The Quality Assurance & Accountability Project (QAAP) is implemented on behalf of the Global WASH Cluster. It is a collaboration between Oxfam, Solidarités International, Tufts University and UNICEF as the Cluster Lead Agency. For more information contact: James.Brown@oxfam.org
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Inception workshop

The inception workshop was held in Paris on the 25th October 2018. Attendees included the Quality Assurance and Accountability Project (QAAP) team (Oxfam, Solidarites International (SI), Tufts University, UNICEF Global WASH Cluster (GWC)) as well as representatives from the GWC’s Technical Working Group (TWG) on Quality Assurance (UNICEF, IFRC, ACF, IMC). The morning introduction and final wrap up sessions were also attended via weblink by representatives from NRC, RedR UK and UNHCR.

The over-arching objectives of the workshop were to:

1) Brief the TWG on the project overview, objectives and implementation plans
2) Gather information about what is currently being done to measure quality
3) Understand specific quality issues to be considered during the project
4) Agree implementation plans and opportunities for ongoing consultation

On the following day, the project team met in a more focussed session to define the project focus, scope of works and schedule based on the workshop discussions.

Introduction to the project

This project, which is a collaboration between Oxfam, Solidarités International, Tufts University and UNICEF, on behalf of the GWC, acknowledges that the first step to improve quality in humanitarian WASH responses is to measure it. Over the course of the project we aim to answer the research question: “How can an ongoing quality assessment process be implemented in a collective manner by National Cluster Partners and National Humanitarian WASH Coordination Platforms? (NHWCP)?”

A host of standards, frameworks and guidance exist to support quality measurement and so the focus for this project is to work with coordination platforms to prototype a monitoring processes that is used in each context, rather than producing more guidance. The project team aims to provide assistance to coordination platforms in three different contexts to establish an ongoing quality assessment and monitoring framework and complete a baseline quality assessment in each country during the scope of the project (October 2018 – June 2019).

Links to other GWC initiatives

The project is in line with the Global WASH Cluster Strategic Plan 2016-20201 to reinforce several of its pillars, notably to enhance quality and accountability of the humanitarian WASH response, by:

- Developing a framework that supports NHWCPs to guide partners towards a consistent definition of quality, and then to regularly monitor quality against that definition, producing alerts and proposing corrective actions when quality is found to be insufficient;
- Developing a methodology that supports the identification of technical and programmatic barriers that impact the quality of humanitarian WASH programmes;
- Instigating collective discussion around actions required to address quality at a global and organisational level leading to the strengthening of institutional strategies with respect to quality;
- Providing knowledge management systems to capture lessons and generate knowledge that can be used to improve the quality of response.

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Presentation of the Three Lenses Quality Model

The three lenses model was developed at the beginning of the project to offer a perspective through which to understand ‘quality’, independent of existing standards frameworks. It was proposed during the workshop to provoke conversation around a shared definition of quality that is both widely adaptable and specific enough to be measurable. At its centre are three lenses through which quality may be measured:

1) The human lens: Acceptable, safe, inclusive
2) The technical lens: Feasible, effective and appropriate
3) The financial lens: Efficient, prioritised and sustainable

Surrounding these measures is the enabling environment (see figure above) that includes: coordination; staff support; improvement and learning; and resource use. While not directly evident at the field level, these are essential to achieving quality programming and so need to be considered at the coordination and organisational levels. Each of the four components of the model include objectives, actions and key indicators.

Feedback on the model highlighted some areas for additional consideration:

- The scale or reach of the response;
- Environmental risks;
- Emphasising community engagement and accountability;
- Explicitly considering the national institutional framework and local standards;
- Simplification of indicators;
- Ensuring that the framework takes into account the impact of donor funding strategies and resource constraints on the quality of programmes;
- Possibility of concentrating on the Human and Technical lens in the QAAP.

Group discussions

During the workshop, group discussions were held to gather information on the key challenges and current state of quality measurement in WASH responses. Discussions focussed on the following topics:

1) Existing definitions of quality, either with reference to accepted standards or an implicit understanding of ‘good programming’
2) How quality is measured, both during formative monitoring and summative evaluations
3) The challenges currently faced measuring quality, including staff and organisational capacity, trust and information sharing, data collection and ‘data burden’
4) Quality issues that are commonly seen in the field, such as a lack of critical thinking, limited meaningful community participation, insufficient use/awareness of technical standards, poor quality implementation, inefficient or unsustainable project design and a lack of engagement with local governance structures or WASH service providers
5) Ensuring that the framework addresses quality from both an agency and inter-agency perspective, through linking with other strategic processes and coordinating the quality monitoring process within NHWCPs
NOTES ON GROUP DISCUSSIONS

1) How is quality defined?

