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| **A Global Strategic Direction for Water, Sanitation & Hygiene (WASH)** |
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| **WASH Team, Health and Care Department** |

January 30, 2017

**International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies**

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***Purpose:***

This document, formulated after extensive consultation with IFRC and NS Health and WASH staff, is intended to provide a reference point and platform from which RC/RC WASH practitioners can align their operational and programming direction. The overarching aim is to encourage a consistent and more coherent collective contribution to the SDG and the aims of the health and WASH sector overall and specific to IFRC and NS’s globally. A broader and more comprehensive health strategy will follow to which this WASH strategic direction will contribute and both documents are intended to align with the IFRC plan and budget and Strategy 2020.

Operational and programming demands often vary according to context and this document does not try to be all inclusive but rather set the general direction from which specifics may be unpacked, while maintaining a collective and overall direction and alignment. The document is intended to be a living document and one which will be open to review and revision on a regular basis.

***Background:***

WASH[[1]](#footnote-1) (water, sanitation, and hygiene) is crucial to human dignity, is a vital element of preventive and public health and can contribute significantly to poverty reduction. [[2]](#footnote-2)

Lack of access to water and sanitation combined with poor hygiene are among the principal causes of preventable death and disease globally[[3]](#footnote-3). It also leads to loss of productivity and forms a major barrier to development efforts and sustainable growth. Although great strides were made globally within the framework of the MDG’s, many countries fell short of targets and significant gaps exist both thematically and geographically. Enabling environments for increased sustainable and equitable WASH access gains are still a challenge across the globe. This is particularly the case in fragile states where underlying poverty and lack of investment and implementation capacities are weak and where policy and legislative frameworks are not in place or applied. It is in those scenario’s that the RC/RC membership is most commonly targeting those in need and will continue to do so in years to come and in both emergency and developmental contexts.

The Federation and its member national societies have a formally adopted WASH policy[[4]](#footnote-4) from which this strategic direction has evolved. Collective RC/RC efforts in the sector to date are significant and as a result we are recognised as a major player both in emergency and developmental WASH. However, the Federation and its membership has the potential to accomplish much more in scale, measurable impact and quality than at present. There are also opportunities to demonstrate a greater degree of social inclusion and innovation while being better positioned to respond to current and evolving global demands and needs in a more integrated fashion, and both within the three WASH sector components and cross sectoral.

This strategic direction will therefore lobby and advocate for:

* Providing a long term vision and common goal for the RC/RC WASH sector.
* Presenting an important coordination tool for RC/RC partners and donors.
* Strengthening the RC/RC leverage for encouraging further resource mobilisation for emergency response and GWSI[[5]](#footnote-5) (contribution to the SDG’s).

***A Global Vision:***

*The vision is to ensure that universal, equitable and affordable access to WASH services, from response to sustainable development, is achieved as a human right[[6]](#footnote-6) and one that impacts positively upon health, dignity and wellbeing****.***

***A Global Goal:***

*The goal is to maintain, improve and expand NSs’ emergency, recovery and developmental WASH programming.*

***Overarching strategic direction:***

The strategic direction will be achieved by focusing upon ‘results based excellence’ in SDG’s.[[7]](#footnote-7) delivery and outcomes which will be generated by working more closely with and strengthening NS capacities and relevant presence in communities. In terms of ‘results based excellence’ projects should be cost-effective; relevant; replicable; targeting those most in need; should be objectively measurable; demonstrate social inclusion, reflect our fundamental principles and embed applied innovation. At the core of this will be sustainable local ownership delivered by RC/RC National Societies in partnership with international and local partners.

The delivery mechanism will be founded upon strengthened NS capacities that are tailored towards existing and emerging ‘acute’ and ‘chronic’ needs. This will require greater efforts in working collectively across technical or institutional boundaries, seeking out new ways of brokering, creating or expanding partnerships (internally and externally) and better pooling of skills, resources, capacities, innovation, knowledge sharing and experience.

