

**WASHplus LEARNING BRIEF**

# Partnerships: A Key Strategy to Increase Impact and Results



## Background

Development practitioners today consider partnering a smart and efficient way to enhance synergies and impact in a world of limited resources. Embracing this principle and recognizing that the water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) sectors rarely operate in isolation, WASHplus created and maintained strong partnerships that cut across sectoral platforms. WASHplus has established partnerships that address specific technical components such as: applying learning from WASH to the clean cooking sector; advocating for increased attention to menstrual hygiene management (MHM); integrating WASH into different sectors such as education, HIV, neglected tropical diseases (NTDs), and nutrition; and contributing to global guidance in monitoring and evaluation and in elaborating the global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Effective partnering has been integral to achieving the project's results.



WASHplus partnered with The World Bank to develop a latrine pit card to help communities determine what type of latrine pit would be most sustainable given their geologic landscape.

WASHplus supports USAID's commitment to strategic and creative partnering in WASH and clean cooking to improve sector cooperation, harmonization, collaboration, and effectiveness. The project is a partnership consortium managed by FHI 360 with Winrock International, and CARE, and operates with relatively small funding streams at the central and country levels.



## WASHPLUS CONSORTIUM

### Managing Partner

- FHI 360

### Core Partners

- CARE
- Winrock International

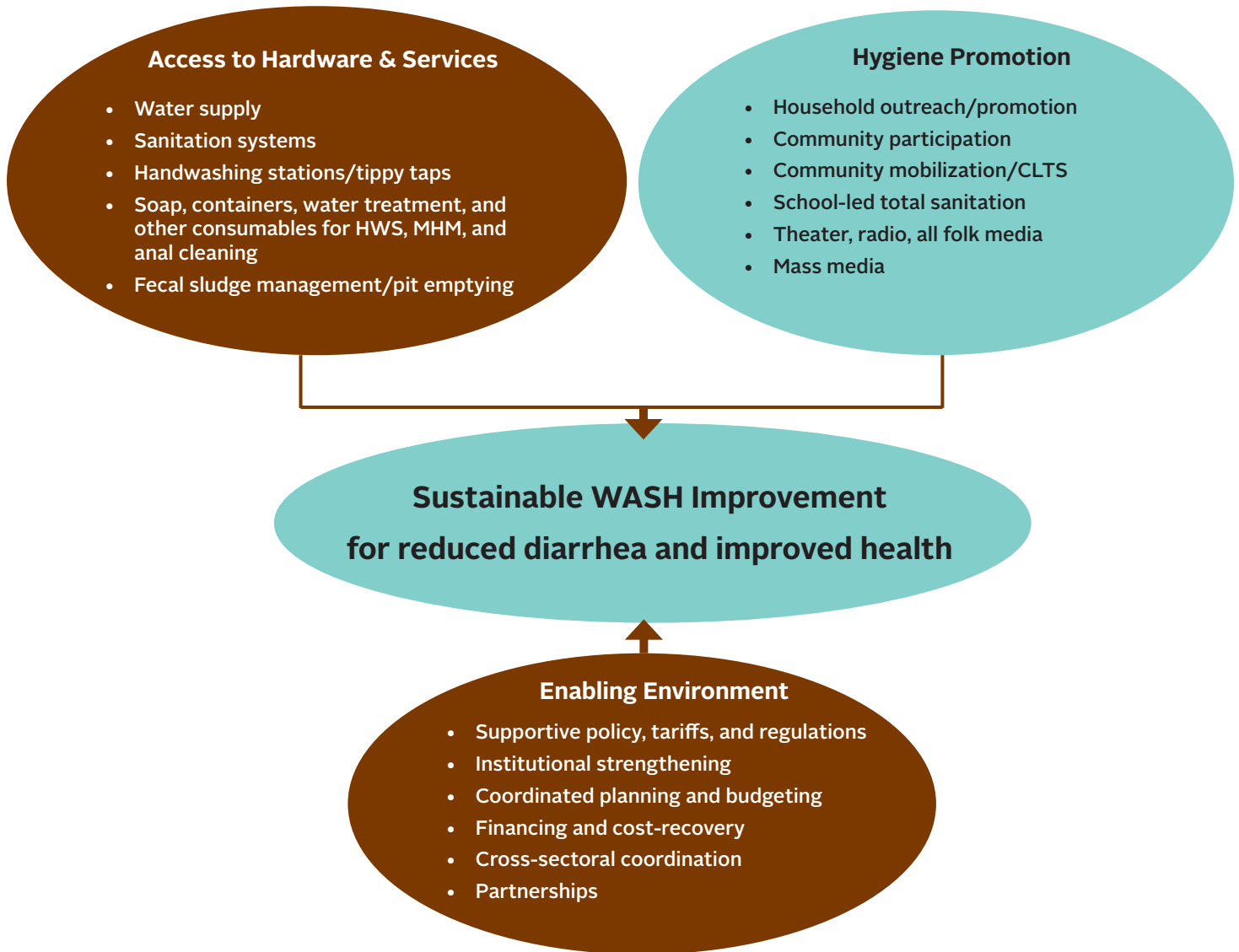
### Resource Partner Categories

- Field Implementation
- Knowledge Management
- Innovation
- Research
- Financing Models
- Public-Private Partnerships



**USAID**  
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

## WASH Improvement Framework



*Working within existing structures ensures that a new approach is accepted and the corresponding activities and materials are resonant, relevant, and sustained.*

Partnering allows for wider-scale implementation and more robust results. In countries, WASHplus interacts with a host of stakeholders to produce the best possible outcomes. Each set of actors and organizations is responsible for shaping the nature of the affiliation and the outputs and outcomes. At the global level, WASHplus, together with or on behalf of USAID, participates in key fora to advocate for and advance WASH and clean cooking. As core partners, FHI 360 offered deep experience in WASH and pioneering expertise in behavior change, integration, and working at scale along with broad country presence. CARE brought long-term experience in water and sanitation, with a focus on governance, advocacy, and integration along with robust country programs. Winrock International provided strong expertise in household air pollution and multiple use water systems.