With reference to agreed standards:
Organisations use a range of existing frameworks to measure the quality of programmes, but generally only at the project evaluation stage and within the boundaries of a single organisation’s work. Specifically, the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) Principles for the Evaluation of Development Assistance were cited as a basis for conducting evaluations. Standards frameworks such as the Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS), Sphere, and the Quality and Accountability COMPASS are also used.

Ongoing quality monitoring should be aligned to the standards framework in place in country, usually either adapted Sphere standards, other nationally agreed standards or as stated in the NHWCp’s Strategic Operational Framework (SOF). However, standards frameworks are often applied in an inconsistent way, with some indicators given more weight than others. For example, the Sphere indicator for water quantity might be given more weight than that for security and dignity. This may be due to the relative simplicity of quantitative indicators (15l/p/d, 20 people per latrine) compared to qualitative indicators (participation, satisfaction) that are more difficult to measure.

With reference to ‘good programming’:
Experienced WASH staff have an understanding of what constitutes a good quality programme, and are able to identify examples of poor quality programming during field visits. Aspects of a good quality WASH response would involve:

- Reducing public health risks;
- Providing adequate services that people use and are satisfied with;
- Making technical and technological choices that are appropriate to the context;
- Ensuring that people affected by the crisis are continually informed about the response and meaningfully engaged such that their perspectives, preferences and priorities are reflected in the way assistance is provided;
- Ensuring that affected people are consistently able to provide feedback and raise concerns, which are then used to adapt programmes to evolving needs and preferences;
- Providing communities with timely responses to feedback that describes the actions have been taken as a result;
- Using power and communication analysis to understand complexities of the context and mitigate the risk of doing harm;
- Building upon, rather than supplanting, existing capacities and coping strategies whilst working in collaboration with local communities, organisations and governments whilst building resilience to future shocks;
- Acknowledging and addressing key protection and safeguarding issues;
- Considering sustainability over the lifetime of the project and planning for an appropriate exit;
- Ensuring adequate staff and resource capacity are assigned to community engagement, complaints, and mapping;
- Working with other sectors in an integrated way to realise joint objectives.

The definition of ‘quality’ must be grounded in a specific context. In one dimension, quality is a measure of how relevant a response is to a particular group of people, at a specific time and place.

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2 Relevance, Effectiveness, Efficiency, Impact, Sustainability
3 Groupe URD: https://www.urd.org/The-Quality-and-Accountability
4 Key indicator under Water supply standard 1: “Average water use for drinking, cooking and personal hygiene in any household is at least 15 litres per person per day”
5 Key indicator under WASH Standard 1: “All users are satisfied that the design and implementation of the WASH programme have led to increased security and restoration of dignity.”
2) How is quality measured?

Currently both formative (monitoring) and summative (evaluation) methods are used to measure the quality of responses.

Evaluations
Evaluations are often conducted by experienced WASH staff who are to some degree external to the project implementation and thus are somewhat objective. They often make recommendations regarding actions to improve programming and document lessons learned for future responses. However, because they are conducted only periodically, or often at the end of a project cycle, these recommendations are often not immediately actionable and do not influence the project quality.

Regular monitoring
On the other hand, regular, formative monitoring should track a project progress over time, in time for adjustments to be made. This monitoring is often carried out by those involved in the project implementation and is tied to donor reporting requirements, so may not be objective or connected to beneficiary preferences and/or priorities. Although modern data collection methods promote the collecting large quantities of data, the type of data collected is often inappropriate for measuring quality in a meaningful way. Furthermore, the results of ongoing monitoring are rarely analysed sufficiently to produce recommendations for improving quality. Monitoring data reported to coordination platforms by implementing agencies is often inconsistently collected and irregularly reported, which limits the reliability of information products produced by the platform. Monitoring quality may also be limited by the technical capacity of teams. Accountability and feedback mechanisms have the potential to include the beneficiary perspective in ongoing monitoring processes where they are implemented well.

Sector level
Ongoing monitoring reported at the WASH Cluster / Sector level is too often focussed on quantifying what has been done rather than measuring how it has been done, or what the impact has been. For example, tools such as the 4Ws (Who, What, Where, When) matrix might report the number of latrines provided rather than how they are sited, constructed, maintained, cleaned and used. Tools such as 4Ws may then over-estimate coverage (based on calculation of ratios and quantity measurements) but hide gaps caused when inappropriate services are provided and, therefore, under-used. Inconsistent approaches to assessment, design, implementation, operation/management, monitoring etc. used across partners presents a significant challenge to information management at the coordination level where information must be summarised for strategic decision making.