***Partnering for more resilient communities[[8]](#footnote-8)*** will require an increased commitment to providing support to NSs and vulnerable communities, specifically:

* Working across/through the resilience continuum, in disaster preparedness and disaster risk reduction, disaster response and recovery leading to development. More resilient communities will be better prepared to respond to and mitigate the impact of disasters and crises while further contributing to poverty reduction.
* Strengthening of NSs’ auxiliary role and links with government and other partners, grow existing and new partnerships, better positioning of NS as preferred partners.
* Ensure evidenced based sustainability and impact, encouraging and providing leadership in innovation, knowledge sharing and best practice. Seeking excellence in everything we do based upon objective and results based programme planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.
* ‘Greening’ both our emergency response and developmental efforts applying climate change adaptation.
* Taking advantage of global initiatives and integrated programming such as the 1 Billion Coalition.[[9]](#footnote-9) This is a new commitment to partnership and coalition-building which is necessary if we are to help individuals and communities strengthen their resilience. We must fully realize the potential of our collective networks including our volunteer base, our ability to work at scale, coordinate our shared resources and collaborate through both internal and external partnerships.
* ‘Flagship’ Projects. At least in the first instance, in a phased approach, is another example on how multi-sectoral and holistic programming can benefit from interaction and synergy with the Global Water & Sanitation Initiative (GWSI). The GWSI may be an entry point or indeed may provide the basis for further expanded follow-on or complimentary activities commenced by other thematic sectors. Thus also the need for strengthened linkages and encouraged overlap and synergy with the other health department teams at all levels, and other technical teams in the secretariat.
* Developing a more flexible and ‘adaptable to context’ disaster response capacity using global tools as the primary platform. This within which a broader and more inclusive RC/RC human resource pool is made available as well as a more adaptable array of technical equipment choices while maintaining standardisation and quality control.
* Increasing our Federation and collective RC/RC profiling, representation, sector leadership, advocacy and engagement through a combination of internal RC/RC networking and technical working group (TWG) coordination[[10]](#footnote-10) and external key events such as the Stockholm World Water Week, specific WASH related events and looking for new opportunities, both actual and virtual, to raise collective Federation and RC/RC positioning and visibility.
* Ensuring social inclusion, gender, disability, age and other cross cutting elements are fully embedded in all activities in all contexts.
* Continuing and potentially broadening the present engagement with the Global WASH Cluster (GWC)[[11]](#footnote-11). This has proven to be additionally advantageous with institutional donors and this should be built upon further. We are currently a member of the Strategic Advisory Group (SAG) to the GWC. Greater efforts are needed to ensure benefits are cascaded more effectively to RC/RC National Societies.
* Keeping our primary focus upon SDG 6, while recognising that WASH importantly overlaps with SDG 3 namely ensuring healthy lives and promoting the well-being for all at all ages and SDG 4 relative to education is essential to sustainable development. Significant strides have been made in increasing life expectancy and reducing some of the common killers associated with child and maternal mortality. Major progress has been made on increasing access to clean water and sanitation, reducing malaria, tuberculosis, polio and the spread of HIV/AIDS. However, many more efforts are needed to fully reduce or even eradicate a wide range of diseases and address many different persistent and emerging health issues and this will require a greater overlap between health and WASH programming and setting of collective targets while increasing complementarity.
* However, of continuing concern is the lack of progress in better cholera preparedness and response, exacerbated by increasing incidence, spread and severity of cholera outbreaks and epidemics.
* Embed and encourage an advocacy role for IFRC and the membership for the WASH sector.
* Further roll out our WASH strategic direction and expand our reach through engagement in the One Billion Coalition, though this can only be best achieved by collective action.

Achieving an improved degree of harmonisation within and external to the health sector (e.g. education; environment; planning; finance) may only be ultimately measured in the number of vulnerable people empowered and served according to their needs. When targeting those that may benefit from WASH programming or operations our efforts in social inclusion (ensuring the disenfranchised, those suffering stigma or discrimination due to gender, age, poverty, disability, political or religious affiliation or indeed any other reason) will be uppermost in our identification of vulnerable groups that we wish to serve. Interventions need to be tailored to adequately address their specific needs.

