loans related to WASH, using credit to invest in their WASH businesses. Loans to latrine masons and seamstresses accounted for more than 56% of all VSLA loans given for WASH-related activities. VSLAs act as platforms for information exchange and behavior change. For example, a survey of VSLA and non-VSLA members in RANO WASH demonstrated VSLA members have different WASH habits than non-VSLA members (but primarily seen in hand-hygiene!):

- 88% of VSLA members have handwashing stations compared to only 56% of non-VSLA members
- VSLA members are more likely to use disposable sanitary napkins than non-VSLA members

The RANO WASH experience in piloting a separate fund for WASH investment reveals that VSLA influence on member purchase of WASH products and services is both directly and indirectly related to accessibility of loans.

Working with VSLAs to Finance Water Smart Agriculture in Ghana

CARE, with funding from the Shockwave Foundation, embarked on a pilot program in northern Ghana between December 2020 and March 2022, aimed at encouraging small-scale farmers to adopt Water Smart Agriculture (WaSA) practices. This initiative sought to address challenges related to high labor input and upfront costs through a revolving conservation fund model. Assessments conducted in October and November 2021, and later in July and August 2022, evaluated the sustainability of the conservation fund within VSLAs and semi-arid communities in the Garu and Tempene districts in Northern Ghana and its impact on agricultural practices.



The conservation fund, offered to VSLA members at a 10% interest rate, provided financial support for adopting WaSA practices. Unlike the main VSLA fund, which is often limited in availability and shared during the rainy season, the conservation fund proved more flexible for agricultural investments. Key findings revealed that members utilized the fund for various purposes, such as purchasing drought-tolerant seeds and hiring labor for planting and soil improvement. Importantly, no defaults were recorded, and funds saw growth due to interest repayments, attributed to increased yields and incomes resulting from WaSA practices.

Notable benefits observed included enhanced soil fertility and increased moisture retention, in addition to advantages for women farmers who could now plant earlier with the aid of additional resources, such as financing

² RANO WASH Final Report, June 2023: <https://www.globalwaters.org/resources/assets/rano-wash-final-report-2017-2023>

for hiring bullocks. Challenges persisted, including limited access to bullocks and certified seeds in some areas, highlighting areas for improvement. This pilot also benefited from pre-existing knowledge of WaSA practices and an understanding of its benefits derived from training in previous CARE programs in the area. Local officials and agriculture extension officers conducted WaSA refresher trainings with the VSLAs to overcome any existing knowledge barriers that could hinder the adoption of WaSA once resources became available. Despite its small scale, the conservation fund model showed promise in overcoming barriers to WaSA adoption, emphasizing the need for further testing and scaling across diverse contexts and regions. The conservation fund pilot is currently in its second phase, expanding to a new set of VSLAs in Northern Ghana.

Looking Beyond the Economic Benefits for VSLAs in WASH: Ethiopia

With financial backing from the Austrian Development Agency (ADA), CARE implemented the SWEEP project (2017-2021) and is currently executing the IWRA project (2021-2023) in the East and West Belessa districts of the Amhara region, Ethiopia. These initiatives aimed to bolster the resilience of chronically food-insecure households, utilizing water as a key intervention point. Partnering with 334 VSLA groups and their 7,702 women members, the projects focused on improving WASH access while empowering women, girls, and people with disabilities.

This study, conducted within the East and West Belessa districts, sought to evaluate the broader impacts of VSLA participation beyond economic benefits, specifically examining its influence on gender norms and its role in promoting behavioral changes related to health and sanitation. Information was gathered from eight VSLA groups comprising 157 female members. Key informant interviews were conducted with village agents and government officials, supplemented by personal/group testimonies and data from various project evaluations and reports. Despite security concerns stemming from regional conflicts, the research managed to proceed, yielding clear insights into the project's outcomes.

The study revealed that VSLAs have had a profound impact on the adoption of WASH practices among women, leading to transformative changes in their lives. By challenging traditional gender roles and providing a platform for women's empowerment, VSLAs have increased women's decision-making power within their households and communities. Women's involvement in VSLAs has led to a shift in gender-based division of labor, with spouses sharing duties such as water fetching and childcare. VSLAs have facilitated conflict resolution and reduced harmful traditional practices like early marriage through open discussions and mutual support among members.

Furthermore, VSLA participation has resulted in significant improvements in health and sanitation practices. Regular discussions within VSLAs have enhanced members' understanding of hygiene and sanitation, leading to changes in behavior such as adhering to handwashing practices and maintaining cleanliness in cooking materials and clothes. Women have also benefited from initiatives like water filtration kits and energy-saving stoves promoted through VSLAs, resulting in a reduction in waterborne diseases and smoke-related illnesses. Additionally, VSLA members have taken proactive steps to improve sanitation by installing private latrines, contributing to "open defecation free" areas without direct support from the project.

