

# Federal Foreign Office Strategy for Humanitarian Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH)

## 1) Summary

Access to clean drinking water and a hygienic sewage system are human rights and basic human needs that must be taken into account in the context of humanitarian emergencies. A lack of functioning sewage systems and inadequate hygiene pose a major health risk especially for already vulnerable populations. Humanitarian measures in the area of water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) help to save lives and enable those affected by crises and disasters to survive in dignity.

WASH is a sectoral focus of the Federal Foreign Office Strategy for Humanitarian Aid Abroad that is underfunded globally in comparison with other sectors of international humanitarian assistance. Partner organisations of Germany's humanitarian assistance have particular specialist and technical expertise in the WASH sector. These organisations have joined forces in the German WASH Network. The Federal Foreign Office drafted this strategy in consultation with the WASH Network and international partners. The objective is to continue to expand these capabilities and expertise in Germany and to deploy them in a needs-based way so that they are an effective addition to international humanitarian assistance and strengthen local capacities in countries affected by crises and disasters in a targeted manner. The following objectives were identified during a participative process:

- (1) Improving the coordination of WASH and partnerships
- (2) WASH capacity development and quality management
- (3) Complementarity of humanitarian and development-related WASH measures

This strategy is based on recognised humanitarian WASH standards and offers a specifically complementary frame of reference for shaping the contribution made by Germany's humanitarian assistance in the WASH sector.

## 2) WASH – a humanitarian assistance priority

Water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) are basic human needs and vital to survival in disaster situations. People affected by natural disasters, conflicts or epidemics, such as refugees and internally displaced people, frequently have no access to clean drinking water and no adequate sanitation, and are often particularly vulnerable to diseases caused by a lack of water supply and functioning sewage systems, as well as by the inability to maintain sanitary conditions.

These diseases often result in death. Breakouts of diseases such as cholera, which are linked to the water supply and sanitation, and other epidemics such as Ebola, which are bound up

with appropriate hygiene practices, undermine the effectiveness of humanitarian aid measures overall.

As women are often responsible for providing their families with water, appropriate water supply and sanitation are particularly important for them. Women in particular require safe access to sanitation facilities in order to meet their specific hygienic needs, especially in humanitarian emergencies.

The figure for global humanitarian need calculated by the United Nations rose from 9.75 billion US dollars in 2009 to around 20 billion US dollars in 2015.<sup>i</sup> In 2015, the humanitarian WASH need was around one billion US dollars. Factors behind this growing need include the increasing number, duration and dimension of major crises such as in Syria and neighbouring countries, as well as in Iraq or in the Central African Republic. Extreme weather events multiplied, among other things, by climate change that trigger more severe and frequent flooding or droughts and which have a negative impact on WASH facilities and services can also give rise to increasing humanitarian needs. Displacement and forced migration as a consequence of crises or natural disasters increase the pressure on host communities when a large number of people seek protection and access to limited water and hygiene resources. This makes it all the more necessary to strengthen and expand WASH capacities in both emergency situations and stable scenarios with preventive humanitarian assistance in mind.

This humanitarian WASH strategy fleshes out the Federal Foreign Office Strategy for Humanitarian Aid Abroad<sup>ii</sup>. It is in line with the Principles and Good Practice of Humanitarian Donorship (GHD Principles)<sup>iii</sup> as well as the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid.<sup>iv</sup> The strategy takes its lead from Thematic Policy Document no. 2<sup>v</sup> of the EU/DG ECHO, which sets standards for coherent and high-quality humanitarian WASH assistance. The objectives of the Federal Government's humanitarian WASH assistance are commensurate with the WASH objectives of the European Commission<sup>vi</sup>:

The main objective of humanitarian WASH assistance is to save and preserve life and alleviate the suffering of populations facing serious environmental health risks and/or water insecurity in the context of humanitarian crises and disasters.

**Specific objectives:**

- To ensure timely and dignified access to sufficient and safe WASH services for populations that are threatened by ongoing, imminent or future humanitarian crises, and to increase their resilience to withstand water stress and shocks.
- To prevent (the spread of) WASH-related diseases in populations threatened by ongoing, imminent or future humanitarian crises.
- To enhance the impact, relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, coherence, coverage and coordination of the delivery of WASH assistance by strengthening the capacities of the humanitarian aid system, including its coordination mechanisms.