***Specific Strategic direction and technical focus areas:***

The four focus areas are namely ***Developmental WASH; Urban WASH (emergency & development); Emergency WASH*** and ***Public Health WASH*** all of which are complimentary to each other in thematic, operational and programmatic terms.

1. **Developmental WASH:**

The Global WASH Team (that is country, country cluster, regional and Geneva level WASH staff and RC/RC WASH staff) shall continue and further expand its reach and scope under the umbrella of the Global Water and Sanitation Initiative (GWSI now extended from 2005 to 2025) which is primarily driven by RC/RC National Societies active at country level. We shall collectively continue and expand provision of leadership, innovation, best practice, research and support to RC/RC NSs in the area of development WASH. Delivery and programming modalities including resource mobilisation need to and will change, and at times rapidly. The GWSI criteria, tools and methodologies, including software guidelines should be aligned with both the SDG’s and with the four strategies for implementation.[[12]](#footnote-12)

IFRC and its membership remains well positioned to increase the scope and scale of developmental WASH programming due to several key factors such as our auxiliary role to government; permanent in-country presence; long-term mission and vision, ability to partner internally and externally and the availability of our networks both local and global. Our role should be expanded where practical in strengthening the enabling environment with governments and other key stakeholders at national and sub-national levels, and in particular the national level policy base.

Innovation will encompass but not be restricted to increased mobile phone technology and remote mapping for full project cycle management; ‘theory of change’ as a means to better capture and relate to change processes and at all levels be that institutional, programmatic or in behavioural change; ‘Look Back’ studies and increased post-project sustainability activities and an overall renewed emphasis on the need to apply improved, innovative and evolving methods of data collection and analysis. These innovative tools or methods should be seen as a vehicle or platform for improving and expanding RC/RC WASH volunteer and staff capacities while improving quality programming overall including impact measurement and monitoring and evaluation. GWSI projects need to reflect an increasing need and demand for Integrated Water Resource Management (IWRM) and must rapidly increase adherence to environmental protection including being ‘climate SMART’ to reduce negative environmental impact and plan ahead now for the increasing impact of climate variability and climate change. We must ensure that the data we collect on the sustainability of our programming is used to improve future WASH programming and widely shared and used to compare our approach with other WASH implementers. More efforts to secure ‘post implementation’ funding and activities to further strengthen sustainability should become the norm. GWSI projects should also be seen as research platforms made open to academic and research institution partners in order to learn and innovate to improve the impact and sustainability of developmental WASH. Overall more efforts are required for collective innovation and research in developmental WASH encouraging a greater buy-in to this from RC/RC and external partners.

Increased resource mobilization (RM) for developmental WASH programming (multilateral and bilateral) is required and we envisage that collective efforts should significantly increase funding. The increased resource mobilization is essential to reach our revised cumulative minimum of at least 30 million people served by GWSI by 2025. A more structured and planned component of WASH related advocacy and information management, representation and profiling of NSs and the Federation will be undertaken. However, resources required are not just financial, creating a greater synergy with technical and partner resources in programme delivery and capacity building is equally important to financial resources such as greater linkages with other WASH actors, private sector and academia.

The WASH team will provide continued technical and programme backstopping to existing and new GWSI projects and foster among NSs a cascading technical and programming support culture. The emphasis on having the right balance between ‘hardware’ and ‘software’ in programme planning and implementation (a public health focused approach) and the increased impact upon sanitation coverage and indeed innovative sanitation solutions will continue. Indeed, we must strive to achieve our own advocacy message to ‘get the balance right’ on sanitation, water and hygiene behaviour change while designing our programmes with at least an equal number of targeted beneficiaries for each aspect.