Overall, VSLAs in the SWEEP and IWRA projects in Ethiopia have not only empowered women to take on leadership roles and fostered collaboration and collective responsibility but have also played a pivotal role in promoting positive WASH practices. Through their active engagement in VSLAs, women have become agents of change, influencing wider social norms and practices related to water, sanitation, and hygiene.

Key Findings of the Role of VSLAs in Water+ Programs

The case studies demonstrate important lessons about how VSLAs can be powerful models for decentralized financing for WASH and promoting water security while providing indirect benefits for social solidarity and gender equality:

- VSLAs are critical tools for addressing WASH challenges such as water scarcity, insufficient investment in WASH improvements, and the need for enhanced hygiene practices.
- VSLA membership correlates with higher adoption of WASH services, even among households that did not take loans, indicating the influence of social accountability and confidence among members.
- Women's involvement in VSLAs led to transformative changes in their lives, increased decision-making power within households and communities, and improvements in health and sanitation practices.
- VSLAs facilitated conflict resolution, reduced harmful traditional practices, and promoted the installation of private latrines, contributing to open defecation-free areas.
- Having funds separate from the main VSLA funds creates an important mechanism for collectively financing WASH services and products, in addition to Water Smart Agriculture practices.
- Overall, VSLAs have emerged as catalysts for sustainable development, empowering women as agents of change and influencing broader social norms related to water, sanitation, and hygiene.

As these initiatives continue to evolve and expand, evidence from CARE's programming demonstrates that VSLAs will remain indispensable agents of change, driving inclusive and resilient development pathways for sustainable WASH improvements across diverse contexts.



Discussions with VSLA groups in Ethiopia
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Creating a Tool to Measure Change in Harmful Social Norms, a case of Social Analysis and Action in Afia WASH, CARE South Sudan

OVERVIEW The USAID Afia WASH program currently works in five counties of South Sudan to achieve the following three objectives: 1) Strengthening sub-national and private WASH sector coordination 2) Expand inclusive and resilient WASH service delivery 3) Promote key WASH behaviors in communities and address harmful gender norms. Social Analysis and Action (SAA) is one of the approaches Afia WASH uses to change expectations of gender roles (particularly for WASH) and address harmful gender norms. SAA uses dialogues and exercises with a diverse group of people from one community – and puts forth scenarios and topics for the group to discuss. Through reflection on reasons for certain gender roles and expectations – the SAA group members discuss solutions to any issues they themselves identify as problems and put together an action plan on how to make changes in their relationships or in their community.

Engaging Men & Boys

As part of implementing a strategy on Prevention of Gender Based Violence, Afia WASH conducts the “Engaging Men and Boys (EMB)” approach in Akobo County. The dialogue sessions target two women’s groups and two men’s groups, all from the same community. EMB uses scenarios and facilitates discussion on gender and social norms that affect WASH service delivery.

Setting Indicators for Measuring Social Norms Change

In September 2022, CARE led a workshop with Afia WASH staff on Outcome Mapping. This five-day workshop involved staff from all aspects of the project, including staff not only from gender and behavior change, but also those involved in infrastructure, governance and monitoring. The workshop brought together the expertise and experience of team members to develop outcomes for “desired” social norms change. Staff considered their own biases, traditions within communities they work and live, along with the findings from

the baseline studies, to develop specific indicators of behaviors that they would “Expect, Like and Love” to see (change) as a result of the Afia WASH program. For example, staff discussed that they would “Expect” a result of their programming to lead to more women in WASH committees; they would “Like” to see women participate more fully and they would “Love” to see women in leadership roles.

Tool Development

As a result of the workshop, a Gender expert from CARE organized each of the proposed indicators into six domains: 1) Gender division of labor and work-sharing, 2) Intra-household negotiation and decision-making, 3) Control of income and productive assets / resources, 4) Women’s leadership and self-confidence, 5) Respect and Open communication at household level and 6) Intimate Partner Violence and Peace in the home. Next, a pilot “SAA Outcome Mapping Measuring Tool” was developed to measure communities’ perceptions of change within each of these domains. A selection “Expect, Like, Love” to see” indicators from each of the six domains were formed into “statements” that participants could either agree or disagree with. The idea was to quantify the social norms change – a specifically qualitative intervention revolving around opinions, experiences, expectations and discussions – in a more quantitative way where change can be seen and measured over time.

Piloting in Wau

In January 2024, two Afia WASH staff went to Wau to pilot the SAA Outcome Mapping Measurement Tool in two different communities, Abshaka and Biringi. In each community the facilitators split the SAA group into men and women. A facilitator sat with the women (or men) and read each statement out loud. Participants raised their hand if they agree with the statement, (and did not raise their hand if they do not agree). The facilitator marks how many people agree with each statement. After this “quantitative” portion of the tool the facilitator encourages discussion through six open-ended questions. Next, the tool was piloted in the same community with “non-SAA” community members (men and women also separate). This was done to see if there were differences

in the way SAA and non-SAA members agreed or disagreed with the statements. For non-SAA members the exercise took just 20 minutes, whereas the SAA groups took over 45 minutes – due to the rich and detailed discussion on personal, household and social changes experienced, and remaining challenges. After piloting with the four groups the Afia WASH staff revised the tool and the phrasing of the statements for easier translation.