Germany's humanitarian WASH strategy is intended to contribute to a more efficient, effective and better coordinated international approach that builds on existing capacities, experiences and specialist knowledge. The German contribution to global humanitarian assistance in the WASH sector is to be systematically improved by expanding existing capacities in Germany, using them in a targeted manner and deploying them in a needs-based way, as well as by supporting international WASH partners and initiatives and expanding local capacities that are already in place. In keeping with preventive humanitarian assistance, humanitarian WASH assistance not only aims to respond to current needs, but also to reduce the vulnerability of affected populations. In order to address complex humanitarian needs, WASH programmes must take place in tandem with other humanitarian measures, e.g. in the food and health care sector. The Federal Foreign Office is therefore increasingly supporting comprehensive approaches in the course of which humanitarian responses are tailored to various needs at the same time, in order to achieve a greater impact.

This strategy was developed in close cooperation with German civil society, in particular with the German WASH Network,<sup>vii</sup> as well as with international partners in the WASH sector, including at a joint seminar to optimise humanitarian assistance strategies in the WASH sector,<sup>viii</sup> which was held as part of World Water Week in Stockholm in

September 2014. During the seminar, the draft and the key areas of the strategy were presented and discussed with international experts from the fields of humanitarian assistance, development, business and civil society, as well as with representatives of other donors and the host countries. The results and recommendations from the seminar were worked into the strategy and discussed in further detail at the WASH Futures conference in November 2014. The results of the seminar on the complementarity of humanitarian and development WASH approaches held during the 2015 World Water Week in Stockholm were likewise taken into account in this strategy.

### **3) Principles of humanitarian assistance in the WASH sector**

WASH denotes activities with respect to water, sanitation and hygiene in the context of humanitarian crises. This includes facilitating secure and affordable access to a clean water supply and to sanitary facilities, as well as waste disposal methods. WASH comprises both the provision of WASH infrastructures and services and ensuring the permanent usage as well as operation and maintenance of facilities.<sup>ix</sup> Limited access to safe drinking water, a lack of sanitation and poor hygiene are life-threatening especially in humanitarian crisis situations. WASH is therefore an essential component of humanitarian assistance.

In keeping with the Federal Foreign Office's overall Strategy for Humanitarian Aid Abroad<sup>x</sup>, German humanitarian measures in the WASH sector are committed to the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence. It is vital to uphold these principles in order to gain access to people in emergency situations and to provide effective humanitarian assistance. The measures are implemented in accordance with the respective humanitarian need.

The Humanitarian Charter laid down by the Sphere Handbook<sup>xi</sup> and the principles it sets out on protection, basic standards and WASH minimum standards are key guidelines that should be taken as the point of departure for all WASH measures. Furthermore, WASH measures must take into account the particular needs of women, children, the elderly and people with disabilities, as well as those who require psychosocial care. Another priority is to address environmental impacts relating to the water supply and the construction of sanitation facilities.

The Federal Foreign Office is supporting life-saving WASH measures during and after emergency situations, as well as in protracted humanitarian crisis situations. These WASH measures are based on coordinated WASH requirements analyses, as well as on requirements analyses from other sectors that are relevant to WASH. In keeping with preventive humanitarian assistance, the Federal Government is also supporting WASH measures to prepare for disasters that are intended to minimise the impact of the

same. What is more, WASH interventions are intended to take account of existing national contingency plans and suitability on the ground.

The Federal Foreign Office is providing humanitarian assistance through the United Nations' humanitarian bodies, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and non-governmental organisations. It is also assisted by the Federal Agency for Technical Relief (THW), which provides technical support abroad on behalf of the Federal Government. The Federal Government is supporting measures in all three WASH fields (water, sanitation and hygiene), either as complementary measures by various actors or as a separate response. Coordinated with and in addition to the measures of international humanitarian organisations in the WASH sector, the partners of the Federal Foreign Office are able to get aid measures off the ground rapidly using existing teams with the necessary WASH expertise and equipment. Collaboration with and support of local personnel plays an important role in this regard.

