SWIFT

Consortium for Sustainable Water,
Sanitation & Hygiene in Fragile Contexts

Innovating and Adapting in a Payment by Results WASH Programme

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The SWIFT experience

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Summary

This study aims to identify if, and how, innovation and adaptation took place during the first phase of the SWIFT programme, and what the lessons might be for implementing organizations that seek to deliver large-scale, challenging and high-pressure programmes under a Payment by Results (PbR) arrangement.

The SWIFT programme provides WASH services to poor communities in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Kenya. A consortium of international and national NGOs is implementing the programme, under a PbR contract funded with UK Aid from the Department for International Development. The first phase of SWIFT, which is the focus of this research, was undertaken from April 2014 to March 2018. The programme ran in two phases: an 'output' phase to deliver infrastructure and behaviour change interventions, and an 'outcome' phase to ensure that the use of services and sound WASH behaviours were sustained. Payment from DFID was attached to outcomes (independently verified mainly through household surveys) as well as outputs. In principle this allowed partners some flexibility in how they achieved both longer- and shorter-term results. In total, close to 850,000 people were reached with either water supply, sanitation or hygiene outputs, or a combination of all three.

SWIFT faced a combination of issues under a PbR contract as well as outside of this which shaped the scope for innovative, adaptive approaches. These included the novel contracting approach, which increased financial risk for implementing partners; the tight timelines for delivery of infrastructure and behaviour change interventions; and challenges in the wider context, such as drought in Kenya and population displacement in DRC. These design and contextual factors interacted with the way the programme was managed at both global and country levels.

The research considers three different areas of innovation and adaptation as case studies, drawing on an online survey distributed to current and former SWIFT staff at different levels, and 28 key informant interviews. The examples considered are:

- a modified sanitation promotion approach in Kenya, involving the provision of limited hardware support;
- the *associations d'usagers des ressources en eau potable* (ASUREP) approach in DRC, a water system management model based around water network users' associations;
- the monitoring framework, developed to generate evidence of WASH results and involving new processes and technologies for data collection and validation.

On a strict interpretation, the research finds that none of the three examples can be characterized as especially innovative or adaptive, due to a lack of evidence of scale-up beyond the programme and of a systematic, evidence-based approach to adaptation. It is plausible that this outcome was shaped by the PbR contract, given the financial risk of using entirely untested approaches or multiple rounds of experimental adaptation. However, what is more in evidence from the examples is flexible programming involving collaboration between global, country HQ and field-level staff to introduce approaches that were novel for their context and to make further changes as required to ensure that they delivered the desired results.

The ways in which SWIFT staff undertook these more modest, local-level processes of innovation and adaptation provide lessons for staff in other programmes which seek to foster more innovative and adaptive approaches, but which may be constrained by difficult operating contexts, novel contractual methods or limited resources. The lessons are especially relevant for programmes, like SWIFT, which are designed and managed from the global level. Specifically, the following recommendations emerge.

To encourage buy-in to new approaches:

- Establish the rationale for introducing a new approach in terms that clearly relate to the work that key responsible staff are engaged with and to their job satisfaction (this can be about collective or organizational interest as much as self-interest).
- Focus on how the approach contributes to end outcomes (whether payment is attached to these or not).
- Think through, acknowledge and where possible mitigate the downsides of new approaches that affect front-line staff individually, e.g. through an increased work burden.
- Seek to understand how both positives and negatives of novel programming approaches are perceived at different levels, on a case-by-case basis, rather than relying on theory.
- Be realistic when estimating the resources required to introduce a new approach, including the likely adaptations/modifications needed, or identify where resources could be reallocated from in advance.

To help staff to work more adaptively:

- Be responsive to requests for support but give appropriate leeway (and time) for local staff to negotiate solutions with and secure buy-in from important local stakeholders.
- Recognize that approaches that appear to offer flexibility to managers may create an arduous process of continuous adjustment and change for those tasked with implementation.
- Adopt a solutions-oriented approach that enables staff to adapt programmes to address risks inherent in the context (e.g. instability, displacement), following the progress of local teams rather than dictating how each step is done, and intervening only where risk is excessive.
- Actively verify with staff working at the local level that they feel empowered to make autonomous decisions, as far as possible.
- Utilize locally based staff's understanding of key features of the context to anticipate and respond to challenges posed by unpredictable events and to help identify more stable aspects of the situation around which new approaches can be anchored, such as customs, laws and policies.
- Encourage the use of results frameworks and programme management tools that do not constrain staff to a fixed change pathway (i.e. step out of the log-frame mentality and culture).
- Make internal processes more flexible to mirror evidence to enable the adaption of programmatic elements and apply innovative approaches.

On fostering a learning culture:

- Allocate time and resources to opportunities for learning, e.g. cross-consortium workshops, and support staff at all levels to analyse the data they collect, rather than just sending it to HQ.
- Where trust is not already present, e.g. where a global-level entity provides technical advice to country-level stakeholders, help to establish rapport and ensure that the rationale is explained in clear, relatable terms.
- Harness the inherent capability of field staff to understand and engage with local political dynamics wherever possible, e.g. by allowing local-level staff to negotiate with government counterparts and/or investing time to enhance their teams' understanding of the context through dialogue and learning exercises.
- Match cycles of experimentation and learning to the lifetime of the programme, by ensuring that there is sufficient time to gather evidence, assess and improve, and drop or scale up an approach.

Abbreviations

ADIR	Action pour le Développement des Infrastructures en Milieu Rural
ASUREP	Association d'usagers des ressources en eau potable
CLTS	Community-led total sanitation
DFID	Department for International Development
MEAL	Monitoring, evaluation, assessment and learning
MVE	Monitoring, verification and evaluation
NGO	Non-governmental organization
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
PbR	Payment by Results
SWIFT	Consortium for Sustainable Water, Sanitation and Hygiene in Fragile Contexts
VEA	Villages et Ecoles Assainis (Healthy Schools and Villages)

Acknowledgements

1 Introduction

This study aims to identify if, and how, innovation and adaptation took place during the first phase of the SWIFT programme, and what the lessons might be for implementing partners and others operating in similar contexts.