Results from Wau pilot

The SAA group in Abshaka has met 5 times over 5 months. The SAA members perceive positive change in gender norms within each of the six domains, especially compared to responses from the non-SAA community members. In the SAA groups men and women both “agreed” with statements that indicated more “progress” for gender equality, as compared to people in non-SAA groups. For example, more SAA group members agreed with the statement “Women and men have improved relationships due to better communication” than in non-SAA groups. Across the groups, there were many interesting comments noted during the discussions after the quantitative portion of the tool that captured additional anecdotes of change in gender norms and practices.



SAA group	Quote
Men	I collect two big jerrycans of water every day to support my family. This is because we drink from the protected well which is a one-hour walk from my home.
	I take responsibility for bringing my sick children to the hospital with my wife.
	In my house, the boys sweep the compound and girls wash utensils or vice versa – we all share in household chores equally.
	I used to fight my wife all the time. Whenever she delays at the water point when she goes to the market when the food is cold. However, after attending SAA sessions, I have stopped beating my wife.
Women	I moved out of the home because my husband never helped with household chores. Now he is appreciative of all that I do and he also helps.
	It is now normal for men to help us with water collection and even cleaning and bathing the children.

Next steps for measuring social norms change

During piloting, the SAA Outcome Mapping Measurement Tool was preliminarily used to compare potential differences in the opinions and experiences of community members who *are* and *are not* in SAA groups. In future settings the tool will be primarily employed for baseline, midline and endline comparisons of social norms change over time within the same SAA group, before, during and after the Social Analysis and Action dialogues.

Afia WASH is a project funded by USAID and led by DT Global Inc, in collaboration with CARE and other partners. The project period is 2021-2026.

Addressing Water Scarcity in Zambia Through Local Adaptation Planning

Introduction

The impact of climate change on water resources is profound and far-reaching, exacerbating existing socioeconomic challenges and threatening the availability and quality of water worldwide. Climate change is already increasing the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events, disrupting water availability and distribution. According to UNICEF, 74% of natural disasters between 2001 and 2018 were water-related, including droughts and floods. Temperatures in Zambia's Southern Province have warmed by 1.3°C since 1960 and the annual rainfall has decreased by 1.9 mm per decade since 1960. Southern Province is historically drier than other regions of Zambia and more prone to the effects of climate change, such as unpredictable rainfall patterns and flash floods that have become more pronounced and significantly increased food insecurity. Changes in precipitation patterns impact agriculture, affecting food security and livelihoods for millions of people globally.

CARE's tool for Climate Vulnerability and Capacity Analysis (CVCA) helps gather community-level information along with broader-level information (territorial, regional, national) to gain a locally specific understanding of vulnerability to climate change and existing resilience capacities, paying particular attention to issues around gender and vulnerable groups, governance and ecosystem. Across two districts in Zambia's Southern Province, CARE recently piloted a two-year Locally-led Adaptation Program (LLAP) that integrated the CVCA with a broader adaptation planning process to document the impacts of climate change on water quality, quantity and access and pilot using community-level processes to address impacts.

CVCA Process

From 2021-22, the LLAP worked in the Kalomo and Zimba districts in Southern Province to address the widespread climate vulnerability facing rural communities.

The CVCA exercise comprised three main objectives:

- Facilitate a participatory multi-stakeholder dialogue process in target districts and communities, laying the groundwork for adaptation planning.
- Enhance the capacity of CARE staff and local partners to assess and understand climate vulnerabilities.
- Through data collection, analysis, and documentation, document insights into climate vulnerabilities, risks, and capacities with a focus on qualitative information and factors affecting decision-making, particularly among women.

In each of the four CVCA exercises, roughly 150 community members were divided into groups based on age and gender, and facilitators generated discussion on climate risks and capacities using Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) tools, such as seasonal calendars, resources mapping, and climate impact chains. Facilitators were drawn from various partners, including local government agencies, local and international NGOs such as Nutri-Aid Trust and the World Wildlife Fund, and community representatives. Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were used to better understand wealth profiles in the community, livelihood activities, and gender roles. Results were compiled into structured templates to organize findings thematically aiding in the assessment of critical resources, hazards, and climate-related information.

CVCA Findings

Below is a summary of the CVCA findings from Katundulu zone in Kalomo district, categorized into hazards, impacts, and capacities, with special emphasis given to the water-related findings.