In line with the SDG 6 we will increase our focus upon and response to waste water and solid waste management. Similarly, safe excreta disposal and management should cascade to individual needs, especially for the elderly, infirm, those with disabilities or to those who have to cope with incontinence. We will continue to expand and roll out our efforts around menstrual hygiene management (MHM) and both in disaster and developmental contexts.

Across the board, increased emphasis on water quality monitoring and surveillance is needed in the sector and the WASH team must roll this out to the membership.

Programmatic funding should contribute to the maintenance of a WASH delegate structure in the field, primarily embedded in NSs at country level, but also should contribute to regional and HQ level WASH positions and structures.

1. **Urban WASH:**

The global WASH team will continue in the first instance to lead the newly formed urban WASH technical working group (TWG) and provide shared leadership to RC/RC WASH advisors and practitioners as we develop an urban WASH strategy which supports emergency and developmental programming and roll this out for the membership. The key focus of this strategy development must be to define the role of the Federation and NSs in urban WASH, as it may be substantially different from how we have designed programmes in the past.Tentatively we expect in the near future that 20% of all people targeted and eventually reached by the collective efforts of RC/RC NSs will be in urban contexts and as much as 40% in coming decades.

A mapping, lessons learned and knowledge sharing initiative is required to capture existing RC/RC experience in urban contexts.

To enable meeting these new targets, a new means of RM will be required and most likely under broader and different partnership profiles and modalities such as new partnerships across the board inclusive private sector; public/private bodies; local entrepreneurs; WASH service providers (WSP’s) including academia and those that can provide specific technical expertise when not available within the Federation or the membership.

Research and development in solutions for urban WASH in emergencies will continue and be shared and piloted with RC/RC NSs and other WASH actors and partners. Urban solutions in the development context need to be scoped and a plan developed for this new direction for Federation and NSs to consider.

A major focus for urban WASH should be governance, whereby RC/RC NSs should advocate for those who are the most vulnerable or have no voice, negligible rights or land tenure under the principle of “leaving no one behind”. We must also recognize the need for developing stronger partnerships with private sector and other stakeholders to meet the 20 and 40% targets we set. Our urban WASH programming should address 5 building blocks to allow good governance within the urban context, especially for sanitation, which are:

1. Universalization of sanitation (inclusive water supply)

2. Community processes and duty bearers

3. Institutional structures

4. Small, private service providers

5. Regulatory framework for the urban WASH sector

1. **Emergency WASH:**

The Global WASH Team shall continue to expand its reach and scope in providing leadership, innovation, best practice, research and scaled up relevant programming inputs to RC/RC NSs in the area of emergency WASH. This requires a harmonisation process to increase and operationalise country and regional level emergency WASH response capacity (RDRT, NDRT and Kits) while maintaining and improving/adapting global capacities (ERU and FACT) to achieve integrated and comprehensive WASH surge capacity in both rural and urban contexts. Greater efforts are required to embed WASH preparedness and prevention in DRR and community health programming and not just for large scale disasters but also the more prevalent smaller scale disasters.

A key area of focus will be ensuring that the WASH global tools work more closely together. The membership’s global WASH surge capacity will be strengthened by ensuring professional dialogue with and relevant support to WASH technical staff and maintaining a functioning network of delegates, NS staff and professionals in the WASH sector. Maintaining the Movement wide pool of human resources for WASH disaster response will require continuous FACT, ERU, and RDRT/NDRT training as well as online e-Learning and new academic opportunities as well as mentoring at field level when opportunities arise. In partnership with other sectors, efforts will be made to develop a competency matrix and improved surge database to streamline deployment and consolidate institutional memory.

The global WASH team will continue to advocate internally and externally for a better balance between sanitation and water activities in emergency operations. To achieve scale up we must dedicate resources to improve our human resource and equipment capability to deliver sanitation activities, particularly in difficult settings such as floods and urban environments.