### WASHplus Partnership Strategy

A key strategy for WASHplus was identifying diverse NGOs, universities, and private sector resource partners to call on when needed to provide short- and long-term technical assistance. The range of expertise complemented

or supplemented the core WASHplus partners. The WASHplus partnering strategy extended beyond these consortium resource partners to embrace international organizations such as the Global Alliance for Clean Cookstoves, the Joint Monitoring Programme, the Global Public-Private Partnership for Handwashing, Rotary International, UNICEF, The World Bank, and the World Health Organization. In WASHplus country programs, national governments and USAID implementing partners served as critical partners as were organizations in other sectors with which WASH and clean cooking engaged.

The intent of this brief is to reflect on WASHplus' s varied experiences creating and maintaining partnerships, to consolidate our lessons learned, and to contribute to more deliberate and effective partnership programming within the WASH sector. The next section lays out WASHplus's rationale and underlying principles for partnering to achieve its objectives. This is followed by an examination of the project's different strategic partnerships. Finally, the brief reflects on the key elements of partnership that led to successfully implementing WASHplus activities.

## Partnering for Collaborative Action, Results, and Sustainability

WASHplus applies the WASH Improvement Framework (previous page) to its program work to ensure sustainability and desired outcomes in health and other sectors. By its very nature, this framework provides a rationale for working in partnership. The framework joins the three elements of sustainability—access to hardware and services, hygiene promotion, and enabling environment—that when applied together can ensure desired impacts and outcomes from WASH investments. It emerged from decades of identifying and refining best practices leading to successful and sustainable WASH programming.

Similarly, moving beyond pilots and small scale interventions to reach scale (another WASHplus approach) both justifies and requires partnering. To reach scale, partnerships among and between actors are essential. In Kenya, WASHplus trained local organizations in WASH-HIV integration, which sought their own resources to further cascade the learning down to the household or facility level to stimulate changes at scale.

A final key WASHplus strategy, integrating WASH into other sectors (education, HIV/AIDS, NTDs, and nutrition) also requires partnering. Integration does not occur simply because it is a good idea or an end in itself. Partnering with and integrating into other sectors involves answering the partner's question, "What's in it for us?" in a compelling way. Sometimes the answer emerged from new research. In Zambia, WASHplus measured the effect of WASH in Schools on student absenteeism—a critical concern for the education sector. In other areas, such as in nutrition, the sector may not be able to achieve its objectives, such as reduced stunting and improved child growth, without concurrent attention to WASH.

