

QUALITY ASSURANCE & ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEMS

This document is an introduction to the Quality Assurance and Accountability Initiative led by the Global WASH Cluster and is part of its Road Map 2020-2025.

WHY QAAS?

Humanitarian crises are complex and dynamic. Reliably delivering against commitments to quality and accountability, improving over time and ensuring continued relevance despite changing contexts requires management approaches that are data-driven and adaptive.

Current response monitoring practices often focus on tracking activities or reach, rather than understanding whether the response is safe, inclusive, participatory and effective. This risks the response being managed to maximise outputs or beneficiary numbers, without understanding whether real progress is being made towards objectives or that commitments to quality are being fulfilled.

Quality Assurance and Accountability Systems (QAAS) are a way of addressing this, while strengthening accountability to the affected population by providing confidence that standards for quality will be met and maintained over time.

WHAT IS QUALITY?

Quality includes both what the response achieves (outcomes) and how it is carried out (process). Quality gaps arise because of the way that humanitarian assistance is designed and/or implemented but may be most apparent when the consequences of those gaps are seen in the outcomes of WASH programming, or the way that people affected by crisis feel about the way assistance is provided.

The operational definition of quality in WASH responses is based on the standards and systems of the National Government, as well as international humanitarian standards such as CHS and Sphere

WHAT IS QUALITY ASSURANCE?

A Quality Assurance and Accountability System (QAAS) is an approach to response coordination that supports results-oriented, evidence-based decision making with the aim of ensuring that standards for quality and accountability in humanitarian WASH responses are met and maintained, with continuous improvement.

It provides a way to monitor a WASH response against jointly agreed, contextually relevant framework of quality and accountability standards that integrate recognised national and international frameworks.

QAAS is an ongoing, collective process carried out at the coordination level to ensure that the humanitarian WASH response:

- avoids doing harm (e.g. increasing protection risks, contaminating water)

resources);

- is effectively working towards strategic goals; (e.g. controlling public and environmental health risks, providing basic WASH services); and
- is meeting agreed standards and ways of working (e.g. commitments to accountability and participation under CHS, technical standards in Sphere).

The Global WASH Cluster's Quality Assurance and Accountability Initiative is developing tools and approaches to support national clusters set up Quality Assurance and Accountability Systems and to link up with other sectors and cross cutting issues (gender, accountability, inclusion...). Currently the following two documents have been realised:

- A **Guidance Note** describes the steps required for National WASH Clusters to begin implementing routine systems for quality assurance and accountability within the humanitarian programme cycle.
- The accompanying **Modular Analytical Framework** provides guidance on monitoring approaches, standards and indicators for quality monitoring in key WASH areas.

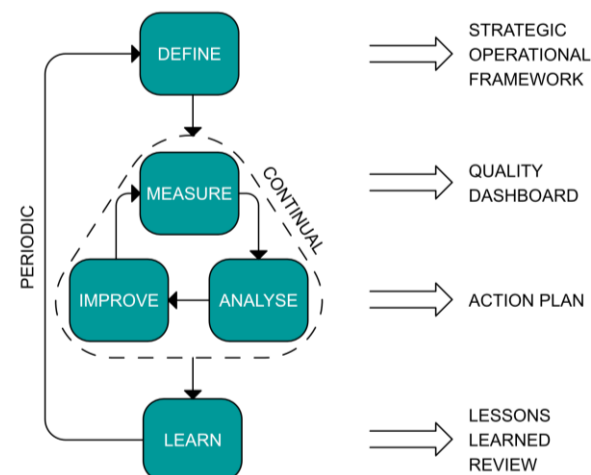
The proper use of this tool will help partners to establish a structured and systematic dialogue around the quality of the WASH response.

QAAS is...	QAAS is not...
...a lightweight, ongoing appraisal of key quality gaps with a focus on triggering action	...a formal evaluation or impact assessment
...owned and managed jointly by the WASH coordination platform for internal use	...an additional, top-down, reporting requirement
...implemented jointly by all WASH Cluster participants	...carried out by the WASH Cluster Coordinator alone
...based on good-enough monitoring of a limited number of key indicators in order to identify where course correction is needed	...an attempt to produce detailed or generalisable statistics
...based on contextualising standards and guidance that already exist	...a set of new requirements, standards or expectations

THE QAAS PROCESS

The QAAS process proposed here is adapted from the Define-Measure-Analyse-Improve-Control (DMAIC) used across a wide range of industries.

The approach combines a continuous process of monitoring, analysis and improvement with a periodic review of lessons learned as defined in the figure beside.



THE MODULAR ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

The Modular Analytical Framework provides guidance on the key standards, indicators, benchmarks and data collection approaches required to monitor compliance with the wide range of humanitarian standards. It supports collective monitoring of inclusion, safety, participation and feedback, by assessing whether partners are fulfilling their commitments to Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP) in the way they work. It also provides guidance for integrating the views of the affected population into quality monitoring. It is designed to ensure that monitoring approaches can identify commonly experienced quality and accountability issues while reducing the burden of data collection and reporting. It should be used to consider what information is required to support decision making at the cluster level.

NATIONAL WASH CLUSTERS

Quality and accountability need to be appropriately and collectively addressed at the WASH Cluster country coordination level. National WASH Clusters (Cluster Steering Committee, Coordinators and partners) have an important role to play in:

- Setting clear priorities, strategic objectives, expectations and ways of working that have the commitment of all partners;
- Creating an enabling environment for collective quality assurance through building trust, taking advantage of collective experience and building mutual accountability;
- Coordinating data collection, information sharing and joint analysis; and
- Creating opportunities for routine review, evaluation and institutionalisation of learning.

As a collective process, the QAAP relies on the engagement of all WASH Cluster partners, the Cluster Lead Agency (most often UNICEF), the Cluster Coordinator and donors in defining, collecting data, analysing, improving and learning.