A consortium of international and national non-governmental organizations (NGOs) is implementing the SWIFT programme, providing water supply, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services to poor communities in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Kenya. The programme is funded with UK Aid from the Department for International Development (DFID) under a Payment by Results (PbR) contract and is part of DFID's wider WASH Results Programme. The first phase of SWIFT, which is the focus of this research, was undertaken from April 2014 to March 2018. Initial 'output' results (construction of water points and latrines and the delivery of hygiene promotion) had to be achieved by March 2016, an extension from the initial deadline of December 2015. In total, close to 850,000 people were reached with either water supply, sanitation or hygiene outputs, or a combination of all three. SWIFT partners then continued to provide follow-up support to communities to build sustainability of results through to the conclusion of the first phase in March 2018. At approximately one and two years after final delivery of the output results, household surveys and other monitoring exercises were undertaken to assess 'outcome' results (use of water points and sanitation facilities; hygiene knowledge and behaviour change). A second phase of the SWIFT programme is ongoing, in the DRC only but using broadly the same approach and running to June 2020. This study looks at the first phase only, in both DRC and Kenya.

All WASH programmes involve challenges, but SWIFT faced a combination of issues that could have shaped the scope for innovative, adaptive approaches. Some were intrinsic to the programme design, such as the novel contracting approach, which increased financial risk for implementing partners, as well as tight timelines for delivery of infrastructure and behaviour change interventions to hundreds of thousands of people. Other issues, such as drought in Kenya or population displacement in DRC, related more to the external context. At the same time, it is possible that these internal and external features could instead have incentivized new approaches and problem solving, by throwing up challenges that required innovation and adaptation as is often the case in fragile contexts. The research therefore considered a range of design and contextual factors, as well as how the programme was managed (implementation factors), addressing each as potential enablers or constraints for innovation and adaptation. The framework used to guide the initial enquiry is illustrated in Figure 1.

The research assesses three different areas of innovation and adaptation within the programme as case studies. This allows it to draw some general lessons for practitioners and policy makers seeking to foster innovation and adaptation as a means to improve results.

A key step in the research design was to define exactly what was meant by innovation and adaptation. Various definitions of innovation in the context of international development programmes emphasize not only novelty but also the creation of additional social value, while the idea of scale also features. However, there is little consensus about how precisely to distinguish between innovation and adaptation. Therefore, we considered both in this study, adopting the following working definitions:

- *Innovation* is the successful exploitation of new ideas that create additional value at scale.
- *Adaptation* is a process whereby new ideas are evolved from existing approaches using evidence about what works.

Data collection processes for the research avoided using the specific terms 'innovation' or 'adaptation', as they can be interpreted in many different ways. Instead, participants were asked about what they

considered new or different, and were free to nominate examples. The overarching programme design, notably the PbR contract, was the only theme excluded in this regard, as it has already been the subject of several studies and evaluations.

Figure 1: Research framework – factors potentially enabling or constraining innovation and adaptation in the SWIFT programme
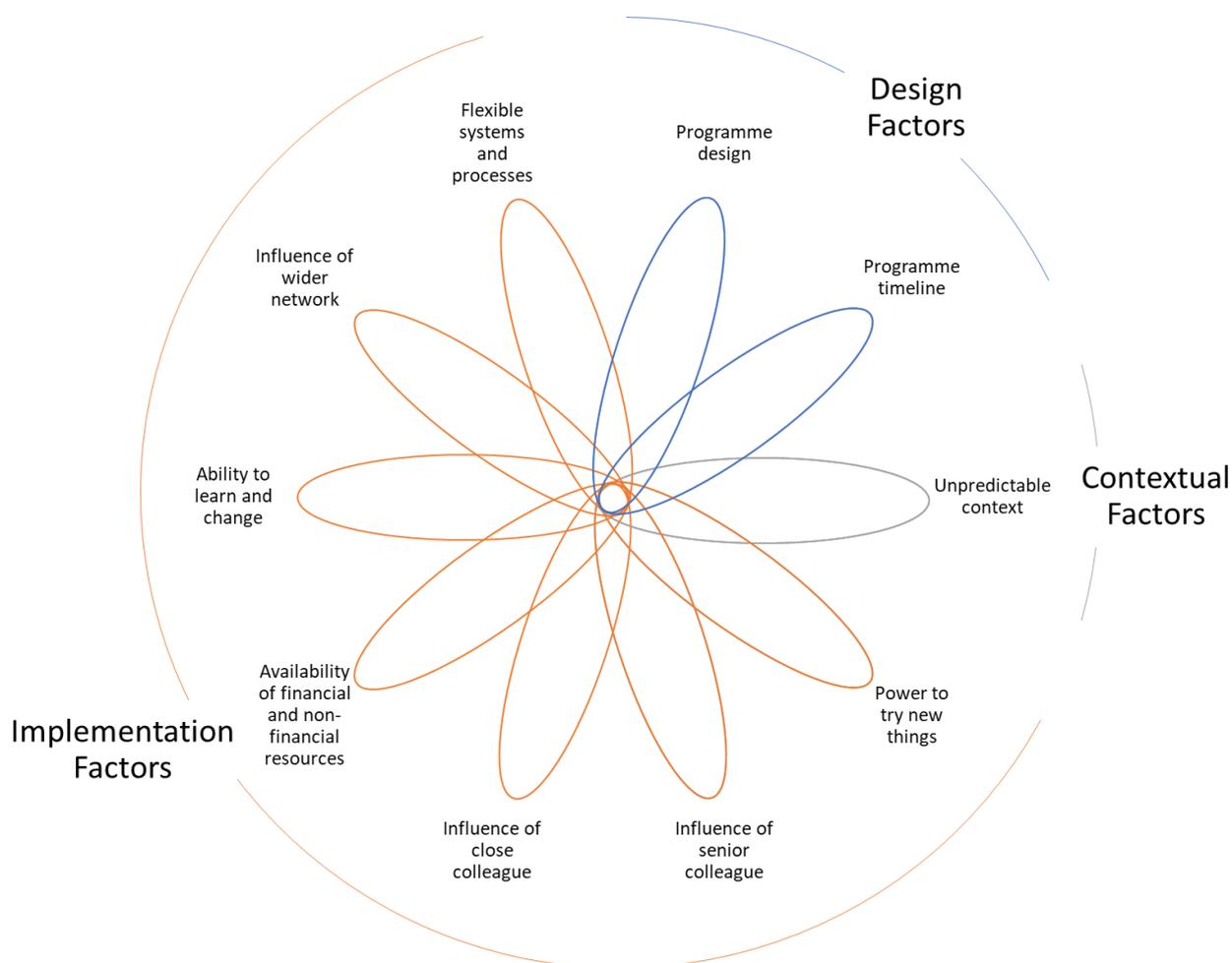
The research commenced with an online survey, distributed to existing and former SWIFT consortium staff at field, country and global levels, across seven organizations.[1] In all, 29 individuals responded to a set of closed and open questions about examples where they felt they had adopted a new or different approach, the benefits and costs of this, and what had enabled or prevented them from doing so. From this, three case studies were selected as the most frequently mentioned, and 28 key informant interviews were conducted, generally, though not exclusively, with the same staff members. The three selected case studies comprised:

- a modified sanitation promotion approach in Kenya, involving provision of limited hardware support;
- the *association d'usagers des ressources en eau potable* (ASUREP) approach in DRC – a water system management model based around water network users' associations;
- the monitoring framework, developed to generate evidence of WASH results and involving new processes and technologies for data collection and validation.

