



IWRA Programme: Impact on Strengthening WASH Systems in Central Gondar Zone

LEARNING BRIEF

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BACKGROUND

The challenges of accessing improved water supply in Ethiopia have intensified due to escalating water demand, depleting aquifers, and an increasing risk of extreme weather events. Despite efforts to transform and sustain water supply systems with government and donor support, rural communities in Ethiopia face restricted access to water. This is primarily attributed 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, such as the woredas of East and West Belesa in Ethiopia.¹

In 2018, a water inventory assessment undertaken by the government with CARE's support revealed a critical situation regarding water supply, as 60% of water schemes in Belesa were found to be non-functional during the inventory period. Contributing factors included poor scheme management, subpar construction quality, natural hazards, and water shortages.

To address these challenges and to enhance Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) services in East and West Belesa, CARE, with financial support from the Austrian Development Agency (ADA), the operational unit of the Austrian Development Cooperation (ADC), executed the SWEEP project (2017-2021) and the IWRA project (December 2021- February 2024) in East and West Belesa districts, Amhara region, Ethiopia. Both projects aimed to enhance the resilience of chronically food-insecure households, using water as the entry point for this goal.

At the end of the IWRA project, CARE conducted a review to explore the contribution of SWEEP and IWRA towards WASH systems' strengthening in Belesa. To do so, CARE adapted the IRC systems' strengthening building blocks² to analyze the institutional, social, environmental, technical, financial, and planning and monitoring factors that influence the WASH systems.² The present brief analysis provides a summary of the feedback CARE received from the local government on IWRA's contribution to strengthening WASH systems at the local level. It is one of a series of reports on IWRA and on systems' strengthening at different levels.

METHODS:

The study was conducted in East and West Belesa 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 the IWRA project's contribution to strengthening WASH systems in East and West Belesa woredas through a semi-structured survey. A total of 27 experts (8 women) from woreda and zone water offices participated in the analysis and review.

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 a 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 (KII) were conducted with representatives from the zone and woreda water sector offices.

¹ CARE Ethiopia water inventory of Belesa report

² [IRC's Building Blocks for System's Strengthening](#)

KEY FINDINGS:

The assessment depicted in Figure 1 highlights the substantial impact of the IWRA project on strengthening WASH systems. The experts consider that the project contributed to very strong and strong results regarding institutional support, coordination, addressing social conditions, and in technical support. The project's support for planning & monitoring and environmental protection was considered moderate. The weakest achievement of the project support was regarding financial sustainability.

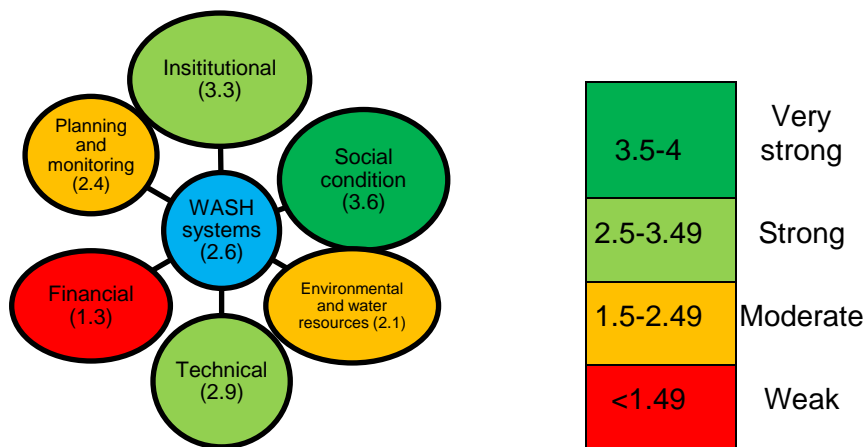


Figure 1. Key findings

1. Institutional Support and Coordination: Strong

Regarding institutional support and coordination, **IWRA's initiatives have yielded significant results in fortifying existing structures and policies.** The woreda-level project steering committee, led by the woreda administrator, enhanced institutional support and coordination for water schemes through regular monthly meetings, annual planning, and quarterly joint supervision visits. The strengthened coordination played a pivotal role in improving water systems' management and planning on behalf of government leaders. The project committees at the woreda, zone, and regional levels were crucial in promoting collaboration and coordination between different stakeholders. The establishment of these committees, coupled with media promotion around hygiene and sanitation, water filtration kits, private sector engagement, and contributing financially and technically to the construction and rehabilitation efforts, fostered inclusive partnerships.