Hazards

Erratic Rainfall, Droughts, Flooding

Katundulu has experienced significant changes in rainfall patterns, with community members reporting that rains now start in November and continue into April, unlike in previous years when the rainfall used to start around mid-October and end in May. In addition, droughts have become more pronounced, lasting longer with a higher intensity as temperatures have increased. Flash flooding has been experienced in more recent years as well, which is exacerbated by drier soils and increased deforestation that reduce the ability for the soil to absorb moisture, thereby increasing runoff from flooding.

Perceived Impacts

Livelihoods

Drought and floods have negatively affected the livelihoods of the people in Katundulu. Drought has led to low crop yields, a decline in soil fertility, and limited and less productive grazing for livestock. Pasture and foraging land have dried up, leading to an increase in livestock death and disease. Lower yields and livestock death and disease have reduced incomes in Katundulu, which has created a negative feedback loop as community members report having less available money to vaccinate their livestock.

Gender inequality

The impacts of drought, flooding, and erratic rainfall are borne disproportionately by women in Katundulu due to restrictions on land and cattle ownership and gendered expectations to fulfil domestic duties such as collecting water, feeding families, and caring for children. Women have reported dry boreholes and nearby streams, forcing them walk longer distances to collect water. Even though women bear the burden of water collection, the FGD of older residents reported that women have little decision-making power over the control of water resources, as evidenced by a committee in charge of the local dam with majority male members.

Water scarcity

Community members in all FGDs reported increased water scarcity and degraded water infrastructure, including the drilling of dry boreholes. Local dams were also reported to be less effective due to the drying of rivers, decreased water volume, and reductions in the capacity of dams due to the build-up of silt and sediment from soil erosion. While some residents in the FGD of younger women reported being able to use shallow wells for gardening, others reported dried shallow wells, limiting their water access.

Poverty

Droughts and floods have contributed to the loss of income, poverty, and homelessness in Katundulu. Community members noted that they had been experiencing lower crop yields each season for at least the last five years as droughts and flooding degraded soil quality, increased soil erosion, reduced water for irrigation, and washed away crops. As a result, people's ability to adapt and recover has continued to reduce.

Deforestation and biodiversity loss

Drought has contributed to deforestation and the drying of streams and rivers. FGD participants noted that one of the nearby streams in the catchment area, which used to run throughout the year, now flows only until June. This has been attributed to deforestation for charcoal production around its source waters near an upstream settlement. Katundulu residents also report that deforestation is contributing to increased flooding, greater soil erosion and the loss of indigenous fruit trees that community members have relied on for food and income.

Health and Nutrition

Hunger, food insecurity, and malnutrition have become frequent issues in Katundulu due to the effects of climate hazards. Community members noted that there have been regular shortages of food from December to February due to poor harvests. Water-borne diseases in Katundulu have also increased during flash flooding events and

there is an overall decline in water quality and quantity. The lack of nearby health facilities further exacerbates health crises in Katundulu as community members must travel long distances to the nearest health clinic, which is often complicated even further as roads are degraded or made impassable by flooding.

Local Adaptation Planning

Six months after the CVCA was conducted, CARE and partners visited the same communities to validate the CVCA findings and initiate a process to co-develop Local Adaptation Plans where communities developed and prioritized immediate actions to mitigate the climate impacts detailed in the CVCA.

The table below highlights the adaptation activities identified in the Katundulu and Kalonda Local Adaptation Plans, along with the current status of implementation for each activity.

Table 1. Local Adaptation Plans and status, Katundulu and Kalonda, Zambia, March, 2023

Strategy	Zone	Activities	Actions
Tree planting	Katundulu and Kalonda	Forest restoration and alternative sources of livelihood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approximately 1,200 fruit tree seedlings • Need water pumps to supply the seedlings with enough water
Improvement in veterinary services	Kalonda	Reduction of animal diseases and infection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Construction of dip tank
Savings groups	Katundulu	To start up a business using farmer field and business schools (FFBS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training 11 FFBS in savings and formation of savings groups
Improvement in animal feed	Kalonda and Katundulu	Improvement of fodder and grazing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training farmers in sowing and distribution of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Rhodes grass ○ Velvet beans ○ Cowpeas ○ Sunhemp ○ Panicum

Success and Challenges

While water scarcity was one of the most prevalent challenges drawn out in the CVCA, the actions prioritized in the Local Adaptation Plans were primarily livelihoods focused and achievable in the short-term. Some of these interventions, such as native tree planting, can help improve water resources by reducing soil erosion and reforesting riparian areas. Yet more infrastructure-focused water resource solutions, such as improved dams and boreholes, were largely absent from the Local Adaptation Plans. This contrast between the immediacy of water scarcity challenge and the interventions prioritized in the Local Adaptations Plans illustrates some of the challenges in adaptation planning. The LLAP only spanned two years, resulting in the prioritization of actions that could be resourced in the short term. The CVCA and Local Adaptation Plans were community-led with facilitation and financing support from CARE and partners that was only sufficient to support adaptation actions and activities that could be achieved at the farm level. However, the close relationships cultivated with local government partners have yielded early indications that long-term water investments are in progress. The local water authority was included in conversations during the Local Adaptation Planning process, and tapped as a partner to help facilitate improvements in water infrastructure that were beyond the scope of community-level action. CARE has reviewed plans by local authorities for the construction of larger and improved dams to help with rainwater capture and storage to better utilize water resources during flash floods for the dry season.