Significantly more responses were obtained relating to the monitoring approach, but this is unsurprising given that it was novel for both countries as well as for the global team. Section 2 describes each case

study in more detail. Each is arguably closer to adaptation than innovation, though there is some evidence of their yielding additional value and of scaling or scalability. In the analysis and conclusion, we return to the question of whether the examples show that SWIFT, as a programme, was innovative or adaptive.

This study is intended as a self-reflective learning review, based on the perspectives of staff involved in the programme. It is not an objective evaluation, and the wider applicability of its findings may be limited by the narrow range of the source material.

2 The case studies

2.1 Changing policy: modified sanitation promotion, Kenya

SWIFT partners Oxfam, Concern and Practical Action initially attempted to use a conventional variant of community-led total sanitation (CLTS) in the arid and semi-arid counties of Turkana, Wajir and Marsabit, where access to sanitation is very low. Key steps included participatory meetings, selection of community volunteers to lead hygiene promotion, and 'triggering', which used participatory exercises to elicit a feeling of disgust around open defecation. The partners' sanitation technicians then provided guidance on siting, depth and privacy as communities dug pits and constructed latrine superstructures.[2] A minimal set of standards were used, which were agreed with DFID and ePact, a third-party monitoring, verification and evaluation (MVE) provider.[3]

However, in the course of triggering successive villages through 2015, it became apparent that a high proportion of newly constructed pits were collapsing due to weak soil formation and platforms built using locally sourced timber, which was scarce and prone to termite infestation. Practical Action, for example, found that 60 percent of latrines constructed by communities in Turkana following the CLTS intervention quickly collapsed (163 of 272). The timber platforms also did not effectively seal the pits to rainwater, and as a result inundation was common during heavy rains.[4]

In autumn 2015 the partners variously decided to support communities with locally manufactured concrete slabs. Having triggered 21 villages in Marsabit, Concern engaged a mason to make concrete slabs and train local artisans to make more.[5] Oxfam's own sanitation technician trained local masons in Turkana to produce domed ferro-cement slabs, where cement is applied over a wire mesh, drawing on his experience in refugee camps.[6] Practical Action opted to directly provide slabs as well as culverts – concrete tubes to reinforce the pit itself.[7]

At the time, the Government of Kenya was mandating CLTS nationally, without any subsidies. In Turkana, Oxfam and Practical Action therefore needed to engage the Turkana County Government, which had a commitment to zero-subsidy CLTS. Ultimately the county government supported the approach. This may reflect a wider shift away from the zero-tolerance approach to subsidy involved in strict definitions of CLTS; the national Kenya Environmental Sanitation and Hygiene Policy 2016–2030 offers room for 'minimal subsidy'. The programme here demonstrates that adaptation of government policy and by local government themselves was critical to the success beyond implementation itself.

In December 2017, a household survey was undertaken with additional latrine inspection, nearly a year after the main implementation phase and involving a representative sample of 612 households across the communities targeted by Oxfam, Practical Action and Concern. This found that 73.5 percent of households had a SWIFT latrine that was in use and conformed to the minimum standards (constructed away from a water source, with a squat hole and a superstructure).[8]

2.2 Changing the management of water systems: the ASUREP approach, DRC

An ASUREP is a legally recognized structure for the management of water networks by a users' association. SWIFT did not originate the approach, which elsewhere in DRC has been employed with some success in informal contexts around Kinshasa (though this fell outside the DRC government's national Villages et Ecoles Assainis (VEA – Healthy Schools and Villages) approach to sanitation).[9] SWIFT has adapted the ASUREP approach to gravity flow systems, which are commonly used in semi-urban areas in the mountainous east of the country.

ASUREPs mix private sector management practices (paying staff with the fees collected from water users) with community membership and governance structures (oversight by various bodies of elected representatives). The structure comprises an *Assemblée Générale*, comprising of community members; a supervisory *Conseil d'Administration* and *Commission de Contrôle*; and the *Unité de Gestion*, salaried staff tasked with daily management of the network.[10]

The initial idea to adapt the ASUREP approach to the SWIFT context came from Oxfam's National WASH Coordinator in DRC, who was aware of its use in the east of the country. The local development organization Action pour le Développement des Infrastructures en Milieu Rural (ADIR), which had pioneered the approach in Kinshasa and elsewhere, was engaged to provide training and support, commencing with an orientation workshop in June 2015. The proposal was endorsed by a desk study conducted by the Overseas Development Institute (ODI), as the monitoring, evaluation, assessment and learning (MEAL) lead for SWIFT, which reviewed a broad range of potential management models for WASH in semi-urban areas. Through the remainder of 2015, SWIFT promoted and supported the set-up of three ASUREPs in semi-urban locations. Their functionality can be attributed to the selection of a tried and tested methodology, one that also professionalises management at local level, and holds legitimacy with, and listing within government.

2.3 Monitoring framework – global

SWIFT partners adopted and evolved a bespoke monitoring framework for the programme. The PbR contract required partners to generate robust evidence against numerous WASH-related indicators. While certain aspects were determined before the programme began, much detail on indicator definitions, evidence requirements and monitoring methodologies was negotiated as it unfolded, between SWIFT, DFID and ePact.

Agreed positions for all indicators relating to PbR were recorded in a document (known internally as 'Form 2') balancing factors including accountability, feasibility and cost. Throughout 2014 and into 2015, discussion centred on payment indicators early in the 'results chain' (activities such as training, system set-up and procurement) and subsequently the output results stipulated (construction of water points and latrines and delivery of hygiene promotion messages). After March 2016, attention turned to the outcome result indicators, in advance of a first round of household surveys and other assessments of the use of water points and sanitation facilities and of hygiene knowledge and behaviour change.

While this applied to Kenya as well as to DRC, one important distinction was that separate 'Form 2' documents were developed for different partners in Kenya. This reflected the diversity of WASH delivery approaches used in the country, which could not be monitored and assessed using the same indicators and which increased the complexity of the overall framework. In contrast, in DRC the more consistent WASH approaches employed by Tearfund and Oxfam (and the latter's national partners, CEPROSSAN, PPSSP and Hyfro) meant that a single unified monitoring framework was adopted.