Moreover, IWRA's focus on capacity development for service authorities through training and workshops³ proved effective in **increasing the accountability and transparency of WASH service delivery.** The introduction of community score cards⁴ and reflection sessions indicated a commendable approach for community engagement. Despite important progress, certain areas, such as system monitoring and building relationships with private sector entities require additional focus,

³The training provided by IWRA for zonal and woreda-level WASH actors included instruction on developing water safety plans, introducing existing policies, laws, regulations, strategies, and guidelines for WASH, as well as operation and maintenance of solar-powered pumps. Additionally, basic skills in asset management were given to strengthen technical and operational capabilities.

⁴ Community Score Card (CSC) is a citizen-driven accountability approach for the assessment, planning, monitoring, and evaluation of public services. It enables community members, service providers, and government officials to work together to identify and overcome service quality and equity challenges.

presenting opportunities for further refinement.

2. Social Condition: Very strong

Regarding social conditions, IWRA's emphasis on demand-driven, inclusive⁵, and gender-transformative approaches in all aspects from design to implementation and to post-implementation monitoring marked a significant departure from conventional interventions. The Social Analysis and Action (SAA) tool, and the Village Saving and Loans Associations (VSLA) were important approaches which helped to garner attention on inclusion and the transformation of discriminatory gender roles.

The project not only facilitated regular community review and reflection sessions but also ensured meaningful community participation at both the kebele and the scheme levels. All segments of the community participated in the committee members' selection, water scheme site selection, review meetings, and community review and reflection sessions. The infrastructure design and construction were consciously inclusion focused.

The active involvement of women in planning and monitoring through fora such as the community review and reflection sessions, the community score cards and community dialogue ensured gender-inclusive decision-making processes, demonstrating the project's commitment to social equity. The integration of gender transformative approaches throughout the project activities has resulted in 67% of water schemes now being managed by women in leadership positions, showcasing a noteworthy shift towards gender-inclusive practices.

3. Environment: Moderate

The Environmental Protection and Water Resource Management category highlighted positive outcomes through IWRA's integrated watershed approaches. This included community engagement in scheme management through proper fencing, protecting upstream watersheds, proper disposal of upland runoff water, providing percolation trenches, etc. The result was improved groundwater levels, springs feeding streams, and enhanced soil moisture.

The emphasis on water safety plans,⁶ the distribution of water treatment chemicals, and the promotion of water filtration kits demonstrated the project's holistic approach to environmental protection.

However, the weak integration in the sustainable management of water and waste flow among local government, private sectors, and communities poses risks to natural water sources, necessitating a more concerted effort in this domain.

4. Technical: Strong

CARE trained zone and woreda-level experts in asset inventory in 2018 and 2020 during the project implementation period. This enhanced planning and budgeting for capital maintenance investments by service authorities and providers.

WASH forums at the woreda and kebele levels were conducted to discuss sustainability issues, leading to proper fencing of water schemes, setting water tariffs, and community budget allocation for scheme rehabilitation. In 2022/2023, 675 water schemes were fenced, 235 rehabilitated with woreda government support – something they had not undertaken previously, and 142 further schemes were rehabilitated by the IWRA project with community and government funds.

To boost the capacity of service authorities in asset management and supervisory roles of contractors and artisans, the IWRA project trained woreda experts in WASH scheme operation & maintenance but also in implementation guidelines, national construction standards and inclusive design, for example with ramps and handles for the disabled, the very young and elderly and with greater

⁵ Allowing and accommodating people who have historically been excluded because of their distance, gender, sexuality, or ability/disability.

⁶ Water safety planning is a comprehensive risk assessment and risk management approach that encompasses all steps in a drinking-water supply chain, from catchment to consumer. A Water Safety Plan (WSP) is a plan to ensure the safety of drinking water.

attention to issues of privacy. Consequently, supervision became more regular, the construction planning processes improved, and the government allocated a capital maintenance and direct support budget (500,000 ETB annually), which constituted the first budget dedicated to this cause.