#### 4) Crisis phases and priority WASH interventions

The planning and implementation of humanitarian WASH interventions is determined by the type of the respective humanitarian crisis.<sup>xii</sup>

**WASH preparedness interventions:** The objective of these interventions is to strengthen preparedness, reach a reasonable level of preparation and to reinforce the coping capacity of local WASH actors (agencies and/or communities). These measures are intended to reduce vulnerability and ensure a timely and appropriate response to a disaster event in order to minimise negative impacts and decrease suffering through the creation and provision of access to appropriate WASH services. This in turn reduces the likelihood of an increased incidence of WASH-related diseases and/or undernutrition, both during and following the disaster itself.

**WASH interventions in acute crises:** In such circumstances, the main priority is to (re-)establish WASH services for life-saving purposes. Temporary WASH services are usually required until more permanent solutions can be found. In accordance with Sphere standards, the priority of water supply interventions is to provide safe and equitable access to an adequate quantity of suitably clean and safe water as quickly as possible. The key focus of sanitation interventions is the immediate and safe disposal of excreta. Protecting drinking water sources is to be a priority. Hygiene promotion focuses on immediate actions that have the greatest potential to reduce the spread of diseases and the risk of WASH-related outbreaks (e.g. hand washing and safe excreta disposal).

**WASH interventions in post-acute crises (humanitarian transitional aid):** The emphasis

here is on early recovery and the rehabilitation of WASH services with the objective of returning to normality and self-sufficiency. The proposed solutions are to be durable and may include both mitigation measures and disaster preparedness activities.

**WASH interventions in protracted and chronic crises:** The main objective in the case of chronic crises is to respond to acute needs and to prevent the negative impact of the crisis from worsening. Another aim is to assist those most affected through re-establishing a certain level of self-sufficiency. Humanitarian organisations must take into account the cost effectiveness, quality and durability of the service and/or the replacement of temporary WASH services where still in operation. Adequate operation and maintenance is crucial to avoid the deterioration of the existing WASH services. The priority is to increase the self-sufficiency of beneficiaries and to achieve complementarity with stabilisation measures and/or development cooperation. Priority is given to comprehensive WASH needs assessments and the introduction of appropriate and affordable technologies and services, which have lower and simpler operation and maintenance requirements. Improved targeting of affected populations/target groups is also required. It is important in protracted crises and/or post-acute crisis situations to manage the various instruments for humanitarian assistance and development cooperation-related aid in the WASH sector in a coherent and coordinated manner.

### 5) Complementarity of aid instruments

Aid instruments must be used in a complementary fashion as per the respective context in order to meet acute needs and to put in place more sustainable structures to make the affected population less vulnerable in emergency situations and to avoid crises in the future. Key overarching considerations that have an indirect impact on sustainability and which are accorded greater priority in the humanitarian WASH context include preparedness, greater emphasis on disaster risk reduction in project work and the need for exit strategies.

Complementarity between humanitarian and development-related WASH measures is necessary for facilitating an appropriate response and for reinforcing preparedness, resilience and the coping capacities of potentially affected populations. Exit and transitional strategies must be elaborated with the specific context in mind and must be taken into consideration from the outset. Humanitarian WASH interventions must be commensurate with existing national crisis plans, strategies and approaches, and should, the situation on the ground permitting, be coordinated with governmental or relevant development partners. The following criteria must be taken into account when reaching decisions on when and how to terminate project support and how best to hand over responsibility to the local government and other local organisations or service providers working to maintain WASH services at the level achieved.