The challenge—whether applying the framework for sustainability and impact, working at scale, and/or integrating WASH into other sectors—is to negotiate, design, and conduct the partnerships using tools and lessons from experiences that have worked, or to modify those that haven't.



### PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP FOR HANDWASHING

WASHplus serves as a mechanism for USAID to contribute funds to the Global Public-Private Partnership for Handwashing (PPPHW). WASHplus leadership helps to energize the PPPHW Steering Committee and guides business plan development and implementation. WASHplus contributes technically to the PPPHW's Handwashing Behavior Change Think Tank, co-hosts learning events, and joins forces for advocacy.



Effective partnering is not easy. It requires partners to understand each other's interests and stake in the outcomes. Sometimes achieving the greater good requires learning a new technical language and letting go of strongly held assumptions and ways of working. While this can be challenging, it can ultimately yield significant benefits. WASHplus experiences highlight the payoffs of partnerships: increasing impact, accessing additional funding or leveraging resources, sharing risks and sharing learning, and perhaps most importantly, promoting sustainability. This is particularly important when projects are time-bound and need to embed the learning and results into an existing system that endures over time.

## Dimensions of Different WASHplus Partnerships

Partnering takes on different forms under various circumstances and cultural constructs. This section is not a recipe for exactly how to engage in partnerships, but rather a reflection of the range of WASHplus experiences with partnerships.

WASHplus was designed to include a range of resource partners that could be called on to provide specific technical assistance as needed. SecondMuse supported WASHplus communication and knowledge management activities. WASHplus used partners for innovative research activities: funding iDE to apply its Cambodia approach to refine the design of latrine products, and develop a business model for manufacturing, selling, and delivering

these products to Ethiopian households. The Berkeley Air Monitoring Group tested a locally produced advanced biomass cookstove among households in Kenya and a range of improved cookstoves in Bangladesh and Nepal to support the scale up of improved cookstove use.

WASHplus found the most effective way to engage at the country level was to work with resource partners that were locally established and apply their knowledge of local context and partners to enable swift program start-up.

- WaterAid, a well-established NGO in Bangladesh with extensive experience installing hardware and strengthening local management and governance capacity in hard-to-reach areas, became the lead implementer for a multi-year WASH program. In Zambia, WaterAid developed WASHplus/SPLASH's equity and inclusion strategy.
- Practica Foundation and Water and Sanitation for the Urban Poor piloted the feasibility of a small scale public-private partnerships for fecal sludge removal and provision of clean drinking water in peri-urban areas of Madagascar.

Through these partnerships, WASHplus has expanded its reach, learning, and effectiveness, developing a better understanding of how to bring improved WASH and household air pollution products and services to previously underserved communities and apply that knowledge to some of its larger country programs.



▲  
*Sanitation workers safely dispose of fecal sludge as part of WASHplus and the Practica Foundation's pilot program to make the process a viable business model in peri-urban Madagascar.*

As a nationally focused program in Kenya, WASHplus developed robust relationships with the Ministry of Health (MOH)/Environmental Health Division and worked collaboratively to identify strong leaders at the provincial and, later, district levels that could move the project forward. Once WASHplus had trained government public health officers in WASH-HIV integration, these officers used their influence to access additional funding to expand the program's reach. They tapped funds

collected from taxes to train others in their districts, and they applied for grants from other government programs to orient HIV workers about WASH-HIV integration.

WASHplus supported national and regional WASH fora and training efforts facilitated by the MOH and local counterparts at the provincial and county levels. WASHplus also worked closely with the MOH to incorporate several indicators into the health management information

system that collected reports from all community health workers. Ensuring that the health system included WASH indicators meant that WASH activities would be monitored and the results and impact documented. In addition, public health officers incorporated the WASHplus-developed equity and inclusion approaches into the standard community-led total sanitation program that the government had developed.

## Partnering with Governments

Partnering with government is a critical component of the WASHplus implementation strategy in countries. WASHplus engages with the government at multiple levels to implement and achieve program objectives. At the national level, the project supports efforts and activities that can influence change across the country, even without direct project support. Working within existing structures ensures that a new approach is accepted and the corresponding activities and materials are resonant, relevant, and sustained. Partnerships also provide opportunities to leverage resources and expertise.