Service authorities became more supportive of the private service providers' role in routine and major maintenance, discussing with them water tariffs, clarifying nationally accepted technologies, and creating links between the private sector and WASH service users around access to spare parts and support with operation and maintenance.

Despite significant improvements, service authorities need to further enhance their support to service providers in developing operation and maintenance plans, improving spare parts' stock management, and devising plans for routine maintenance and major replacements at the water scheme level. There are still major gaps with regard to service providers' own planning and maintenance units, their sufficient budgeting for capital maintenance, support to the private sector, and formulating strategies for post-construction management and service level performance.

In summary, IWRA's contribution to infrastructure development was commendable, but a lot more needs to be done to strengthen infrastructure management and ensure the sustainability of services.

5. Financial: Weak

IWRA actively implemented demand-driven approaches to improve water service delivery, emphasizing the meaningful participation of both communities and government sector offices. Communities were encouraged to contribute in-kind, covering up to 40% of the construction cost, and they provided an impressive amount of cash contribution to initial operation and maintenance services, ranging from 1,500 to 5,000 ETB⁷ per scheme depending on the chosen technology options.

Furthermore, to ensure the financial sustainability of these schemes, IWRA promoted and initiated the establishment of water tariffs, particularly for the water schemes managed by water user associations and rural piped systems (RPS). In seven sites, utility managers and skilled labourers were recruited at the water scheme level, and water user associations were responsible for hiring and compensating guards, as well as contributing to minor maintenance costs.

The IWRA project also played a role in promoting and facilitating the allocation of water tariffs. Utilizing asset inventory results, IWRA advocated for the government to allocate budget to capital maintenance, proposing an annual direct support ranging from 400,000 to 500,000 ETB.

Nevertheless, in general, the available funds were collected from water tariffs and the budget was allocated by the government, which fell short of fully covering either the capital or recurring costs associated with water service delivery.

Therefore, the threat of financial problems affecting the overall sustainability of the schemes remains, as full government takeover of the capital or maintenance costs for water service delivery could not be secured. Overall, the project's contribution to the financial sustainability of water service delivery was thus identified as weak.

6. Planning and Monitoring: Moderate

Concerning the monitoring and planning capabilities of service authorities and providers, IWRA's establishment and reinforcement of steering committees at the woreda, zone, and regional levels played a crucial role in the overall project implementation. The annual review processes, marked by community-level sessions and the participation of various stakeholders, assessed physical and financial factors for weak water service delivery, identified challenges and lessons on an annual basis and agreed on the plans for the following year. These measures were important for transparency and

⁷ For the rehabilitation of hand dug wells and springs – 1,500 ETB; for new construction of springs and hand dug wells – 2,000 ETB and for rural piped water systems with solar-driven units – 5,000 ETB.

progress towards the sector plans and targets.

Nevertheless, the project's contribution to strengthening the capacity of service authorities in planning and monitoring was considered weak. The project invested significant finances in the planning and monitoring of the project activities. However, it did not support the government's own planning and monitoring work, as the assessment identified. For example, the project did not support the government to ensure that the woreda's own annual plans were developed through a participatory and inclusive process to achieve policy targets, or that deliberations of the learning platform were regularly documented and made available to stakeholders.

Additional support is required 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, continuous regulation monitoring, oversight of water service providers, and ensuring the full engagement of NGOs and the private sector.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

To strengthen WASH systems in the two woredas, it is recommended that service providers and authorities allocate a minimum fund to cover some recurring costs associated with rural water service delivery. Developing and monitoring multiyear financial plans for the WASH sector is crucial, encompassing aspects like water quality monitoring, continued regulation monitoring, and oversight of water service providers, with active engagement from NGOs and the private sector. Additionally, efforts should focus on enhancing the effectiveness of environmental regulation and enforcing laws to ensure sustainable WASH services in the region.

This research piloted the use of a feedback form to assess how well a systems' strengthening approach works. The assessment team recommends to the Belesa government authorities that this feedback form is used on an annual basis, to continue strengthening the WASH systems in Belesa. It could also be used as a monitoring tool to measure the effectiveness of the systems and to identify the areas that require attention in other woredas.