While the evolving approach did leave consortium partners vulnerable to changes and potential disagreements that could increase their financial risk, it made an adaptive approach inevitable, as

programming realities and increasing clarity on the expectations of DFID and ePact necessitated repeated evolutions. As well as modifications to the process and the approach, partners also adapted their technological approach, including introducing tablet computers and a survey platform for electronic data collection (SurveyCTO) for the midline and endline surveys in autumn 2016 and 2017.[11]

On a narrow interpretation, the monitoring framework fulfilled its intended purpose, i.e. it generated evidence of sufficient quantity and quality for payment to be made in full, across all payment indicators. Independent reviews by ePact of the monitoring and reporting systems confirmed this, while highlighting areas for improvement.[12]

3 Findings

3.1 Why did SWIFT staff adapt and innovate?

Staff generally articulated their motivations for innovating and adapting in ways that implied a degree of local ownership, rather than seeing them as externally imposed. Staff in both countries generally framed the motivation as being to solve a problem or secure better results. In the case of the adapted sanitation approach in Kenya, this was set against the failure of the strict CLTS policy and approach to sanitation promotion where households constructed latrines with no external hardware support and using locally available materials. In the case of the ASUREP approach in DRC, staff tended to emphasize improving the service in the near term through professionalism and better management (six of the eight respondents interviewed on this), and in two cases made a connection to long-term sustainability.

The idea that new approaches could achieve better results was also apparent for staff asked about the monitoring framework, in terms of enhanced data collection. Six of the 19 respondents interviewed on this topic picked up on this theme, with improved robustness most commonly mentioned and time savings, uniformity, verifiability, reduced errors and lower cost also featuring. However, the introduction of new approaches for monitoring was also more likely to be portrayed as externally driven e.g. from the global (London) level.

However, more often when staff portrayed the motivation as coming externally, they did so in a way that articulated the benefits for their own work (six respondents), often in the context of the PbR contract and in terms of reducing financial risks. Half of these respondents also mentioned the need for data to feed back into programme management and not just generate payment.

A tendency to describe motivation in terms of local problem solving or improving results was also visible in the results of the online survey, albeit for a wider range of innovative or adaptive approaches than the three case studies. A majority of staff responding to the survey identified that they had adopted the new approach because they thought it would get a better result (25 of 29 respondents); nearly half said that they did so because the usual way of doing things wasn't working (12) and only three said that they did so 'because they were asked to'.[13]

3.2 How did SWIFT staff perceive the positive and negative impacts of innovation and adaptation?

A key part of understanding the adaptation/innovation experience for SWIFT staff, and how to improve it in future, is whether they regarded the ultimate impacts as positive or negative. Generally, staff mentioned positive impacts, with the benefits of the monitoring framework described mainly in terms of making their work easier, while they articulated the benefits of the ASUREP and sanitation adaptations more in terms of advantages for the households and communities for which SWIFT was working.

'Oxfam trained local masons from these villages to provide these slabs, which later became a business for them, as they were to be formed into an institution of masons so they could do that independently.'

Kenya field-level respondent

For the monitoring framework, a fairly high proportion of staff asked about this (12 of 19) emphasized the ways that the monitoring framework facilitated their work or the overall management of the programme. A similar number (11) framed the benefits in terms of serving organizational goals, emphasizing the robustness and rigour instilled by the framework, and citing links to data quality and precision and to real-time information. Six staff also explicitly linked the monitoring framework to enabling the achievement of results and/or getting paid within the PbR contract. Only a handful made an explicit link between the monitoring system and benefits for communities (e.g. through real-time monitoring).

The positive impacts of the sanitation adaptation in Kenya were framed more often in terms of household- or community-level benefits (mentioned by all nine staff interviewed about this), including health, behaviour change, safety or wider social impacts such as livelihood opportunities (for the masons making slabs). A few staff members mentioned sustainability, either in terms of community ownership or, at household level, sustained use of facilities. Six out of eight interviewed reflected on the theme of sustainability when describing the positive impacts of the ASUREP approach. A broad set of sub-issues were mentioned in this regard, including improved cost recovery, legal recognition, professionalization and accountability, as well as community ownership. In contrast to Kenya, only a few staff mentioned more immediate benefits to households such as improved water supply.

Perceptions were not all positive, however. Negative impacts were mentioned by 22 respondents, primarily around two themes: additional burdens on resources and time, and difficulties working with communities. Notably, staff mainly described challenges for their own work (albeit with potential negative implications for achievement of results and payment).

'There is empowerment of the community. They feel involved, because it is their representatives who run the service and monitor each other.'

DRC field-level respondent

Considering the first theme – additional burdens on resources and time – a number of respondents (seven) regarded the monitoring framework as being resource-intensive to set up. Some explicitly mentioned additional difficulties posed by uncertainty about the expectations and direction of travel (such as training new staff). A few in Kenya said that the resources required to establish the new approach also constituted a negative impact, e.g. having to constantly engage with the government and communities over the course of a year to introduce the modified sanitation approach.

The second theme – difficulties in working with communities – was picked up on by staff in relation to all three case studies, and again related to the uncertainty that working with communities posed for the achievement of results e.g. in monitoring. For the ASUREP approach, three respondents said that success depended on the community's willingness to pay for water and the goodwill of community leaders. Similar views were expressed regarding the sanitation approach, though remarks seemed to apply more to the challenges of behaviour change inherent to the community-led sanitation promotion approach in general, rather than to the adaptation (the introduction of locally manufactured slabs) specifically.

3.3 How did staff solve problems as they arose when innovating and adapting?

Staff were asked about the challenges they faced in the course of adopting new approaches, and how these were addressed. Each of the new approaches saw challenges in implementation, which staff generally overcame through a combination of technical skills/resources, dialogue and/or awareness raising, though they sometimes required additional resources, support and/or sign-off from higher levels.

The challenges most frequently cited (19 respondents) related to technical aspects. In relation to the monitoring framework, 13 respondents reported challenges associated with the digital technologies introduced – the tablet computers and the survey platform for electronic data collection. To be able to use these technologies and upload data, all partners operating in the field needed a reliable network connection and power supply, which were lacking in many areas in both countries. The solutions that staff found to these challenges included purchasing modems and power banks, using back-up questionnaires and moving enumerators to areas with better connections once every two days to send data to the office. This could incur additional costs, however, which might require sign-off higher within the organization.