However, some of these plans were already in place, so investments in WASH infrastructure cannot be wholly attributed to the CVCA and Local Adaptation Planning processes. CARE is also working with communities to better link them to Zambia’s community development funds that could finance boreholes and more localized interventions for rainwater capture and storage.

Conclusion

Worldwide, water resource challenges are some of the most immediate and persistent climate impacts, and the CVCA processes revealed this global trend to hold true in communities in Zambia’s Southern Province. Communities reported that drought, flash floods, and rainwater variability are impacting livelihoods, women’s agency and access to resources, health and nutrition, and infrastructure, and exacerbating environmental challenges of soil erosion and deforestation. The CVCA process was useful in drawing out localized experiences of climate hazards and impacts and informed the creation of Local Adaptation Plans that detailed specific interventions to address these impacts. While some interventions, such as native tree planting and climate-smart agriculture, will likely improve water resource challenges, there was still a discrepancy in the longer-term nature of climate-related water issues and the short-term solutions detailed in the Local Adaptation Plans. Future CARE climate risk analysis and adaptation planning processes should plan for a longer timeline of implementation to account for more systemic water resource challenges and focus on using partnerships with local and national partners to plan for strategies that mitigate climate-related water impacts from the household to institutional levels.



Women in Zambia preparing a seasonal calendar during a CVCA exercise
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An Evaluation of CARE Guatemala's Agua+ Program and Impacts: 2016 – 2022

AGUA+ Overview

AGUA+, spearheaded by CARE Guatemala and supported by the KIES Foundation, is a vital initiative in CARE's broader WASH Systems Strengthening portfolio. Since 2016, CARE, through the AGUA+ Program, has focused – not on construction or funding of WASH infrastructure – but on strengthening the technical capabilities of WASH municipal governments and service providers, facilitating platforms for constructive dialogue on water governance, and implementing gender-responsive strategies, which has demonstrably improved access to WASH services in the department of San Marcos, and contributed to advocacy at the national level in alliance with local and international WASH networks. Building on lessons learned over many years in collaboration with the Municipality of Tacaná, CARE and partners supported additional municipalities to establish and strengthen Municipal Water and Sanitation Offices (OMAS) – from about **50 before 2016 to about 172 in 2023**.

Understanding impacts of the AGUA+ program since 2016 helps us learn how CARE can best support and channel funding to strengthen WASH systems, and specifically institutional capacities to deliver WASH services. Because of AGUA+'s importance to WASH programming in Guatemala and across the CARE confederation, CARE conducted an evaluation and **benchmark against the WASH Systems Strengthening Building Blocks** to capture insights on its process, factors towards sustainability of its outcomes, and recommendations for how AGUA+'s progress can be scaled and inform CARE's broader models and approaches.

AGUA+ Evaluation Process and Methodology

The evaluation of the AGUA+ Project focuses on three primary objectives:

1. Identify and document the impact of project actions on strengthening the WASH system in specific municipalities within the San Marcos department and at the national level.
2. Describe lessons learned and best practices, as expressed by water service technicians, community leaders, and institutional representatives involved with the program directly or indirectly.

The evaluation process was conducted within the municipalities of Tacaná, San Antonio Sacatepéquez, San Rafael Pie de la Cuesta, El Tumbador, and El Quetzal, involving over 30 stakeholders at both local and national levels. Evaluation criteria encompassed relevance, impact, effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability, ensuring a comprehensive assessment of the project's outcomes. Additionally, CARE's six pathways of impact at scale approach and Agenda for Change's key components for WASH system strengthening provided frameworks for analysis.

The evaluation used in-depth interviews and focus group discussions for data collection. The evaluation further encompassed a comprehensive review of primary documentation from different AGUA+ Project phases, including baselines, evaluations, and methodological tools, supplemented by secondary sources from various stakeholders. Triangulation and validation mechanisms ensured the integrity and reliability of the data.

Evaluation Findings

Based on qualitative data collected from 29 government and community representatives and 10 representatives from the National WASH Network (RASGUA), the Agenda for Change and CARE (current and former staff), AGUA+ contributed to strengthening the WASH system in six key ways.

1. WASH Capacity Building:

The strengthening efforts resulted in notable improvements in water and sanitation management and services, as reported by 80% of participants. Communities experienced enhanced quality of life through reliable and improved services and reduced diarrheal diseases.