Substantial efforts have been made to improve WASH emergency response by making hygiene promotion the bedrock of our approach. Our hygiene promotion activities must expand to incorporate new methodologies grounded in a solid evidence base. As it is both vital and requires a significant amount of software skills, we will strive in particular to see that menstrual hygiene management incorporated in emergency WASH response.

To respond effectively and at scale, WASH equipment, including hygiene promotion equipment, needs to be readily available and appropriate and the WASH team will maintain its role as technical focal point for WASH equipment, and equipment that can be sourced at all levels be that global, regional and local especially if local level pre-positioning is appropriate. The global WASH team will continue to work with logistics and NSs to ensure a range of equipment is available globally. Research and development in partnership with external agencies, suppliers, and academic institutions will be carried out to ensure WASH personnel are equipped with the most effective and reliable means to provide safe water, sanitation and hygiene in emergency response. We must also acknowledge the need to catch up with adopting ways of working, such as cash transfer programming, which are seen as mainstream rather than innovative approaches to WASH in emergencies. Primary and secondary data collection and analysis including mapping needs to be strengthened and rolled out to better inform key decision making in real time but also to better capture and measure effectiveness and overall impact.

Saving lives will continue to be always the primary concern when responding to crisis. That in no way precludes a responsibility to reduce harm to the environment. We must contribute to initiatives such as Green Response and thread carbon reduction and improved environmental health throughout our planning and response activities. This has to go beyond small measures and we must open ourselves to radical rethinking of how we go about our work.

As emergency WASH transitions to recovery and developmental efforts we fully take every opportunity to ‘build back better’ and plan exit and transition strategies from the outset of emergency response operations. Overall we seek a strengthened strategic direction on how we better engage with and take into account in our planning and activities the broader resilience continuum.

1. **Public Health WASH:**

The Global WASH Team will ensure that WASH programs support disease control and prevention of transmission in all relevant settings (clinical, home, environment etc.) We will redouble our efforts to ensure an equal emphasis on sanitation elements without de-emphasising the continued need for safe water coverage. This reflects a consensus among research bodies and other WASH and health players that increased and sustainable impact upon WASH related morbidity and mortality, indeed public health impact, needs an increased awareness and resultant behavioural change. Clearly defined and demonstrated methodologies to encourage and deliver behavioural change do exist but need better alignment and streamlining as well as further research and development. The growing threat and incidence of cholera will be a major focus, both in terms of preparedness and response, but also in long term WASH gains as the ultimate solution in cholera eradication. The correct use and application of cholera surveillance techniques and the expanding use of OCV will be major factors as we step-up our efforts against cholera.

The proper and safe management and disposal of medical waste is included as a crucial element in our sector. Hand-washing should not be under emphasised. An increased understanding and synergy is required to better link WASH with Nutrition overall. This will be the subject of new collective work within and external to RC/RC National Societies.

The WASH team will ensure National Societies are able to effectively incorporate public health in WASH activities within each stage of the emergency cycle and along the resilience continuum; strengthening of WASH as part of prevention; WASH disaster preparedness; community disease detection and early warning; behaviour change communication; community management of sustainable water supplies, vector control in its broadest sense and especially in light of new or remerging public health threats, waste water and solid waste management including reuse and safe disposal.

Internal cooperation will be strengthened with Emergency Health and epidemiology focal points and resources within the Federation and NSs. This will include developing linkages between WASH and the Oral Cholera Vaccine and influencing GWSI project site selection to eliminate cholera hot spots. This should include all efforts to reduce all diarrhoeal disease threats and incidence.

Evidence based research and programming will be undertaken in areas such as medical waste and vector control. Five key areas of focus will be:

* Improve data collection and epidemiological analysis and surveillance for programme design
* Make WASH global tools (FACT, RDRT, ERU and NDRT) more flexible to better address the complexity of epidemics, including slow onset scenarios
* Expand the membership’s capacity and access to technical support for vector control activities (partnership) especially global tools’
* Undertake continual adaptation and improvement overall of kits and tools
* Ensure our medical facilities are the solution rather than the problem by improving medical waste treatment

Underpinning the above will be an increased focus on staff and volunteer development, tailored training and capacity building and mentoring.