For sanitation, the technical challenges mentioned were generally around latrine construction – e.g. poor soil formation, termites and flooding – which led to the decision to modify the approach by providing locally manufactured slabs. Staff involved in both the modified sanitation approach and the ASUREP approach faced challenges initially in obtaining community buy-in, which was essential if the approaches were to succeed. For sanitation, it was difficult to persuade communities to build latrines, especially as the approach was implemented during a drought, when household resources were stretched, and people expected to receive cash for their efforts. The ASUREP approach encountered difficulties when communities in remote areas, and those whose neighbours had received subsidized support from emergency responses, questioned the need to pay for water and look after the water infrastructure, or defaulted to using other sources.

A further challenge with the ASUREP approach was dealing with complex power dynamics within communities, such as managing the transition from voluntary water management committees to the ASUREP model. Solutions to these challenges tended to involve long-term engagement with the community: for example, to address reluctance to pay for water under the ASUREP approach, one staff member described a six-month period of awareness raising, starting with mass sensitization but then moving to door-to-door outreach to improve community understanding. Another reflected on the compromises necessary to avoid inflaming tensions with representatives of existing water management structures.

Another common theme for both approaches was the need to secure the cooperation of government representatives. In Kenya, county governments were initially unwilling to let the programme adopt an approach with a subsidized element, and obtaining approval required lengthy negotiation and dialogue. For the ASUREP approach, there was a lack of understanding of the Water Law[14] among local authorities, such as the health zone bureau. To address this issue, partners held a three-day workshop in Goma, to which they invited their health zone partners.

3.4 What helped and what hindered SWIFT staff in innovating and adapting?

We included a question in the initial online survey on a broad range of new approaches (Figure 2), and in interviews asked SWIFT staff directly about what factors enabled or constrained them when making efforts to adapt or innovate.

The survey suggested that staff generally felt empowered and that they had space for learning and changing, supported by systems and processes as well as by senior colleagues and their peers. Programme design was highlighted as a positive factor considerably more often than as a negative one, though at this

general level respondents were not necessarily giving a verdict on the PbR element specifically. Other factors, including resourcing and timeline, were viewed as playing a negative role by more respondents, though at least as many saw them as positive. The only factor seen as negative by a majority of respondents was the unpredictability of the context (a catch-all intended to capture ideas of 'fragility').

Figure 2: Positive/negative perceptions of new or different approaches[15]
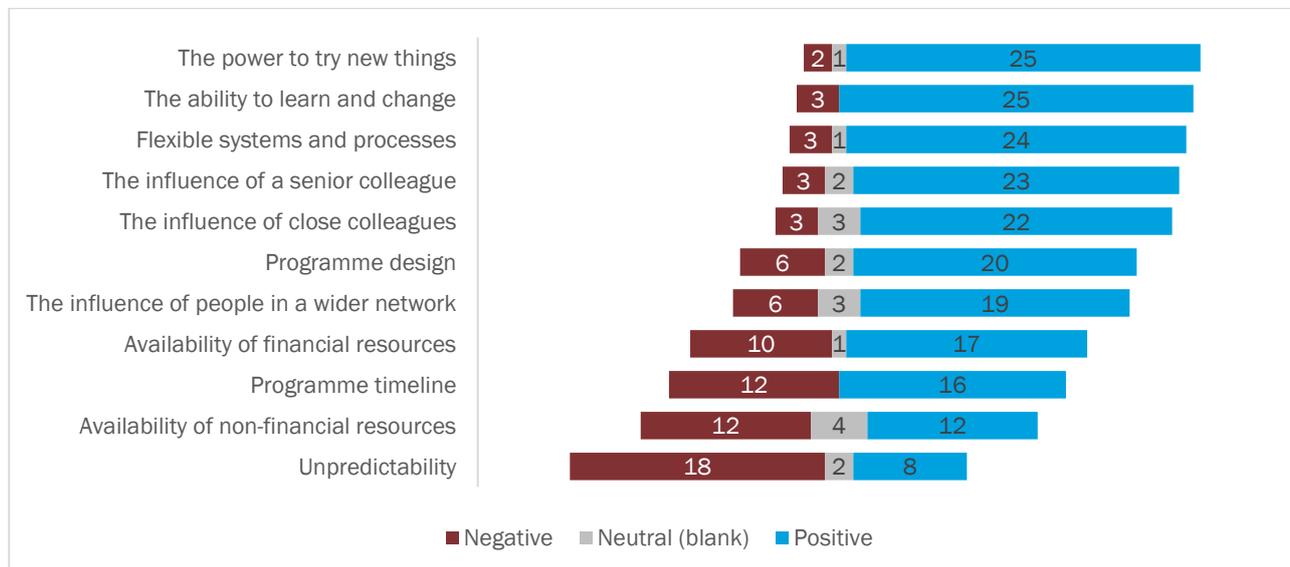
The online survey results offered only a preliminary picture of staff views, and more open-ended questions were included in the interviews to provide a more nuanced picture.

Power to try new things

A relatively high number of respondents, mainly those reflecting on the monitoring approach (12) credited country and field staff – either themselves or colleagues – with an integral role in adopting new approaches. However, with a few exceptions, the responses did not directly suggest that these individuals had a significant role in developing the new approach: for example, staff inputs were framed in terms of technical support, often linked to training, more than taking a direct initiative or direct responsibility.

The ability to learn and change

A small number of responses hinted at an organizational culture where there was space to learn, and that this was facilitated by working as a consortium. However, more commonly a lack of support for learning was implied, or it was framed as a top-down imposition, particularly in relation to the monitoring framework. Although many staff saw the framework as providing a supporting structure, which generally made it easier to deliver the programme, it could also be seen as absorbing their learning efforts rather than facilitating a wider learning culture.

This issue would arguably be more significant at the start of the programme, given that unfamiliarity was a major driver. However, several respondents highlighted a general disconnect between monitoring and learning, indicating that while the system was able to capture large volumes of information, this was not routed back to staff at more local levels to aid in decision making.

Flexible systems and processes

To facilitate learning and foster innovation and adaptation, managers arguably need to find a balance between providing a robust, well defined framework and allowing room for flexibility. The issue of flexibility did not feature very strongly in interviews, but it was mentioned by a few staff in connection with the

monitoring framework and ASUREP approach. In some respects, the monitoring framework was inherently flexible, in that there was much less emphasis on tracking inputs than with a conventional grant programme. But where this aspect was mentioned, it was also portrayed as a burden due to its unfamiliarity, which necessitated on-the-job learning. On the other hand, two respondents at programme management level in DRC said that the focus on results created a clear objective while leaving staff free to alter the approach where necessary to achieve results, rather than being tied to log-frame activities as in a conventional grant contract.