Field level
Quality is also measured directly at a field level during the supervision of activities as part of the daily responsibility of WASH team leaders. Often it is not done in a systematic and rigorous way and/or by staff who may not always have the technical capacity to undertake this role.

Recommendations and take-aways:
- Aim to provide light and real-time monitoring information that allows NHWCPs to collectively take timely corrective actions when required
- Build upon and reliably apply, rather than supplant, existing national standards and frameworks
- Seek opportunities to support field teams to assess quality using simple proxy indicators and rules-of-thumb based on guidance from staff with a wider perspective and a greater exposure to evidence information.

3) What challenges do we face measuring quality now?

Staff and organisational capacity, roles and responsibilities
Whilst experienced WASH staff are able to identify quality when they see it, from the perspective of those working in the field it is often not easy to make the same judgements. Without a clear framework to guide quality and systematic capacity strengthening initiatives, staff involved in the implementation of projects may not have the capacity to measure quality in a rigorous way. We need
to be clear about the complex set of priorities that field staff are working with – not just ‘quality programming’ but also internal and external compliance, financial management, procurement and a host of other “technical” and “non-technical” requirements. Challenges that are faced commonly by all organisations such as limited resources, high staff turnover, restricted funding, procurement and financial constraints, working with governments, burnout etc. affect both quality itself, as well as our ability to measure it.

Measuring user-satisfaction, identifying protection risks and groups who are excluded or have inequitable access to WASH services requires nuanced monitoring based on qualitative data and investigation. WASH staff may not be used to collecting this information in an efficient and/or appropriate way. However, in turn this requires additional capacity building, staff time and financial resources to accomplish – it seems unlikely that improvements can be made through financially-neutral initiatives and efficiency gains alone. There can be a significant impact from donor funding strategies and resource constraints on the quality of programmes due to insufficient organisational capacity resulting from funding restrictions.

**Recommendations:**
- Field teams should ‘own’ the process of contextualising the definition of quality and measuring it in their context, but this process should be consistent with the global perspective. A balance of top-down and bottom-up approaches is needed to ensure field teams have ownership of the process without unduly burdening them with the additional workload.
- Project tools should be made as simple as possible to achieve the required level of detail. Avoid creating additional data collection, analysis and reporting burden on field staff. Balance the level of effort required with the value of information returned.
- Agree clear expectations about the responsibilities of field staff in the collection and analysis of data related to quality, including the support they will need from the project team.
- Consider the implications of monitoring frameworks on the allocation of organisational resources – link project outcomes to advocacy around effective (financial) resourcing that promotes quality

**Trust, transparency and information sharing**
Humanitarian responses are competitive, and sharing information about the quality of programmes can be sensitive. Project-based monitoring mechanisms are often linked to project funding so there is a risks of bias towards reporting positive outcomes and limiting the discussion of challenges and failures where this is perceived to risk further funding. Bias can also occur during end of project evaluations where an external evaluator relies on poor quality (or subjective) information already collected by programme staff.

The inter-agency coordination architecture already demands high volumes of data to be shared upwards by operational agencies and there is a perception that agencies get little of informative value in return. The quality of data flowing into coordination platforms is not routinely assessed, the quality of analysis should be improved and the IM products that are generated/not generated from this process should be reviewed at both subnational and national level to ensure that they accurately reflect reality.

**Recommendations:**
- The project team should engage with coordination platforms early in the QAAP to understand their perspectives and ensure that the project is defined to add value to their response.
- The quality framework should be based on an understanding of the operating environment, including limitations and challenges faced by implementation teams and consider what is possible, rather than what is perfect. The analysis of data collected should understand quality in terms of trade-offs and possible alternatives.
- Stakeholders should view the quality assessment as the beginning of the process, the results should initiate and demand further dialogue amongst partners about how quality can be improved in their specific context
- Stakeholders should support coordination mechanisms to build trust between partners to promote open and objective data sharing and mitigate the risk of creating a ‘blame culture’.
- The project team should be clear in communications that this project is not about “HQ” level staff policing field teams, but is a genuine effort to support field teams to define and meet their own WASH programme quality objectives.