- **Technical dimension:** WASH interventions must take technologies that are suited to the region into account and bring technically feasible measures into alignment with solutions that local stakeholders are able to retain by themselves following the termination of the project. The guiding principle for interventions is therefore the optimised use of capacities and expertise available in the region.
- **Financial dimension:** The longer-term operating and maintenance costs of WASH infrastructures must be borne in mind from the outset. Taking long-term financial consequences into account from an early stage is likewise crucial for the (re)construction of WASH services. Flexible project schedules and financial mechanisms are part of this. Synergies should be created wherever possible, either by implementing integrated cross-sectoral projects or by focusing on concurrent measures in other sectors (e.g. health care, food and education).
- **Socio-cultural and institutional dimension:** All WASH interventions must ensure the acceptance and suitability of the technologies and systems used in the region, as well as usability, gender-specific needs and the respect for human dignity. Affected populations, community-based organisations (CBOs) and WASH service providers must be able to safeguard WASH infrastructures, including their financial management as well as operation and maintenance. Suitable public, private or community-based organisations must be in place in order to provide the support required. Steps must be undertaken to ensure that local partners and communities are involved at both the initial planning stage and during implementation.
- **Environmental dimension:** Impacts on local water resources must be assessed prior to any intervention. The technology and design of WASH systems must take identified risks into account. The deployment of Integrated Water Resource Management (IWRM) is an integral part of emergency measures. Such strategies involve a comprehensive evaluation of water resources, an assessment of current and future demand, the definition of the roles and functions of local and national authorities and the creation of water management bodies and suppliers, as well as the elaboration and implementation of water-use rules and/or master plans for water, or waste water, systems in urban settings.

In the case of **longer-term and protracted crises**, humanitarian stakeholders and stakeholders in the field of development cooperation and stabilisation work in a complementary way for an extended period of time. It is important for them to coordinate their efforts in order to meet humanitarian needs in an effective manner, as well as to



reduce the humanitarian caseload in the long term through stabilising and structure-building measures.

## 6) Principal focuses of Germany's humanitarian WASH strategy

The Federal Foreign Office is committed to strengthening international humanitarian assistance in the WASH sector in cooperation with other donors and partners. Depending on the overall need, projects and programmes in the WASH field are supported in a targeted manner in acute and protracted crises. Focal regions of the WASH aid measures supported by the Federal Foreign Office to provide clean drinking water and construct latrines in refugee camps are the Middle East and Africa. The Federal Foreign Office supports collective approaches and sets great store by building capacities and involving the affected populations in the implementation of measures in order to strengthen international assistance and to empower local stakeholders in the WASH sector in the long term.

### a) WASH coordination and partnerships

The effectiveness of available resources and capacities must be maximised in light of the rapid increase in worldwide humanitarian WASH needs and the scarcity of humanitarian funding. To this end, it is necessary to strengthen coordination and partnership mechanisms within the humanitarian WASH community, close gaps in the international system and provide aid measures that are tailored flexibly to the respective needs. Available technical expertise in Germany should be leveraged to a greater extent to support humanitarian missions and strengthened in line with humanitarian needs. Focuses here include:

- **Supporting UNICEF as a leading agency of the global WASH Cluster. Joining global WASH coordination bodies,** including building up and using WASH coordination platforms such as the WASH Cluster structures and structures at the national level. Representatives of aid recipients and/or state WASH institutions must also be involved in these coordination mechanisms.<sup>xiii</sup> Suitable national platforms and coordination bodies (e.g. platforms on national preparedness and disaster risk reduction) are being strengthened wherever possible in order to avoid duplication of efforts or the circumvention of structures that are already in place.
- **Supporting the German WASH Network.** This network is the central point of contact for coordination, capacity-building and the establishment of consortia, as well as for the active support of implementing organisations in the WASH sector

in order to ensure the coherence and complementarity of Germany's humanitarian assistance in the WASH field.

- **Promoting more comprehensive involvement on the part of members of the network at the global and national level.** The objective here is for German experts in relevant forums (e.g. the working groups of the global WASH Cluster, the Strategic Advisory Group, the Humanitarian Country Teams, Field Support Teams and the WASH Clusters at regional level) to contribute their expertise to a greater extent and assume more responsibility. Non-governmental organisations are becoming increasingly involved in international and national WASH coordination mechanisms in order to ensure that their capacities and WASH interventions are in line with needs and are commensurate with the general humanitarian priorities of the country in question. This also includes facilitating the continuous exchange of knowledge and capacity-building among German actors.
- **Promoting innovations** through – on the basis of requirements and gap analyses – encouraging the scientific community and the private sector to develop suitable new technical, and other, non-technical, solutions for the field of humanitarian WASH assistance. This also comprises cooperation with respect to the introduction of new technological approaches.