In other countries, WASHplus has developed focused collaborations with provincial and district governments. Local systems require engagement at multiple levels, and no single NGO has either the authority or the reach to be able to initiate system change. WASHplus forged collaborative partnerships with multiple local actors from government, NGOs, and where possible, the private sector. In Zambia, WASHplus partnered with UNICEF, the Ministry of General Education (MGE), and the Ministry of Local Government and Housing in Eastern Province. WASHplus offices were housed in the MGE, which allowed the project to advocate for inclusion of WASH activities in strategic and annual district work plans and budgets. These partners helped WASHplus to increase reach and deliver WASH services more holistically to schools. In Uganda, the project worked closely to assist district governments to apply for and implement USAID grants to improve their WASH options. In most countries, WASHplus builds capacity among government counterparts to collaborate internally with their own institutions to promote well-grounded WASH efforts that can be sustained over time.

### ...With USAID Implementing Partners

USAID has often considered its WASHplus investment as a mechanism for integrating WASH into existing programs through its implementing partners. In several countries, WASHplus needed to convince USAID HIV/AIDS

## PARTNERING FOR ADVOCACY

UNICEF and the Joint Monitoring Programme convened a communication and advocacy technical working group to promote a dedicated WASH goal with corresponding targets and indicators in the SDGs. WASHplus and PPPHW specifically advocated to include hygiene. While the various constituency organizations tried to speak with one voice, they often had different priorities. As a result, the partners had to negotiate for the policy asks most likely to be adopted. Ultimately, the power of partnerships lies in collaboration; agreeing on a singular strategy amplified impact well beyond what WASHplus could have done alone. And hygiene was officially adopted as an indicator in the SDGs.

## SPOTLIGHT ON ZAMBIA



**Schools Promoting Learning Achievement through Sanitation and Hygiene (SPLASH) is the name of the WASHplus project in Zambia. SPLASH/Zambia created a strong partnership with the Ministry of General Education at all levels, ensuring integration of WASH in the sector's core business. SPLASH sought partnership points of entry for different purposes: with the District Education Board Secretaries for local leadership in all aspects of school WASH and to ensure an enabling local environment; with the provincial standards officer in charge of school monitoring to ensure the inclusion of WASH/MHM indicators in monitoring instruments; with the in-service teacher training system through District Resource Centers to integrate WASH themes into classroom teaching using locally made lessons and materials; and with the National Curriculum Center to integrate WASH themes into the national curriculum and textbooks. The key to success with each entry point and partner was to identify how WASH helps achieve that partner's objectives.**

and/or nutrition partners to integrate WASH into their existing programs. While the evidence base shows WASH services are essential to achieve the desired results of these programs, and WASHplus depended on collaboration to implement its activities, intensive effort over time was required to forge these essential partnerships. Perhaps the greatest obstacle was that the potential partner projects were already underway, with approved objectives, targets, work plans, budgets, and activities that did not necessarily include WASH. While WASHplus often brought some financing that was generally limited to developing materials and training trainers; partners were financially and programmatically responsible for rollout. Notably, these partnerships blossomed as partners recognized the added value of the integrated approach and of specific training and material inputs offered by WASHplus. In Bangladesh, WASHplus worked with the USAID-funded SPRING and SHIKHA projects to introduce a WASH component that was embraced and expanded by SHIKHA at the subdistrict and local level, but only over time. Currently, WASHplus is collaborating with SPRING at the national level, giving input to key strategies and documents that have impact at local levels, specifically installing tippy taps near cooking areas and safely disposing of infant feces. Key ingredients that nurtured these partnerships to success included persistence; regular meetings; resource sharing; and offers of support, collaboration, and feedback when opportunities arose.

### ...With the Private Sector

Engaging the private sector is quite different from engaging other NGO and government partners. WASHplus has learned that bridging the for-profit and not-for-profit world can be challenging as the motivational gulf is wide. Corporations need a business case to engage in activities, whether it is developing new products, gaining new market share, or increasing revenue. Another vehicle to narrow the chasm is corporate social responsibility. Experiences in Zambia have shown that private sector partners are most comfortable when the "ask" is explicit and simple and they can clearly understand "what's in it for them." For example, private sector contributions to global commemorative days such as Global Handwashing Day or World Water Day offer companies a way to be socially responsible while still advertising their products to increase product sales and profits—the bottom line for most private sector partners.