Elvira Santizo, member of Cantón Tonalá de Tacaná, commented: “In Tonalá, what CARE has done is very supportive because I remember before there was no water pipe, no water jet, we used to carry water from the big well, and between several of us we carried the water. The project helped us with materials, training, and to improve the quality of the water we drink.” Amílcar Vásquez from the El Paraíso community in the municipality of El Quetzal, also indicated: “...CARE came and provided us with training and support, so we improved water quality and coverage in our community.”



2. Development and Systematization of WASH Models and Methodologies:

Critical methodologies and models were co-developed with other NGOs and the government, with a specific lens on gender and inclusion within the entire process and specifically within promotion of behavioral changes and improving hygiene practices. Stakeholder testimonies underscored the transformative impact of these interventions on service provision, community behavior and overall confidence and involvement of women.

3. Exchanges and Dialogue Spaces:

Exchange visits between technical units fostered enhanced service provision and management practices, improving strategic planning and coordination for sustainable service delivery. Additionally, CARE facilitated quarterly dialogue spaces between stakeholders. These meetings involved various municipal offices including rural development, women’s rights and water and sanitation, improving water governance with collaborative problem-solving and effective resource management. CARE no longer facilitates these dialogues but they have been adopted by the local government as an essential tool to improve efficiency and communication.

“There is better communication and coordination of local actors through the technical water roundtables,” as indicated by Delmar Pérez, Water and Sanitation Technician of OMAS Tacaná. Likewise, a member of the community WASH committee of San Ramón, in the municipality of San Antonio Sacatepéquez, commented: “We at least meet every month both as the current board and the former board to inform the Assembly about the state of the water system.”

4. Development of Tools:

The development of comprehensive and yet simple and accessible tools enhanced service providers’ capabilities, for both local partners and municipal agencies resulting in improved service quality and quantity and enhanced monitoring and maintenance practices. The tools, including local agreements and protocols, have enabled easier

continuity when there is a change in personnel working in the rural WASH sector.

Eduardo Cardona, member of the Santa Rita Water and Sanitation Committee in the municipality of San Antonio, commented: “When there is a change of authorities, the two groups go to the springs to teach how the work plan will continue. In our case, we are going to teach the new ones how to chlorinate the water, how much chlorine can be used, and then take water samples, up to a certain time, because if too much chlorine is used, people start to complain that the water tastes bad, so there must be a measure so that it is not too much.”

5. Partnership for Advocacy:

The National WASH Network (RASGUA) and Agenda for Change partners meet regularly to align and reinforce advocacy efforts and strategic actions. The strong alliances for WASH in Guatemala have helped institutionalize Municipal WASH Offices (OMAS) and has also underscored the importance of specific approaches to successful behavior change and gender integration in WASH activities.

Haroldo Galindo, a member of RASGUA, said that “the project’s support has been key, since we were able to jointly build an advocacy strategy for updating the sector’s national policy; we have also been able to build a model for integrated intervention in water, sanitation and hygiene, and the creation of a road map for the institutionalization of the WSSOs has also been important. For example, as part of the advocacy process for the updating of the sector’s national policy, meetings were held with the Ministry of Health and in their agenda they prioritized the updating of this policy.”

6. Implementation of Conservation and Restoration Works in Water Recharge Areas:









Capacity building and community-led initiatives in water recharge areas promoted conservation and protection efforts, ensuring sustained water availability for future generations and enhancing community resilience and well-being. Stakeholder testimonies highlighted the positive impacts on water quality, environmental conservation, and community empowerment.

Relevance

This evaluation provides a useful model for how other programs can better understand their sustainability, limitations and best practices. CARE Guatemala plans to share results and recommendations with other NGOs and government representatives through the RASGUA.



Table 2. Summary of AGUA+ contributions to WASH Systems Strengthening in Guatemala, organized by the WASH Building Blocks (Agenda for Change), 2016-2022.