***Key requirements and assumptions:***

To deliver effectively on the WASH vision, goal and strategy we recognise the following requirements and assumptions:

* WASH continues to be a core focus area (Area of Focus 5 as per IFRC Plan and Budget 2016-2020) with other core functions of the Federation and its membership, contributing overall to building resilience and impacting at country, regional and global levels and broadly engaged in the continuum of linking relief, recovery and development/resilience building. We expect other technical and support service departments act in partnership to support global WASH team efforts.
* The existing efforts and methods of networking, both internally and externally, will be stepped up and improved through the continuation of existing and the creation of new Technical Working Groups (TWG’s) in the 4 WASH work stream areas (Emergency, Developmental, Urban and Public Health). These TWGs will create ‘buy-in’ to better position the sector and highlight the added value it brings to both emergency and developmental programming. These efforts must be closely linked to research, innovation and excellence and driven by emerging needs of targeted populations.
* A clear focus upon complex settings such as fragile or ‘failed states’ and forgotten disasters as a priority, underlined by scaling-up how we address inequities in health. This on the assumption that this grouping represents in many countries those in greatest need but often missed out.
* Furthermore, an open and evolving approach is required to benefit from both horizontal and vertical programming where appropriate and according to context assuming that donor flexibility allows such an approach. This requires more inter-sectoral planning, resource mobilisation and identification of overlaps that add value to a broader and more holistic product.
* NSs are recognised by their respective governments as playing an auxiliary role for the delivery of WASH services and infrastructure.
* Sustainable funding for WASH projects and staffing is secured from a broad array of sources.

1. WASH is the collective term for Water, Sanitation and Hygiene. Due to their interdependent nature, these three core issues are grouped together to represent a growing sector. While each a separate field of work, each is dependent on the presence of the other. For example, without toilets, water sources become contaminated; without clean water, basic hygiene practices are not possible. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Of particular concern is the impact that the lack of WASH infrastructure and services has on incidence of diarrhoea and resultant malnutrition and stunting among children. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. WASH related morbidity and mortality is well documented however the advocacy for universal coverage needs a greater emphasis on negative impacts in child development, nutrition, educational impacts (MHM), and overall global productivity. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Adopted by the IFRC Governing Board in 2003. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The IFRC Global Water & Sanitation Initiative (GWSI 2005-2025) the WASH developmental programming platform. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. The Right to Water, or more accurately the Human Right to Water and Sanitation (HRWS), was recognised by the United Nations General Assembly on the 28 July 2010 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. 7 From Plan and Budget: Water, sanitation and hygiene SDG 6: Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all. a) Vulnerable people’s health and dignity are improved through increased access to appropriate and sustainable water, sanitation and hygiene services. • Communities are provided with improved access to safe water. • Community knowledge on treatment and reuse of wastewater is improved. • Communities are supported to reduce open defecation. • Community management of water and sanitation facilities is improved. • Positive behavioural change in personal and community hygiene is promoted through awareness and education activities. The provision of WASH services of course impacts on many other SDG’s especially SDG3. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. 2016 -2020 IFRC Plan & Budget [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. The One Billion Coalition is a transformative initiative to scale-up community and civic action to strengthen individual and community capacity to thrive in the face of adversity. The goal is that by 2025, at least one billion people around the world will have taken active steps to become safer, healthier, and more prosperous. [www.ifrc.org/one-billion-coalition](http://www.ifrc.org/one-billion-coalition) [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. See attached an overview of the WASH Working Group Structure. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. For more information on the Cluster <http://washcluster.net/> [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Four strategies for Implementation (1) *Strengthened National Society capacities and sustained and relevant Red Cross and Red Crescent presence in communities (*2) *Effective international disaster management (*3) *A leading strategic partner in humanitarian action and community resilience* 4) *A strong IFRC that is effective, credible and accountable.* [↑](#footnote-ref-12)