WASHplus developed a strategy for private sector engagement in two urban areas of Mali to provide products for improved latrines, but the vendors contacted did not believe this would yield enough profit for them to invest. However, the project has spurred community investment in entrepreneurial schemes such as village sanitation shops, production and sale of latrine covers to reduce flies, and increased contracting for the masons who helped produce the removable toilet slabs. In Bangladesh, American Standard donated plastic sanitation platforms to WaterAid, which used them in small scale sanitation marketing efforts in project areas. WASHplus also conducted household trials of improved cookstoves in Bangladesh to assess consumer preference and willingness to pay. Private sector manufacturers were given the findings and a \$5,000 incentive to modify stoves to address consumer input. Four of five manufacturers changed their stove designs, and one launched a new model for South Asia based on the WASHplus partnership.



## ...With Local Organizations

Though local organizations may often be subgrantees of larger U.S. government programs, they can also be small organizations working in a particular area on similar topics. These local organizations are often interested in adopting approaches that have been tested and found successful. They may use funds generated through their subcontracts, but they also are adept at seeking other sources of funding to implement activities. For example, in Benin WASHplus received funds that were restricted to handwashing and water treatment. However, partnering with a local foundation enabled WASHplus to find a way to rehabilitate school latrines. Small organizations usually can implement activities at a much lower cost than larger NGOs, helping to reach needy communities with important information and evidence-based approaches.

Working with local organizations in Mali with ties to the community facilitated a more rapid start up than with an external partner. In Kenya, WASHplus trained local grantees from other projects funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and USAID. These organizations embraced the training and cascaded the concepts down as quickly as possible. In Uganda, a women's HIV support group from

## ENGAGING GLOBAL PARTNERS

In Bangladesh, WASHplus partnered with the Global Alliance for Clean Cookstoves and USAID's Catalyzing Clean Energy in Bangladesh (CCEB) project to design and implement a consumer preference and willingness to pay research study. The trials introduced different stove models and found that no stove met consumer needs, nor were consumers willing to purchase the relatively expensive improved cookstove. This finding encouraged CCEB to support domestically produced stove alternatives. The partnership allowed WASHplus research to be applied practically, and helped CCEB make informed programming decisions.





an adjacent district served as a strong local partner. The group trained local government education and HIV NGOs and USAID implementing partners to sew reusable menstrual pads and catered training events to raise additional funds.

## ...With Global Actors

Working with multilateral agencies and global organizations is critical to getting information endorsed and into the hands of credible channels for distribution. WASHplus, with USAID, worked with the Joint Monitoring Programme and other agencies tracking the progress of the SDGs to ensure that the “H” (hygiene) was not eliminated from the water and sanitation goals. This required advocacy at the global level and constant

pressure to ensure that hygiene was adopted as a target and indicator.

## POSITIVE PARTNERING

USAID/Kenya described WASHplus as a national-level program. This model necessitated strong alliances with USAID implementing partners to ensure that the activities rolled out to the community level. WASHplus developed an approach and materials that other organizations were expected to use. WASHplus avoided friction by working collaboratively with the government and USAID implementing partners to create shared ownership of the materials, training packages, and results. This was further supported by USAID requirements for the partners to work together—thus WASHplus provided materials and facilitation for training community health workers, and other partners covered the venue and participation costs of the learners. Shared responsibility helped to streamline capacity building at the local levels.

In Kenya, WASHplus worked with The World Bank to develop a latrine pit card to help communities determine what type of latrine pit would be most sustainable given their geologic landscape. WASHplus supported the design and testing of the tool while The World Bank printed and disseminated the pit card through government channels once WASHplus/Kenya closed.

WASHplus also worked with The World Bank to build global advocacy and develop concrete programming guidance on safe disposal of infant feces; and with WaterAid/UK to increase the focus on another facet of “the silent H of WASH”—food hygiene.

WASHplus partnered with the Global Alliance for Clean Cookstoves (GACC) and the USAID TRAction project to apply consumer marketing and behavior change approaches learned in WASH to the clean cooking sector. Through these partnerships, WASHplus accessed GACC’s extensive member network and participated in GACC/TRAction technical reference groups to review and guide multi-method research leading to adoption of improved cookstoves. WASHplus developed a Market Research Guide for the sector with GACC and co-authored a lead editorial and peer reviewed article in the *Journal of Health Communication* highlighting key behavioral dimensions of clean cooking.