 <p>Institutional arrangements and coordination</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Established and institutionalized Municipal Water and Sanitation offices (OMAS) across the country, boosting municipal leadership in rural WASH service provision. Clarified roles, responsibilities, and coordination among municipal government actors (technical units & agencies), to provide quality services and support community organizations. Dialogue spaces adopted by municipal government. 	 <p>Finance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Municipal governments funds repair and maintenance of community water system. Drafted guidelines for managing loans to repair community drinking water systems. Developed practical tools for municipalities to calculate water service costs and service fees. Developed digital tools to facilitate information flow between municipal and community levels, promoting evidence-based decision-making.
 <p>Service delivery infrastructure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Created tools for data capture and visualization of water and sanitation diagnostic information, facilitating inventory management for technical units. Conducted capacity building activities such as diploma courses, experience exchanges, and specific consultancies to train personnel in monitoring actions and resource conservation. 	 <p>Regulation and accountability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developed tool for efficient water service collection, ensuring project sustainability and financial oversight. Enhanced public involvement in WASH service management through community dialogues. Bolstered service authorities' capacities to meet regulatory mandates. Clarified roles and enhanced cooperation between state and non-state actors.
 <p>Monitoring</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> WASH personnel received targeted training to enhance follow-up and monitoring skills. Conducted water quality studies in collaboration with universities to ensure informed decision-making for follow-up measures. Developed an information system for water and sanitation service provision to enhance sector monitoring frameworks and strategic coordination. Gender and ethnicity included in monitoring forms for improved understanding of disparities. 	 <p>Water resources management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Helped Municipal Technical Units to update municipal and community water resource databases. Assistance to develop integrated water resource management plans at the local level. Promotion of water resource registration and monitoring occurred at departmental, municipal, and community levels, including activities and protocols for ongoing protection and restoration of water recharge areas.
 <p>Planning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhanced national WASH sector strategic planning, facilitating the development of a national WASH sector policy and improving municipal compliance with annual plans and budget commitments. Gender analysis and action plans at the municipal level contributed to narrowing the gap in representation and decision-making between women and men in the WASH sector. 	 <p>Adaptation and learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Established municipal dialogue spaces to promote learning among diverse actors. Implemented certification and diploma courses for peer-to-peer learning, refresher training, and professional development of municipal technical personnel. The AGUA+ Project strategy was adaptive and responsive to changing stakeholder needs, exemplified in pivoting agendas and activities during the pandemic.

Measuring CARE's influence on WASH Systems Change in the Central Gondar Zone through the IWRA Project, Ethiopia

Background

In Ethiopia, the challenge of accessing improved water supply has intensified due to escalating water demand, depleting aquifers, and increasing risk of extreme weather events. Despite efforts to transform and sustain water supply systems in collaboration with government, rural communities in Ethiopia face restricted access due to recurrent system failures, inadequate scheme management, a lack of operational and maintenance services, the absence of local institutions overseeing schemes, and a deficit in community ownership. The severity of this issue is most pronounced in drought-prone areas like the East and West Belessa woredas of Ethiopia.

A 2018 water inventory assessment was undertaken by the government with CARE's support and revealed a critical situation, with 60% of schemes in Belessa non-functional. Contributing factors included poor scheme management, subpar construction quality, natural hazards, and water shortages. To address these challenges and enhance WASH services in East and West Belessa, CARE, with financial support from the Austrian Development Agency (ADA), implemented the SWEEP (water for food Security, Women's Empowerment and Environmental Protection) project from November 2017 to February 2021 and the IWRA (Improved WASH Systems and Resiliency in Amhara) project from December 2021 to December 2023. The IWRA project's overarching objective was to enhance the resilience of chronically food-insecure households.

At the end of the project CARE conducted a review to explore the contributions of the SWEEP and IWRA projects towards WASH system strengthening in Belessa. To do so, CARE adapted IRC's WASH systems building blocks assessment to examine institutional, social, environmental, technical, financial, and planning and monitoring factors. This brief provides a snapshot of the status of WASH building blocks in East and West Belessa in December, 2023, and a summary of feedback by local government on the IWRA project's contributions to strengthening WASH systems at the local level.

Methods

The study was conducted in East and West Belessa woredas within the Central Gondar zone of the Amhara regional state. Primary data collection involved local government authorities conducting a four-point scale assessment (categorized as weak, moderate, strong, and very strong) of both the local WASH system, and of the IWRA project's contribution to strengthening WASH systems in East and West Belessa woredas. A total of 27 experts participated in the analysis and review. Of these experts, 8 were female, and they represented the woreda and zone water offices.

These experts exhibited an average of 6 years of working experience, ranging from 1 to 13 years in the water sector. Their academic qualifications included Bachelor of Science (65%), Master of Science (12%), and diploma (23%), covering diverse fields such as electromechanical engineering, geology, water resources administration, planning and monitoring, water technology, and surveying. Additionally, four Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and five key informant interviews were conducted with representatives from zone and woreda water sector offices.

Key Findings

The table below depicts results of the WASH Building Blocks assessment and reflection conducted with woreda government officials in East and West Belessa. The Systems Score depicts the current strength of the WASH system in East and West Belessa based on established criteria, ranging from 0-4 where 0 is weak and 4 is very strong. The third column depicts the woreda government's perception/feedback on the impact of CARE's support to woreda governments and the final column summarizes recommendations from woreda government staff.

Table 3. Summarized assessment of 27 government officials, by WASH Building Block, East and West Belessa woreda, 2023.

