

## Rural WASH in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

Over two decades of insecurity, extremely poor rural infrastructure, weak institutions and poorly developed policies for the WASH sector mean that access to water, sanitation and hygiene remains a huge challenge in rural areas of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).

In 2015, drinking water coverage in rural DRC was estimated at 31% and access to sanitation at 29%, according to the WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme. This leads to high rates of child mortality, recurrent cholera epidemics and high prevalence of waterborne diseases, hampering socio-economic development.

The key challenge for the sector is how to expand coverage at scale, improve the sustainability of WASH services and build upon the existing national rural WASH programme (see box on right). The DRC WASH Consortium has put these issues at the core of its approach.

### The National “Healthy Villages and Schools” Programme

To address the challenges of rural WASH, the DRC government initiated a national rural WASH programme « *Healthy Villages and Schools* » in 2008, which is run through the hygiene division of the Ministry of Health and with the technical support of UNICEF.

Villages complete an 8-step community process based on PHAST, to achieve the seven WASH **national norms** and become certified as a “Healthy Village”. The programme is currently in its second phase (2013-19) and targets over 3 million beneficiaries in total.

## The DRC WASH Consortium and its approach

Established in 2013 as a complementary initiative to the national programme, the Consortium is composed of five international NGOs:



The Consortium is funded through a grant of 30m GBP from 2013 to 2018 from the UK government through DFID (UKAID), which is also the principal donor of the national “Healthy Villages and Schools” programme. The creation of the Consortium took place during a one-year preparatory phase, also supported by DFID. The initial set-up of the Consortium took into account lessons learned from other WASH consortia in Liberia and Sierra Leone. Those experiences emphasized the importance of a strong Consortium Coordination Unit (CCU) within the lead agency, which was set up in DRC with a Consortium Director; a Deputy Director for Programme Quality; a Communication, Learning and Advocacy Coordinator; a Grant Compliance Manager and a Support Officer.

The reasons DFID named to support a rural WASH consortium of international NGOs in DRC were:

- **To achieve a greater scale**, as the Consortium provided the opportunity to expand WASH coverage in addition to the national programme;
- **To work with other government structures** in addition to the Ministry of Health, and focusing especially on decentralized local government authorities in the DRC;
- **To promote innovation and learning**, by researching and sharing best practices and knowledge;
- To enable INGOs to **shift from humanitarian interventions to longer-term development**, in line with the transitional nature of the DRC context.

The Consortium contributes to the national programme by supporting communities to achieve the “Healthy Villages” status according to the seven national norms, but develops and tests alternative approaches in order to improve sustainability in the long term, building on the experiences and expertise of the five member agencies. Knowledge Management and Learning activities are at the centre of the Consortium’s approach and allow flexibility in the programmatic approach: according to evidence-based results and research projects, interventions are adapted to the shifting contexts and the lessons learned.

The Consortium intervenes in 7 provinces and 17 health zones in DRC, targeting over 600,000 people. The programme therefore covers a sufficient scale and range of contexts to provide relevant evidence for the sector.

## The Consortium's 12-step process for rural WASH

The Consortium's programme approach is implemented through a **12-step process** which lasts between 18 and 24 months, and aims at the certification of villages according to the seven norms of the National Programme. The process starts with coordination with local authorities, social marketing activities to promote the programme and "Small Doable Actions" as well as community mobilization activities, and includes several evaluation stages to assess the progress of the villages, with the objective to get them certified as Healthy Villages. Support to local partners and communities continues for an additional 6 months to ensure that the villages become part of the national programme's post-certification monitoring process.

Some of the key elements of the approach are:

- **Small Doable Actions** : an emphasis on the promotion of community-led "Small Doable Actions" for water, sanitation and hygiene takes place before considering external investments in water infrastructure, promoting behaviour change and mitigating the risks of sustainability of infrastructures.
- **Life-Cycle Cost Approach**: based on participatory analysis and informed decisions, communities and local authorities take joint decisions on investment in water infrastructures and develop long-term financing plans.
- **Coordination with actors at different levels**: alongside coordination with the central government to align its activities to the National Programme, the Consortium cooperates with local health services, provincial and local governments, as well as the private sector for support to supply chains and marketing WASH products.

### Mid-term Results July 2013 - June 2016

- 81 villages certified, 238 villages completed the 12-step process, 537 villages are on going
- 346 water points installed
- 195,000 people gained complete WASH access and 32,000 have access to sanitation, hygiene and alternative water solutions

### Key achievements

- Over 20 tools, guides, manuals, factsheets, and research projects published and shared
- Bi-annual WASH sector exchange and learning events organised with 50-100 participants
- A successful advocacy initiative on the new Water Law in January 2016

## Strengths of the DRC WASH Consortium

- Combined increased scale of WASH programme delivery across different contexts in DRC
- Increased mutual capacity for research, innovation and learning among members
- Innovative joint strategy on key sustainability issues for rural WASH in DRC
- Strong advocacy and promotion of dialogue and exchange within the sector
- Sharing of operational and financial risk, and development of reinforced quality control

## Key challenges

- Implementation of rural WASH programmes in DRC continues to be logistically challenging
- Shifting to longer-term development is difficult in a context more focused on emergency projects
- The success of the approach in terms of sustainability cannot be directly measured in the short-term
- Positioning the Consortium and its approach in the sector takes significant time and relationship-building

### Lessons learned for WASH consortia

- A strong Consortium Coordination Unit is vital to allow effective leadership and implementation
- Organization of sectorial events helps position the Consortium as a platform for dialogue and exchange
- A flexible approach to adapt according to lessons learned over time is critical in fragile states
- Piloting innovative approaches should be done at a small scale before expanding
- A future mix of Consortium members and partners with more specific experience in different areas (e.g. governance, the private sector) could strengthen the overall structure.

The DRC WASH Consortium is composed of:



Financed by:



For more information about the DRC WASH Consortium, visit [www.concern.net](http://www.concern.net) and [www.consortiumwashdrc.net](http://www.consortiumwashdrc.net). This briefing note was published in November 2016 and is based on a paper "Lessons learned from a consortium model for rural WASH: experiences of the DRC WASH Consortium", presented at the 39th WEDC International Conference, Kumasi, Ghana, 2016.