**Data volumes, quality, analysis and relevance**

Humanitarian responses are increasingly data-thirsty environments. As the collection of large volumes of data becomes easier through the introduction of digital tools and platforms, the expectation to share increasing quantities of data grows. This data can be very valuable where it enhances our understanding of context and allows us to design approaches that better meet needs. However, we do need to ensure that data collection is proportionate and relevant to this goal, that it is analysed in an appropriate way to produce useful insights and that it is shared in a form that enables effective decision making. The quality of information is also important and highly variable, both between and within contexts, and is often shared without providing a measure of how reliable it might be. As increasing amounts of data is collected in digital formats that enable almost frictionless distribution, data protection, privacy and security also become increasingly important considerations.

There can be a disparity between the picture of the response provided at the coordination level through tools such as the 4Ws, and what is observed on the ground. Simplistic, quantitative indicators can often hide spatial, temporal or social disparities in coverage or quality. Priority should be given to understanding the situation at field level using measures that illustrate distributions as well as averages.

**Recommendations:**
- The quality assessment should understand and aim to collect the minimum amount of data required for measuring quality.
- The team should plan how data will be collected, stored, analysed and shared before it is collected, in line with data protection policies.
- The project should promote the use of robust data collection and analysis that is sufficient to capture disparities in quality measures across spatial, temporal or social dimensions.
- Stakeholders should ensure that the information provided back to partners is analysed and presented in a format that actually supports effective decision making.

**4) Key quality issues**

The meeting highlighted several aspects of quality programming that we should anticipate in the QAAP framework:

**Meaningful community participation, and accountability:**
Community participation is both a means to understand the needs, preferences, priorities and fears of the affected population and an important outcome in its own right. It is a critical consideration throughout the project cycle from needs assessment to evaluation. Meaningful participation involves providing safe, appropriate and equitable opportunities for people of all genders, ages and abilities to participate in decisions about the design of programming that affects them. It prioritises dialogue and understanding and involves a repeating cycle of listening, learning, taking action and feeding back to the affected community. Meaningful participation is often not achieved early enough in the response, resulting in actions being taken without understanding the views (or gaining the trust) of people affected, communicating plans to them or providing effective ways to feedback. Accountability requires that communities are transparently and consistently informed in a timely way about all aspects of the program and proactively provided with appropriate channels to feedback and report issues. Ensuring technical capacity and resources allocated to community appropriate modes of engagement, communication and feedback is key, however organisations also need to build in mechanisms for adapting programming in response to feedback received.

**Critical thinking in project design and implementation:**
Critical thinking involves evaluating and analysing information from a range of sources to come to a conclusion or plan that is rational and evidence-based. In some cases, response planning is not based on sufficient evidence – either because the right questions have not been asked (sub-standard data...
collection) or because the answers have not been considered (poor data analysis). This can lead to generic (WASH) responses that are not adapted to the context and expressed needs of the affected people. High quality outputs lead from high quality processes – if the right questions are asked, of the right people and this information is analysed in relation to the wider evidence base then project design and implementation has a good chance of succeeding. Critical thinking does require staff capacity – both in terms of technical skill, access to information and availability of time and other resources. Where specific information from beneficiaries is not available, we can make informed decisions based on prior experience and appropriate assumptions, for example ensuring that latrines are built to provide privacy and security to women and girls by default. Decisions need to be based on the best information available at the time, in line with the phase of the response and organisational capacity.

**Technical standards, use of existing guidance and evidence:**
Despite technical standards, requirements and guidance documents being available, often these standards are not used, only partially used, or insufficiently contextualised. There is a lack of clarity around which standards are the minimum, which are priority and which are ideal. ‘Non-negotiable’ standards (e.g. ‘do-no-harm’) are not necessarily the easiest to achieve and so putting them first takes conscious effort. Without a prioritisation framework or a SOF (Strategic Operational Framework), and the critical thinking behind it, it is not simple for field staff to clearly identify where to prioritise limited resources.

**Technical quality of implementation:**
One of the most evident quality issues seen is the quality of programme implementation itself. This is evident both with the quality of WASH hardware construction and maintenance and the quality of software or communication activities. These project outputs are important because they are how the response is experienced by beneficiaries. It might be that poor design choices have been made, that construction has not been supervised effectively, or that maintenance mechanisms are not in place. There may be a trade-off between speed and quality but the balance of this trade-off should always be considered relative to the context and phase.

**Efficiency and financial sustainability:**
Both capital expenses and operational expenses need to be considered to ensure projects are efficient over an appropriate lifetime (either over the period of the project, or an assumed lifetime of the response). There are often situations where very high operational expenses over the period of a response could have been reduced by early investment in more cost-effective systems (long term water-trucking being the common example). Considering the impact of interventions on local markets at the beginning of the response may also provide opportunities to mitigate harm to local traders and the wider supply chain.