WASH Building Block	Systems Score (0-4)	CARE Support to Woreda Government in this Building Block	Recommendations and Next Steps
Institutional Support and Coordination	3.3 (Strong)	Fortified existing structures, policies & coordination at woreda and zone levels across stakeholders; strengthened capacities of service authorities through training and workshops.	Need to reinforce monitoring capacities and systems and strengthen relationships between woreda government and private sector partners.
Gender and Social Condition	3.6 (Very strong)	Facilitated Social Analysis and Action tool, VLSA, Community Score Card: facilitated regular community review and reflection of gender and social norms, enhanced participation of all groups at stages of design. 67% of waterpoints are managed by women in leadership positions.	Need to continue monitoring outcomes and needs associated with the relevant tools, ability for women to meaningfully participate in leadership positions, and coordination with government partners in supporting the integration of the tools and participation of community members.
Environment and Water Resources Management	2.1 (Moderate)	Strengthened community planning, capacities, and action for source protection and Water Safety Planning but need to integrate this further into planning and monitoring processes.	Need for strengthened coordination between woreda government, private sector and communities for water use and water source protection in quantity and quality.
Technical Capacity	2.9 (Strong)	CARE trained zone and woreda-level experts in asset inventory, enhanced capacities for planning, budgeting, maintenance, construction quality and inclusive design; established community forums to identify and address sustainability issues and rehabilitate infrastructure; strengthened collaboration between woreda government.	Need for service authorities to better support service-providers in developing operation and maintenance plans, stocking of spare parts; planning for routine maintenance and repair. Need for service authorities to internally strengthen planning and maintenance units, ensure sufficient budget for capital maintenance, enhance coordination with the private sector, and formulate strategies for post-construction management and service level performance.
Finance	1.3 (Weak)	Encouraged life-cycle costing and demand-driven approach in which communities contributed significantly to construction costs, and O&M; initiated water tariffs for piped and community managed infrastructure, and advocated for woreda government to budget for capital maintenance based on asset inventory but need to support government to identify models for full cost recovery.	Need to support woreda government to identify additional or increased revenue sources to fully cover capital and recurring costs of water service delivery, and incorporate into annual budgeting and planning.
Planning and Monitoring	2.4 (Moderate)	Conducted strong project monitoring, planning and coordination with woreda government and communities, including strengthened coordination between woreda government and communities, but did not sufficiently support the government's planning and monitoring processes.	Further need to assist woredas in developing more transparent and reflective platforms for local policies and strategies as well as multiyear financial plans for the WASH sector, water quality monitoring, consistent regulation, oversight of water service providers, and ensuring the full engagement of NGOs and the private sector.

Conclusion and Recommendations

- Woreda and zone government perceive that the IWRA project had a significant impact on WASH services in East and West Belessa, and greatly strengthened capacities within 3 of the 6 WASH building blocks.
 - However, CARE's support to woreda government – particularly in planning and monitoring, finance, and Water Resources Management – needs further effort to ensure a focus on strengthening woreda capacities and processes that more effectively enhance the WASH system.
- The adapted assessment tool proved valuable to CARE and the woreda government, both in benchmarking the status of the WASH system in East and West Belessa, and in stimulating productive dialogue between woreda government and CARE teams to identify weaknesses and challenges, identify next steps in strengthening the WASH system, and more effectively target CARE's support
- CARE recommends that woreda government teams use this tool annually, to identify areas for improvement, and to assess changes in the WASH system over time.
 - CARE will use a version of this tool annually to assess changes in the system, and adapt support to the government to address shortfalls. CARE also plans to use a similar tool at a community level, to assess the strength of community-managed systems and governance.
- CARE and woreda government have identified action items going forward, including the need to develop multi-year financial plans and identify revenue sources to cover fully recurring costs of water services; strengthen woreda tools and capacities for routine monitoring and regulation; and strengthen coordination between woreda government, NGOs and private service providers to maximize collective investment.



Yalga, 70, fetching water at a water point installed by the community with CARE
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Conclusion

In 2023, CARE's Water+ initiatives continued to tackle the intricate challenges hindering sustainable and inclusive access to WASH services, aligning with CARE's broader Vision 2030 and contributing to Sustainable Development Goals. Through a steadfast focus on fortifying WASH systems and embracing a holistic approach, CARE has crafted comprehensive solutions that not only enhance community capabilities but also challenge harmful gender norms and systemic barriers. These efforts are instrumental in fostering resilience within WASH systems and empowering the communities reliant on them.

The global impact of CARE's Water+ endeavors underscore several crucial lessons that should shape future policy and practice. These lessons encompass the imperative of fostering genuine community engagement, empowering and supporting local leadership, focusing on systems wide change, responding to the intersections of WASH and diverse sectors through integrated programming, and establishing robust monitoring mechanisms to enhance disaster preparedness and response. Moreover, CARE's commitment to understanding and addressing the unique needs of women and girls, while dismantling structural barriers to gender equality within governmental institutions, remains steadfast. These achievements are a testament to the dedication of our CARE teams, government partners, civil society collaborators, donors, and communities worldwide. As our CARE teams affirm, "**Water is Life!**" We stand resolute in our commitment to bolstering WASH systems and ensuring sustainable access to WASH services for all.

Thank you for reading!

The CARE Water+ Team

For more information, visit: <https://www.care.org/our-work/food-and-nutrition/water/>



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