The influence of senior colleagues

The role of senior staff was not frequently highlighted in interviews, though there were some reports, again mainly in relation to monitoring, that senior staff had supported the adoption of new approaches. For one country-level manager, a supportive attitude from the global level was linked to the pressure to deliver results, which meant that authority was delegated if this would get the job done. However, there were occasional opposing views implying that monitoring approaches were imposed from the top down. One DRC staff member (management level) said that the system and, by implication, the importance of providing timely, verifiable evidence to get paid made micro-management a necessity. In contrast, in relation to the ASUREP approach, one interviewee (global level) identified significant negative consequences from insufficient management control, which in one location meant that it took months to set up the ASUREP, with no revenue being collected and a lack of clarity as to who was in charge.

The influence of close colleagues

Interactions between staff working within the consortium were seen as important to the successful adoption of the new monitoring approach (mentioned by 14 respondents) and, to a much lesser extent, the sanitation approach in Kenya. This included staff working within the same area, but also a broader set of consortium partners in some instances. Several respondents working at field or country management level identified their colleagues' skills and expertise as important, as well as specific training, implying that technical capability was prized (e.g. in Kenya, the experience of a particular engineer in preventing the collapse of latrines). Opportunities to come together through workshops were also highlighted as important by a number of interviewees.

The relationship between country-level staff and global-level advisers (as opposed to those in a management position) was also touched on. The role of ODI, which was responsible for advising on monitoring aspects and explaining the expectations of DFID and ePact, was not immediately clear for staff working in the two countries, who had their own ways of working.

PbR programme design

Although PbR has been seen as a key feature of consortium programmes funded under the WASH Results Programme,[16] it was not mentioned by many staff as a factor that either enabled or hindered their adoption of new approaches. Only two mentioned the PbR structure as an enabler or disabler specifically, both at global level and focusing principally on implications for the monitoring approach.

A wider range of staff, at both global level and at country level in Kenya, mentioned PbR as posing challenges to the effectiveness of the monitoring approach, or the programme as a whole, because of the incentives it created. For example, some argued that it led to a focus on easier-to-reach communities, while others said that there was a mismatch between the incentives for the MVE provider and implementers or that PbR disincentivised risk-taking. However, this must be set against a number of perspectives (mainly from field level, in both countries) that saw the focus on results as a positive. These tended not to explicitly mention PbR, but rather connected payment and/or monitoring with the achievement of objectives.

The influence of people in a wider network

As might be expected for new approaches to implementation, staff in both countries identified that stakeholders outside the SWIFT consortium frequently shaped their ability to adopt the new approaches. Most examples were raised by staff working locally. Some respondents identified the support and cooperation of local elites as being important to the success of the ASUREP approach, including both government representatives and traditional leaders. At the same time, however, because the ASUREP model disrupted existing power dynamics, it could meet with resistance.

In Kenya, staff were more likely to focus on the challenges of changing behaviour, particularly as, even with the introduction of subsidized slabs, households sometimes 'held out' in expectation of fully subsidized toilets, sometimes encouraged by local politicians. At the same time, several interviewees believed that positive engagement with county governments to move away from the officially mandated zero-subsidy approach was critical for the success of the modified approach.

Good relations with government representatives were also seen as playing an enabling role in adoption of the monitoring approach, e.g. collaboration with public health officers and community health extension workers. One staff member claimed that the new approach was inherently good for strengthening relationships with officials as it encouraged their participation and sign-off at each stage of the process.

Availability of resources

Financial resources were not mentioned frequently, but when they were they were generally depicted as a constraint. Four staff members implied that the costs of the monitoring approach were higher than anticipated, showing the financial difficulty of adopting an approach where the level of ambition was uncertain. In particular, it was quickly realized that the traditional MEAL approach adopted at the start of the programme was not adequate for the task. Similarly, the ASUREP approach, though intended to enhance cost recovery, was perhaps over-ambitious in its expectations of full cost recovery. In both cases, it could be argued that there was insufficient realism about the financial implications of delivering an ambitious new approach. However, it is not unusual for aid programmes to be over-ambitious, and it is perhaps more notable that so few interviewees highlighted a lack of money as a key hindrance.

Programme timeline

Global discussions about the WASH Results Programme have emphasized its short duration as another defining characteristic given its scale, and in particular the deadline to achieve the output results (December 2015, later extended to March 2016)).[17] Like financial resources, however, the programme timeline did not feature greatly in interviews with staff. Time was briefly mentioned as a constraint by a few respondents in relation to the ASUREP approach and the monitoring framework, but only in terms of general pressure to deliver, rather than as a driver or barrier to adopting new approaches.

Fragile context

Another defining characteristic of SWIFT was that it operated in contexts that can be characterized as fragile. Although fragility was not explicitly mentioned, related issues featured more as a hindrance to scaling up or rolling out the new approach than to developing a new approach in the first place. In the case of monitoring, population mobility was mentioned as a constraint, as well as insecurity (specifically, the risk of the smart devices used for data collection being stolen while working in informal urban settlements in Kenya). Also in Kenya, the drought was a key impediment, which made it hard to persuade hard-pressed families of the need to build latrines. In DRC, despite what might be assumed to be a highly fragile context with an almost total lack of governance, several interviewees emphasized that the new Water Law was an important enabling factor in instigating the new approach.

4 Analysis

The first and second set of findings – the reasons staff gave for adopting new approaches in the first place, and how they perceived the positive and negative impacts – give rise to several related considerations. On the first point, irrespective of whether they described their motivation for adopting a new approach as personal or as imposed externally, SWIFT staff seemed ready to take ownership – where new approaches were seen as externally imposed, staff were still often able to articulate the rationale and utility for themselves and/or the organization. In a few instances new approaches were viewed more negatively as an imposition from above (principally from the global level), but in the main staff were receptive to new ways of working and described something of a co-creation process.

On the second point, judging from how staff portrayed the positive and negative impacts of adopting new approaches, there appears to be (i) a willingness to recognize collective or organizational benefits from adopting new approaches, when asked about positives; and (ii) a propensity to emphasize challenges for one's own work, when asked about negatives. These points are relevant when thinking about how to introduce and frame more innovative and adaptive approaches between global, country management and more local levels.

The third set of findings, meanwhile – how staff described the challenges they faced and the solutions they developed – provides a reminder of the importance of seeing innovation and adaptation as a continuous process, in which staff at country level and below play the leading role, where they are empowered to do so. The fourth and final set of findings – on what staff felt had enabled them or restricted them from innovating and adapting – adds depth to these insights. At least some of the limitations on more flexible programming can be addressed through better management.