As a global mechanism, WASHplus developed active linkages between field experiences and global advocacy efforts. For example, SPLASH/Zambia learnings were shared with the WASH in Schools Global Partnership, which is comprised of many different actors working in the WASH in Schools space. This has allowed SPLASH to take advantage of global trends and innovations such as mandatory daily group handwashing. Further, SPLASH practices, such as comprehensive MHM in schools, were adopted by different agencies that are implementing similar programs around the world. Five years ago the education community rarely talked about MHM. Now lessons from SPLASH and other MHM activities are being highlighted as a key factor in keeping girls in school. WASHplus has also partnered with Human Rights Watch to frame MHM in the context of human rights.





## Reflections on Partnering

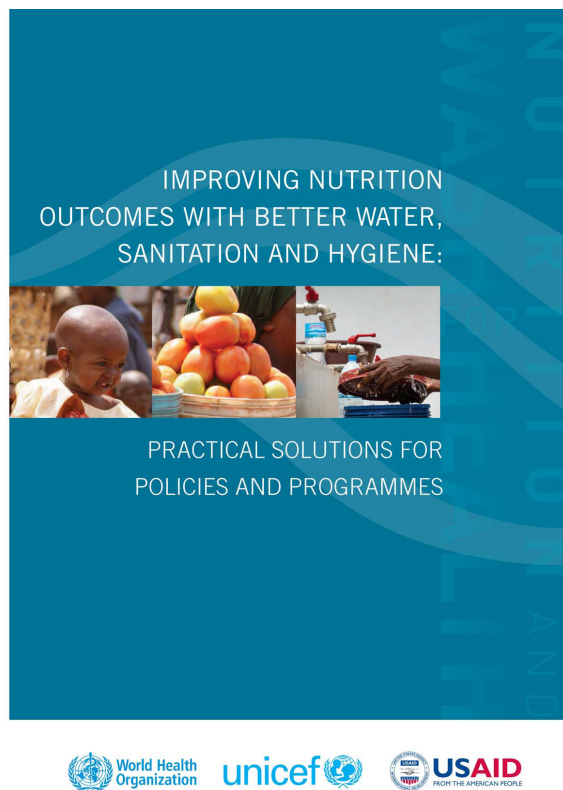
Grappling with the challenges and reaping the benefits of partnerships has led WASHplus to think about key elements and lessons learned. The phrase, “It takes a village to raise a child” resonates when thinking about how to achieve lasting change. USAID’s Local Systems Framework responds to the reality that achieving and sustaining any development outcome depends on the contributions of many interconnected actors and that building the capacity of any one actor is insufficient. Rather, the focus must be on the whole system: the actors, their relationships, and the incentives that motivate them. Partnerships help confirm that all the elements of a system are in place to facilitate long-lasting change. The section below focuses on facilitators of success, and also identifies continuing challenges.

**Share ownership, accountability, and success.** WASHplus has found that the best partnerships are those where all parties have ownership and are recognized for the work and the ensuing results. The value of a partnership is when the whole is greater than the sum of the parts—the group is stronger than any one organization operating alone. To function properly, partners need to share accountability so that all members have a vested interest in collaborating, contributing to, and seeking results for the beneficiaries. Individual entities, then, may

▲  
*Students at SPLASH schools in Zambia now practice daily group handwashing, a practice WASHplus picked up from its involvement with the WASH in Schools Global Partnership.*

## CHAMPIONING NEW IDEAS

WASHplus and USAID engaged WHO and UNICEF to develop a “how to” document on integrating WASH and nutrition. Actors from different sectors and organizations wrote the sections—and revisited the purpose, audience, and content repeatedly. The process was long and each partner compromised on form and content. But this extensive, iterative process strengthened the output, helped to engage all stakeholders, and motivated them to own “Improving Nutrition Outcomes with Better Water, Sanitation and Hygiene: Practical Solutions for Policies and Programmes” that was launched with great fanfare by all three organizations on World Toilet Day 2015.



lose autonomy because they are working in a shared environment. Sharing success and attribution may not be easy. Partners have different roles and responsibilities in achieving a shared result; deciding how to measure it and apportion the success may not be straightforward and can rend partnerships.

