



WASH/IWRM alignment in Dutch foreign policies and practices

Main findings from interviews and literature review

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Key messages, summary and recommendations

Key messages

In order to ensure sustainable WASH in a context of decreasing water security, there is a need to align WASH and IWRM. While the Dutch government acknowledges the need for alignment, these intentions are not reflected in action. Top priority is to step up collaboration within the Dutch government and to seek collaboration with others to fill gaps. Next to that there is a need to develop guidelines for integrated programming and to have clearer criteria for how WASH proposals are being assessed.

Summary

Providing sustainable water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services requires sustainable access to sufficient clean water resources. This becomes increasingly challenging in areas with high competition for water and environmental degradation. Integrated water resources management (IWRM) can be an important process to ensure the sustainable provision of WASH services in the context of increasing water scarcity. IWRM, defined as "a process which promotes the coordinated development and management of water, land and related resources, in order to maximize the resultant economic and social welfare in an equitable manner without compromising the sustainability of vital ecosystems", includes a river basin approach and refers both to the wide range of economic and social sectors that rely on water resources as well as to water security and the role of the environment in regulating the quantity and the quality of water.

Sustainable Development Goal 6 is to ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all. The goal includes specific targets related to WASH, IWRM and water related ecosystems. The targets are closely related. For example, clean water resources and ecosystems need proper solid waste management, including fecal waste, to remain clean. Providing sustainable WASH and IWRM can be mutually supportive. The High Level Panel on Water seeks to mobilize political commitment and support towards the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 6. The Netherlands participates in the High Level Panel and thus needs to mobilize support both for WASH and IWRM. But how are WASH and IWRM aligned in our own foreign policies and practices? A review of relevant policy documents, and interviews with selected representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, The Ministry of Infrastructure and Environment and the Netherlands Water Partnership, provide an answer to this question.

Dutch foreign affairs and development cooperation policies acknowledge the need for alignment of WASH and water security. This is mentioned both in policies of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as well as in joint policy of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Infrastructure and Environment and Economic

Affairs. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs notes that the availability of drinking water depends on river basin management. The Ministry wants to connect water, sanitation, climate change and conservation of ecosystems where possible. Investments in water supply and sanitation funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs will carry a 15-year sustainability clause, defining that services are supposed to function for at least 15 years after construction or rehabilitation, and environmental sustainability is part of that. The Ministry of Infrastructure and Environment also supports the need for an integrated water approach, underlining the need for interaction with other sectors.

However, policy language often remains vague on what precisely integration entails and how it should come about. Next to that, most people interviewed for this study are unaware of the WASH component of the International Water Ambition.

Evaluations find that Dutch WASH practices do not pay enough attention to environmental issues. The Policy and Operations Evaluation Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs notes that WASH programmes don't pay enough attention to ecological aspects, in particular in the context of IWRM and climate change. The sustainability clause was triggered by the first evaluation of the Policy and Operations Evaluation Department, but the second evaluation still finds that environmental aspects are under addressed. This is reflected in the difficulty that the interviewees have, to come up with best practices of WASH/IWRM alignment.

The Watershed partnership aims for improved WASH sector governance to contribute to improved water resources management and aims for improved water resources management to lead to more sustainable WASH services delivery. This means for example that WASH programmes recognize that their sustainability depends on the appropriate conservation of the broader watershed, that WASH programmes include environmental sustainability criteria, that services delivery is part of IWRM programmes, and that WASH-related voices of citizens are heard in IWRM bodies.

Obstacles and incentives for alignment are found both in policy processes as well as in the translation from policy into practice. The professionals and organisations working on WASH programmes are different from the ones working on WRM programmes, and they do not often collaborate. This lack of collaboration is perceived to be the most important obstacle for alignment. Other obstacles are abstract intentions without clear goals, limited influence of the Netherlands as a donor, separate funding streams for WASH and IWRM and different geographic location and scope. The main measures to make alignment of WASH and IWRM work are working together better and providing clearer guidance on integration, for example through incentives for WASH/IWRM synergies to implementing partners.

What strikes most at the level of policy processes, is the lack of collaboration both within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as well as between this ministry and the Ministry of Infrastructure and Environment. While the Ministry of Foreign Affairs notes that many stakeholders prefer to work in their own sector and acknowledges that it is difficult to address working in silos, it fails to note that within the Dutch government teams tend to work in silos as well. This is reflected in money and in geography: WASH and water management programs have separate funding streams and different geographic locations and scope. Working in silos with separate financial resources and different geographic locations for WASH and IWRM programmes is not necessarily a problem, as there is value in having specialisation in a certain topic, but it is a problem if there are no adequate coordination mechanisms.

In relation to the translation from policy into practice, it turns out to be important not only to provide more support on new WASH programming, but also on the appraisal process. There is a need for clearer criteria for the assessment of WASH proposals.

Recommendations

1. The new Sustainable Development Goal 6 implies closer collaboration between different water sectors. The Dutch government needs to step up coordination so as to better align WASH and IWRM in its practices. WASH and IWRM experts need to increase collaboration within the Water Cluster of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and within the Interdepartmental Water Cluster: they need to build on each other's knowledge and to seek each other's advice. Collaboration with other organizations can also help fill gaps, add knowledge and increase impact.
2. The Interdepartmental Water Cluster needs to pay more attention to the WASH component of the International Water Ambition. Access to drinking water and sanitation is essential for all and cannot be left out of water management for development, and inadequate sanitation is a big challenge in many urban deltas. Elaborating WASH as part of IWA will not only help to make both WASH and water security programs more sustainable, it will also help to make IWRM more pro-poor and thus increasing the public and political support for large water management plans. The Water Envoy and the Delta Teams should play a key role and become ambassadors for WASH/IWRM integration.
3. The MFA needs to provide more guidance for moving from sustainable WASH policies into sustainable WASH practice. This needs to build on best practices. It is recommended to have a closer look at existing guidelines drawing on lessons learned, and to test if they could serve as a tool for new WASH programming. It is also worth exploring possible incentives for alignment for example by funding specific pilots on cross-cutting issues like re-use of waste water or groundwater management.
4. The support for sustainability in WASH programmes is a good initiative which should be monitored over time. Sustainability checks meant to measure the sustainability clause should not only look at maintenance and institutional issues but also need to address environmental issues more clearly. Next to that it is worth exploring if integration can be spurred through the Beoordelingsmemorandum. It is important to look beyond numbers, since it is not only the number of beneficiaries with access to drinking water that counts, it is also about wider ecosystems. It is recommended to have a closer look at existing frameworks and indicators developed for integrated monitoring and evaluation. The MFA needs to ensure that assessors are knowledgeable about this.