Overall, this investigation shows that innovation and adaptation are interchangeable in the understanding of the SWIFT staff members interviewed. Adapted approaches, either from others or from past programmes, were seen as innovative because they were new to the team, deviating from what had been done traditionally.

Interestingly, the mechanism of the funding, which allowed for flexible management of the budget and activities as long as the outputs and outcomes were met, facilitated adaptation in the approaches taken. The flexibility of the PbR structure allowed for changes in activities or approaches without protracted negotiations being necessary for teams to respond to issues faced in the programme areas or to adapt programmatic interventions accordingly. For instance, a revised approach for water management was researched and introduced during the implementation of SWIFT 1 and then adapted in SWIFT 2.

In Kenya, the adaptation was in response to a previous programme that had seen a significant failure in latrines due to the geology of the area, leading to a decision to subsidize the provision of slabs to improve sustainability. Whether these ideas were new or adapted, the aspect that challenged and inspired the teams was doing something different that led to a change in results or impact that responded to a local problem.

Several interesting points emerged from this research: firstly, the way in which the approaches taken had a wider effect; secondly, a number of commonalities can be noted in the markers of success; and thirdly, all changes or adaptations were reliant on support from people within the organization.

Understanding unintended consequences

Most staff linked innovations or adaptations to the need to overcome a particular practical problem; however, in both cases the adaptations led to greater changes and improved sustainability as they responded to local challenges and contexts with practical solutions owned and driven by the teams on the ground.

In DRC, the problem was ineffective management of water systems; this led to the adoption of an approach that was already being used by a national organization (ADIR) in Kinshasa. Adapting it to the context in the east of the country, SWIFT adjusted the approach to professionalize the structures and practices of local ASUREP water management systems. The response to this local problem led to an improvement in water management through a more professional system which, although not entirely a new approach, was new in the areas of operation.

In Kenya the nature of the ground and soil often led to the failure of latrines; however, the CLTS approach was a national policy and all NGOs were encouraged to follow this methodology. After the failure of a previous programme where latrines collapsed due to flooding, drought, termites and unstable soil, SWIFT worked with the government to allow its teams to provide concrete slabs to minimize the chances of collapse and extend the useful life of the latrines.

In DRC the adaptation has opened the door to working with the government to adapt national policy on water management and on the delivery of water in semi-urban areas. In Kenya the adaptation has led to artisans in the arid lands setting up a business to produce and sell latrine slabs, with government support. Both these adaptations went beyond the stated impact and outcomes of the programme and were due primarily to the ownership and leadership of the programme team. Their unintended consequences highlight the evolving nature of longer-term programming.

In fragile contexts, programmes are often of short duration and leave little time for the adaptation or evolution of ideas; however, the SWIFT programme provided multiple-year funding with a focus on sustainability. In both countries this allowed for support to systems or projects beyond the programme's parameters.

Markers for success

What allowed or supported these adaptations? There were a number of commonalities across both countries that were key to the success of the adaptations:

1. The technical expertise of one or more people in the team to lead and support on driving through ideas;
2. A good working relationship with the government to garner support; and finally, the structure of the programme.
3. Space for adaptation is key for team ownership of a new process or approach; it is interesting that no one person was credited with initiating the process, but it was seen rather as a response to a problem.
4. In both countries the technical vision or expertise of the WASH advisers was key to the success of the intervention; in both cases they were willing to push the boundaries to move beyond the traditional programme approach and look at innovative ways to address the issues involved. The space given to innovative individuals in country programmes is clearly important in supporting and encouraging adaptation or innovation.

Role of governance

Another important aspect in both cases was the working relationship with local authorities. Both approaches responded to and adapted existing country laws. In DRC the Water Law was relatively new; it stipulated that management systems must collect payment for water, but the structure of management committees had traditionally been voluntary, and within national programmes such as VEA they continue to be so. This move away from traditional practice was dependent upon SWIFT working with local authorities both to support the professionalization of the set-up and to ensure that support continued afterwards and did not have negative impacts on the ongoing management of water systems.

In Kenya the national policy was CLTS, which was based on community members using local raw materials to build latrines. Following past failures, negotiation with the authorities was necessary to allow subsidies

for slabs to adapt the approach to allow for the introduction of more robust materials. Not only did the authorities agree to this change of approach, but they have since continued to explore the approach with other organizations in the region.

The SWIFT programme was designed in two phases split between construction and service delivery, with a focus on sustainability through supporting the structures in place in the second half of the programme. The space given to construction or to supporting structures in place differed from programmes traditionally implemented in such contexts, with time dedicated to support activities and the evolution of discussions and wider change, which is often not the case. This meant that issues of sustainability were discussed and solutions or adaptations were looked at in order to improve the approach.

What does this mean?

This reflection piece shows that innovation or adaptation can take place in a programme if enough space and support are allowed for it. In this programme the support of inventive and imaginative technical personnel was key: this, in conjunction with the split in the design of the programme and the ability to flexibly manage finances, made it possible to change the approaches taken as the programme progressed. The experience of SWIFT highlights the need for flexible funding over multiple years to support the creative problem solving that leads to innovation.

5 Conclusion and recommendations

The definitions of innovation and adaptation used in this study still leave much scope for individual interpretation, for example what 'scale' constitutes and the extent to which evidence is consciously employed to inform decision making. On a strict interpretation the SWIFT programme, based on the three case studies, cannot be characterized as especially innovative or adaptive. What does appear to have occurred is a fairly high degree of flexible programming, involving collaboration between global, country HQ and field-level staff to introduce approaches novel to their context, and to make further changes as required to ensure that they delivered the desired results. In the final analysis, what matters most is the impact that programmes have on the communities they are designed to benefit.

This study concludes with three sets of recommendations, aimed at staff responsible for designing and/or managing programmes which seek to foster more innovative and adaptive approaches, but which may be constrained by difficult operating contexts, novel contractual methods or limited resources. Even in these cases, good management principles and practices can go a long way.

To encourage buy-in to new approaches:

- Establish the rationale for introducing a new approach in terms that clearly relate to the work that key responsible staff are engaged with and to their job satisfaction (this can be about collective or organizational interest as much as self-interest).
- Focus on how the approach contributes to end outcomes (whether payment is attached to these or not).
- Think through, acknowledge and where possible mitigate the downsides of new approaches that affect front-line staff individually, e.g. through an increased work burden.
- Seek to understand how both positives and negatives of novel programming approaches are perceived at different levels, on a case-by-case basis, rather than relying on theory.
- Be realistic when estimating the resources required to introduce a new approach, including the likely adaptations/modifications needed, or identify where resources could be reallocated from in advance.