#### **b) WASH capacity development and quality management**

The Federal Foreign Office will place stronger emphasis on the following areas in order to strengthen international and local capabilities:

- **Promoting capacity development and exchange of knowledge among German actors.** The objective here is to enhance the quality of Germany's contribution to humanitarian WASH measures and to build up a larger pool of experts. This includes needs-based WASH training measures for WASH experts and partners on the ground, as well as supporting the continuous exchange of knowledge within the German WASH Network and with international and local partners.
- **Facilitating learning processes between countries threatened by humanitarian crises and affected countries and building local capacities.** Measures here include organising regional WASH seminars and events on exchanging knowledge between countries affected by humanitarian crises and local partners and setting up WASH committees at local level, as well as supporting efforts to set up local

networks. Non-state partner organisations and governments are encouraged to establish national WASH platforms or to join existing ones.

- **Promoting dialogue with universities on activities in the WASH sector** in order to raise awareness among young professionals of the fact that more qualified WASH personnel is required. This includes offering young professionals postgraduate and course-based training modules on humanitarian assistance in the WASH sector.

### c) **Complementarity of humanitarian and development-related WASH measures**

Depending on the respective context, close coordination is required for planning and implementing humanitarian WASH measures, as well as for measures in the area of stabilisation, development cooperation and adaptation to climate change. The Federal Foreign Office therefore focuses on the following priorities:

- **Continuing the dialogue with development assistance stakeholders** in order to improve the complementarity of humanitarian assistance and reconstruction and development assistance activities. Actively supporting exchange of knowledge between stakeholders working in the fields of humanitarian assistance and development cooperation is part of this. These efforts comprise raising the profile of the humanitarian sector in key forums of WASH development cooperation such as the World Water Week in Stockholm, as well as cooperating with relevant international networks, alliances and think tanks.
- **Placing greater emphasis on sanitation and hygiene practices.** Humanitarian WASH measures must take sanitation and hygiene practices into account from the outset in order to ensure that infrastructures are properly used, operated and maintained once established. Such measures include information campaigns in the area of sanitation and hygiene, social marketing, WASH committees and community-based approaches to comprehensive sanitation services with the express involvement of women, as well as community-based health centres.
- **Taking the impacts of humanitarian WASH measures into account at the project planning stage.** The impact of WASH measures depends upon a range of factors. These include:

- Ownership and involvement of communities and households in planning, shaping and implementing measures
- Technologies with affordable operating and maintenance costs for communities and households
- The existence of functioning supply chains for replacement parts and other equipment
- Technical, financial and institutional support from medium-level actors
- The existence of enabling and supporting legal provisions

These factors must be borne in mind prior to crises when planning humanitarian WASH interventions in order to reach decisions on the scope and the appropriate level of WASH services for the region that are decided upon, operated and maintained by the affected communities in the long term.

## Abbreviations

BMZ	Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development
CBO	(Community-based organisation)
DG ECHO	Directorate-General for Humanitarian Aid at the European Commission
FFO	Federal Foreign Office
IWRM	Integrated Water Resources Management
Sphere	Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response
THW	Federal Agency for Technical Relief
WASH	Water, sanitation and hygiene

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<sup>i</sup> United Nations (2013)

<sup>ii</sup> Federal Foreign Office (2011)

<sup>iii</sup> GHD (2003)

<sup>iv</sup> DG ECHO (2007)

<sup>v</sup> DG ECHO (2014)

<sup>vi</sup> DG ECHO (2014)

<sup>vii</sup> The member organisations of the WASH strategy working group include: ADRA, arche noVa, the BORDA Overseas Research & Development Association, Care Deutschland, the German Toilet Organization (GTO), Engineers Without Borders Germany, Johanniter International Assistance, Malteser International, Welthungerhilfe and World Relief Germany.

<sup>viii</sup> German WASH Network (2014)

<sup>ix</sup> ECHO (2014)

<sup>x</sup> Federal Foreign Office (2012)

<sup>xi</sup> Sphere (2011)

<sup>xii</sup> Entire chapter taken from DG ECHO (2014)

<sup>xiii</sup> DG ECHO (2014)