**Building on local capacities and working with existing service providers:**
Responses should work with governance structures, communities, local partner organisations and the private sector to ensure that actions support, rather than undermine, existing systems and capacities. This should include mapping of existing WASH infrastructure and local capacities, including public and private sector service providers (e.g. through a market assessment). WASH organisations should identify and work with relevant service providers to plan how activities will be handed over at the end of the project. A contextual analysis of existing power dynamics, informal governance structures and black markets in the community may be required to understand and mitigate potential risks to programmes, staff and marginalised groups.

5) **Considering sector and agency perspectives**

**Links to other strategic processes**
Whilst this project is field-focused and aims to primarily measure the quality of response from the perspective of affected people, it does need to fit within the context of the humanitarian programme cycle for several reasons:

- It is important to have a consistent approach to defining and measuring quality to ensure replicability and comparison over time;
- There is collective accountability as a sector to measure and take steps to improve quality;
- In order to sustain a quality assurance mechanism across the geographic scope and lifetime of a response;
- Quality of response is a consideration of allocating funding resources, which are prioritised at the sector and HCT levels;
- Monitoring and evaluating performance is one of the 6 core functions of clusters;

The quality of response should be measured within a framework that includes the Humanitarian Needs Assessment (HNO) and Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) documents, as well as the Strategic Operational Framework (SOF) agreed by partners of the National Humanitarian WASH Coordination Platform (NHWCP) in each country. Specifically, the quality criteria developed in each country might well be used as part of the technical scoring of pooled funding applications, as well as projects submitted to the HPR.

**Coordination of quality assurance**

The process of measuring quality should be coordinated by the NHWCP, with agreement from all partners at both national and subnational levels. Existing mechanisms such as Technical Working Groups should be the basis for discussions around measuring and improving programme quality. The monitoring mechanism itself could be carried out using peer, third party, individual or community-based monitoring as agreed with the NHWCP by WASH partners and the government. At the coordination level, monitoring results should be used to:

- Provide clear guidance to partners on what is considered quality programming in each context and emphasise the role that they play within the wider framework of quality improvement;
- Initiate a conversation around improving quality, using results as an evidence base to show what is effective;
- Alert agencies to critical issues and inform the design of corrective actions.

Once standards and monitoring mechanisms have been agreed, these can be used on an ongoing basis to track quality over time. The role of the coordinators is to facilitate this collective process, and to ensure that information is managed and shared appropriately between stakeholders.
ANNEX 1: WORKSHOP AGENDA

Date: 25th October; 0900-1700 CEST

Location: L’Atelier B-45, located at 45 Boulevard Victor Hugo, 92110, Clichy

Attendees:
- Oxfam: Andy Bastable, Marion O’Reilly, Helen Hawkings, James Brown
- SI: Aude Lazzarini, Laurène Barlet, Louis Coudray
- Tufts: Daniele Lantagne, Travis Yates
- GWC: Franck Bouvet
- UNICEF: Carla Daher
- IFRC: William Carter
- ACF (Fr): Thomas Heath
- IMC: Yasir Ahmad
- RedR UK: Harriette Purchase (online)
- NRC: Jack Chow (online)
- UNHCR: Eva Barrenberg (online)

Objectives:
- Provide stakeholders with an overview of the project, objectives and implementation plans
- Agree a working definition of quality in the context of the humanitarian WASH sector
- Agree the core components of a quality assurance system, including principles of partnership
- Agree the roles and responsibility of GWC, National Coordination Platforms and partners
- Understand what quality monitoring and assurance systems are already being used and what we can learn from what has gone before
- Propose a practical way of measuring quality that is based on the complementary roles and responsibilities of both national coordination platforms and implementing agencies
- Agree further opportunities for engagement throughout the project
- Develop key milestone for the project to inform the detailed work plan

Session plan:

1) Introduction
   a. Introduction to the project, objectives, timescale, countries
   b. Framing the project within other initiatives
   c. Propose the 3 lenses model for measuring quality

2) Group discussions:
   a. How do we define and measure quality?
   b. What are the key quality issues we should focus on?
   c. What challenges do we face measuring quality now?
   d. How do we ensure that the framework addresses quality from both an agency and sector perspective?

3) Group discussions:
   a. Detailing the three quality perspectives and the enabling environment
   b. How do we practically measure quality?
   c. How do we address quality once issues have been identified?

4) Summary:
   a. Group work feedback
   b. Wrap up
   c. Next steps
   d. Agree engagement opportunities + ways of working with external stakeholders