**Align objectives.** It is impossible to overestimate the importance of clarifying and harmonizing objectives when designing and managing a partnership. Each project or organization has its own core mission and objectives, which may be very different from others; and these differences can often pull people away from partnership efforts, because they are time-consuming and/or because the direction of the partnership appears out of sync or a low priority. But effective partnerships are based on shared objectives, either from the outset or developed and negotiated among stakeholders over time. While the motivation for engaging in the partnership may differ—perhaps a company is seeking publicity for its products while WASHplus is promoting improved WASH practices—both collaborators can agree on the ultimate purpose of the partnership, to contribute to improving hygiene practices.

**Apportion sufficient time, attention, and work.** Partnerships must be built on a foundation of mutual respect. A partnership requires time and commitment—time to develop trust among the members and time to nurture understanding and acceptance of the values and mission of one another’s objectives. It requires active engagement, open communication, and champions to nurture the relationship. Active and ongoing engagement ensures that all parties benefit and feel that their contributions are valued. Too often partnerships fail when these elements are not built into the relationship. Another key factor is the provision of adequate resources, which too often are not planned or incorporated into budgets.

**Communicate clearly.** What seems to be evident to one person or organization may look completely different when examined from a different viewpoint. Since all partners have different motivations and core missions, clear, explicit communication is critical. When WASHplus expressed parameters of partnership in writing, all entities knew the roles and responsibilities of each partner in the agreement. In Kenya, WASHplus and the implementing partners engaged in joint work planning and developed shared monitoring platforms to make sure the activities occurred. WASHplus signed Memorandums of Understanding with UNICEF and YASH Pharmaceuticals in Zambia to advance the reach of the SPLASH program.

## WASHplus and Beyond

Funders often require organizations to design and implement sustainable WASH projects that last over the long term. This can be difficult when a project has a determined time frame that may span only two to five years. Partnerships can extend the reach and influence of programming by leveraging funds or pooling resources while harmonizing approaches and messaging. Further, when linked with ongoing activities, partnerships can safeguard project activities into the future.

WASHplus country programs used partnerships to encourage sustainability by embedding efforts within the structure of existing systems. Project activities were always merged into existing programming and usually integrated within other sectors—education, HIV, NTDs, nutrition. WASHplus found active and respected players entrenched in the targeted sector through which to introduce a WASH component. These partnerships enabled organizations to engage in WASH without expending capital or uncalculated risk: they conserved resources by using WASHplus-generated materials and training and used their available funds to extend activities once proven effective. This approach allowed WASHplus to take the risk and enabled the partner to share in the learning and ultimate outcomes. This infusion of knowledge and expertise allowed partners to experience new approaches that benefit them. For example, sharing the SPLASH experience in Zambia's education sector with education colleagues within FHI 360—the parent organization—has fostered an acknowledgment and a commitment to incorporating WASH into education programming. Our education colleagues will likely never again design a school-based education project without considering WASH and MHM needs.

Ultimately, partnerships have enabled WASHplus to advance comprehensive strategies that incorporated all elements of the WASH Improvement Framework and improved sector coordination, harmonization, collaboration, and effectiveness to achieve scale across the project's WASH and clean cooking landscapes.



---

## STAUNCH CHAMPIONS

The confluence of MHM-related events in recent years united a core group of champions committed to bringing menstrual hygiene to the forefront of the WASH in Schools/girls education agenda. From different organizations, these individuals have created an informal partnership that has strengthened the conversation, expanded MHM advocacy and publications globally, and promoted Menstrual Hygiene Day. WASHplus has built on this platform of committed professionals to launch a DC Coalition for MH Day and foster activities throughout the year.



## What is WASHplus?

The WASHplus project supports healthy households and communities by creating and delivering interventions that lead to improvements in water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) and household air pollution (HAP). This multi-year project (2010-2016), funded through USAID's Bureau for Global Health and led by FHI 360 in partnership with CARE and Winrock International, uses at-scale programming approaches to reduce diarrheal diseases and acute respiratory infections, the two top killers of children under age 5 globally.

This brief is made possible by the generous support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Bureau for Global Health under terms of Cooperative Agreement No. AID-OAA-A-10-00040. The contents are the responsibility of FHI 360, and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.

*For more information, contact:*

**WASHplus**  
**FHI 360**  
1825 Connecticut Ave, NW  
Washington, DC 20009  
Tel.: +1 (202) 884-8496  
e-mail: [washinfo@fhi360.org](mailto:washinfo@fhi360.org)  
[www.washplus.org](http://www.washplus.org)