To help staff to work more adaptively:

- Be responsive to requests for support, but give appropriate leeway (and time) for local staff to negotiate solutions with and secure buy-in from important local stakeholders.
- Recognize that approaches that appear to offer flexibility to managers may create an arduous process of continuous adjustment and change for those tasked with implementation.
- Adopt a solutions-oriented approach that enables staff to adapt programmes to address risks inherent in the context (e.g. instability, displacement), following the progress of local teams rather than dictating how each step is done, and intervening only where risk is excessive.
- Actively verify with staff working at local level that they feel empowered to make autonomous decisions, as far as possible.
- Utilize locally based staff's understanding of key features of the context to anticipate and respond to the challenges posed by unpredictable events and to help identify more stable aspects of the situation around which new approaches can be anchored, such as customs, laws and policies.
- Encourage the use of results frameworks and programme management tools that do not constrain staff to a fixed change pathway (i.e. step out of the log-frame mentality and culture).

On fostering a learning culture:

- Allocate time and resources to opportunities for learning, e.g. cross-consortium workshops, and support staff at all levels to analyse the data they collect rather than just sending it to HQ.
- Where trust is not already present, e.g. where a global-level entity provides technical advice to country-level stakeholders, help to establish rapport and ensure that the rationale is explained in clear, relatable terms.
- Harness the inherent capability of field staff to understand and engage with local political dynamics wherever possible, e.g. by allowing local-level staff to negotiate with government counterparts and/or investing time to enhance their teams' understanding of the context through dialogue and learning exercises.
- Match cycles of experimentation and learning to the lifetime of the programme, by ensuring that there is sufficient time to gather evidence, assess and improve, and drop or scale up an approach.

Notes

1 Oxfam GB (consortium lead, DRC and Kenya implementing partner); Tearfund (global partner and DRC implementing partner); WSUP (global associate and Kenya implementing partner); BBC Media Action (Kenya implementing partner); Concern Worldwide (Kenya implementing partner); Practical Action (Kenya implementing partner); Sanergy (Kenya implementing partner).

2 SWIFT (2016a). 'No one wants to go back to the bush': SWIFT brings improved, sustainable sanitation to communities in Kakuma. SWIFT Consortium webpage. http://swiftconsortium.org/portfolio/no-one-wants-to-go-back-to-the-bush-swift-brings-improved-sustainable-sanitation-to-communities-in-kakuma/

3 https://washresultsmve.wordpress.com/about/

4 P. Karanja, E. Nzisa and C. Gathu (2018). Implementing community led total sanitation in Turkana County. Paper presented at the 41st WEDC International Conference, Egerton University, Nakuru, Kenya. https://wedc-knowledge.lboro.ac.uk/resources/conference/41/Karanja-2939.pdf

5 SWIFT (2015). SWIFT Consortium Newsflash – 13 August 2015. Internal email communication.

6 SWIFT (2015). SWIFT Consortium Newsflash – 25 June 2015. Internal email communication.

7 P. Karanja et al. (2018), op. cit.

8 Eliminating open defecation was not an explicit objective of the programme nor of the results agreed for payment by DFID, although it is commonly seen as a key goal of CLTS. Rates of open defecation were therefore not monitored systematically, and anecdotal evidence suggests that open defecation was not eliminated in any SWIFT programme communities in Marsabit, Wajir or Turkana. This may limit overall health benefits since, even with latrines, households may be exposed to faecal contamination if their neighbours (or other residents) continue to defecate in the open. See D. Mara (2017). The elimination of open defecation and its adverse health effects: a moral imperative for governments and development professionals. Journal of Water Sanitation and Hygiene for Development. https://doi.org/10.2166/washdev.2017.027

9 F. Bédécarrats, O. Lafuente-Sampietro, M. Leménager and D.L. Sowa (2016). Building commons to cope with chaotic urbanization? Performance and sustainability of decentralized water services in the outskirts of Kinshasa. Journal of Hydrology. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhydrol.2016.07.023

10 The ASUREPs are structured as follows:

- The *Assemblée Générale*, consisting of elected community members representing areas/communities within the settlement. The *Assemblée Générale* is a decision-making body and undertakes strategic analysis of reports.
- The *Conseil d'Administration*, which is elected by the *Assemblée Générale* members to supervise the *Unité de Gestion*, implement/supervise implementation of its decisions and analyse monthly reports.
- The *Commission de Contrôle*, which is also elected by the *Assemblée Générale* to supervise use of the ASUREP's resources, monitor receipts and expenditures, analyse understanding between users and other bodies, and evaluate the functioning of the ASUREP.
- The *Unité de Gestion*, which is the technical body for daily management of the network. Functions include an administrator, accountant, cashier, plumber, tapstand operators and guards. Individuals are recruited on the basis of skills and remunerated according to the performance of the network's operations and in line with legislation. The *Unité de Gestion* provides a monthly report to the *Conseil d'Administration* and checks, maintains and protects the infrastructure and equipment.

Based on A. Kavuya (2017). *La gouvernance de l'eau par l'asurep*. Internal SWIFT presentation.

11 SWIFT (2016) Midline survey underway. SWIFT Consortium webpage. http://swiftconsortium.org/portfolio/midline-survey-underway/

12 For example, the updated appraisal of SWIFT's monitoring and reporting systems conducted in spring 2015 found that systems in DRC were 'of a very high standard. Processes and tools are well defined and logically set up, and staff have been effectively trained and are using the tools, as shown by the documentation and data that we find at different levels.' In Kenya, meanwhile, there was 'still some variability in quality (reflecting in part the larger number of partners with their varying approaches and in-house systems). But … there is clear improvement in the provision of evidence.' ePact (2015). Report of the Sustainable Water, Sanitation and Hygiene in Fragile Contexts (SWIFT) Programme Deliverables due Quarter 2, 2015. Unpublished.

13 Multiple-choice question, multiple responses allowed.

14 See: https://www.leganet.cd/Legislation/Droit economique/Eaux/Loi.15.026.31.12.2015.html

15 Based on the framework of enabling factors for innovation developed by Whitehead (2015), with additional factors relating to the design and context of the SWIFT programme. J. Whitehead (2015). Unlocking Innovation: Enabling and blocking factors in developing innovative programmes in Oxfam GB. https://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/unlocking-innovation-enabling-and-blocking-factors-in-developing-innovative-pro-558453

16 ePact (2017). Evaluation of the WASH Results Programme: Mid-Term Evaluation Report. ePact, Oxford, UK. https://www.opml.co.uk/files/2018-05/mid-term-eval-report-revised-feb17.pdf?noredirect=1

17 Ibid.

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