



Photo: Activity Infrastructure Team (Mercy Corps and Tetrtech) on a Site Selection initial visit in Sake, North Kivu

USAID’S Sustainable Water & Sanitation Systems Activity

Semiannual Report – FY21 S1

REPORTING PERIOD: OCTOBER 2020-MARCH 2021

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Acronyms

AMELP	Activity Monitoring, Evaluation, Learning Plan
CLA	Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting
CLC	Consortium Leadership Committee
E4i	Enterprise for Impact
EMMP	Environmental Monitoring and Mitigation Plan
ETD	Decentralized Territory Entity (Entité Territoriale Décentralisée)
FCDO	UK Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office
IMAGINE	Integrated Maji Infrastructure and Governance Initiative for Eastern Congo
LSE	London School of Economics
MCDA	Multi Criterial Decision Analysis
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MSD	Market Systems Delivery
SNA	Stakeholder Network Analysis
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

Executive Summary

USAID's Sustainable Water and Sanitation Systems Activity is a five-year Activity implemented by Mercy Corps, London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), Sanergy, and Tetra Tech. The Activity aims to increase and sustain access to clean water and safe sanitation services for communities in the North and South Kivu provinces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). The Activity will do this through robust research geared to informing potential investors, operators and authorities on best practices (Objective 1), improving the enabling environment for water and sanitation service delivery (Objective 2), and proving the market potential of economically sustainable delivery of water and sanitation services (Objective 3) throughout the Kivus region.

Key Highlights

- › **Successful start-up:** The Activity successfully completed start up and is ahead of schedule for implementation in Year 2. Startup activities included completion of the Annual Workplan, the Activity Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning Plan (AMELP), the EMMP and Baseline assessment. Implementation and recruitment occurred in parallel, leading to a strong foundational year for the Activity.
- › **Site Selection:** The Activity team developed a robust framework for site selection and the associated site selection tools, which utilize a multi-criterial decision analysis (MCDA). The MCDA tool facilitates a competitive site selection process where sites are evaluated according to pre-determined criteria that the Activity team determines will contribute to successful project implementation.
- › **Strong collaboration between Stakeholder Engagement and Research:** Working in tandem, the Activity's Stakeholder Relations and Governance; and Monitoring, Evaluation and Research Teams identified crucial links between stakeholder engagement activities and approaches to disseminating Activity learnings. Engagement couples with and is reinforced by communication between partners and stakeholders as well as tailoring outputs to the latter's interests and preferences in terms of format and frequency. This overlap will be leveraged to refine dissemination approaches as well as stakeholder relations activities.

Implementation Update

Overall Update

Theory of Change: USAID's Sustainable Water and Sanitation Systems Activity was the result of a Broad Agency Announcement, developed over a period of two years through a number of consultative processes and iterations to the concept note and associated annexes, officially starting on September 30, 2020. However, there were significant shifts in the operational context from the time of submission of the final concept note to the start of award. This necessitated a review and update of the Activity concept note through a six-month inception period from October 2020-March 2021. This Activity performance report reflects the progress made during the inception. As the activity indicators are still

pending approval at time of submission, the report does not include progress against indicator targets. These will be included in future iterations subsequent to approval of the Activity Monitoring and Evaluation Plan (AMELP).

The inception period used a Collaborating, Learning and Adapting (CLA) approach to refine the existing concept note, tailoring it to the updated needs and contextual reality of the Kivus region. Furthermore, the inception focused on putting in place the foundations for success across the subsequent four and a half years by investing in the systems, processes, and partnerships needed to effectively achieve the Activity goals. To kick start this process, the inception first focused on a refinement of strategy, resulting in an updated Theory of Change. Through a series of workshops, the team reviewed the approach to reflect the updated operational realities. As a result of this process, several key adjustments were made: Research and Learning gained prominence both as a culture and a tool within the overall approach, moving from Objective 3 to Objective 1 and aligning it to the flow of data and experience to the outcomes of Objective 3. The goals of capacity building in the enabling environment (Objective 2) and the business model implementation (Objective 3) were further refined as interlinked and driving towards systemic change. At the activity level, we also saw a rise in the prominence of inclusion (building on our own lessons learnt from 2018 onwards requiring increased community awareness and engagement), with each objective having stand-alone activities related to the inclusion of marginalized voices, with a specific focus on women and youth. These changes were made to further strengthen the achievement of the overall goal - increased and sustained access to clean water and safe sanitation, while the participatory process used aligned all parties around the shared vision.

Inception Workshops/Key Events

- > Post Award Meeting (Oct)
- > Internal kick-off (Oct)
- > Consortium kick-off (Oct)
- > Inception Workshops - internal (Nov)
- > Program Official Launches (Nov)
- > Inception Workshop w/ USAID (Nov)
- > Theory of Change Workshop (Nov)
- > Kivus in Context & Lessons Learned (Dec)
- > Research & Learning (Jan)
- > Site Identification & Selection Process (Jan)
- > Governance Approach (Feb)
- > Stakeholder Engagement (Feb)
- > Research Agenda (Feb)
- > Refined Site Selection Methodology (Feb)
- > USG Rules & Regulations (Feb)
- > MEL Approaches (March)

Context Adaptation and Partnerships: During the inception phase, Mercy Corps **entered into subaward agreements with TetraTech and LSE**. The subaward with Sanergy is anticipated to be completed in April 2021. These awards are only part of the broader partnership development that occurred during the reporting period. To help establish the partnerships and ways of working, the team held several workshops during inception, including consortium kick-off workshops, shared lessons learned workshops, and technical workshops inclusive of all partners. Through these workshops, as well as regular one-on-one meetings, the consortium established a shared vision of ways of working, supported by an integrated team structure with cross-partner reporting lines and shared office space. The overall consortium is strategically guided by the Consortium Leadership Committee (CLC), formed by both HQ and team representatives from the consortium members. The first CLC meeting was held on January 29th, with subsequent meetings expected on a biannual basis.

The initially envisioned roles of **E4i** and **Sanergy** shifted as a result of the incorporation of lessons learned from the IMAGINE program (FCDO). Building from the experience of working with Congo Maji, a water service delivery enterprise under IMAGINE, and Mercy Corps' work with the South Kivu Government on the options for Service Delivery, the program team gained a stronger understanding of the roles of various actors in service provision, and the associated constraints posed by the political context. As such, the implementation team further clarified the role of the Activity as a catalyzer - not direct implementer of service provision. In short, the potential and perceived conflict of interest of being both an operator and an advisor was detrimental to the achievement of the program goals. As a result of this, it became apparent early on during the inception phase that there would need to be a division for both E4i and Sanergy to ensure there was no conflict of interest. For E4i, it was clear that it would not be possible to resolve this conflict. As a result, E4i left the consortium and Mercy Corps restructured the consortium partnerships to reassign responsibilities initially envisioned under E4i. These changes were outlined in detail in a document shared with USAID in March 2021.

With **Sanergy**, partnership discussions were conducted to adjust programming strategy to a facilitative approach. As a small social enterprise, Sanergy's modis operandi was to act as a business, with incorporated business costs (operational expenses, marketing, etc.) embedded in their budget. During the inception, Sanergy and Mercy Corps more clearly defined the role of Sanergy to cover only business facilitation/advising and not direct service provision. This approach is new to Sanergy, who do not have technical depth as advisors. To reflect this, and to ensure appropriate performance management, the business operational budget has been relocated to Mercy Corps, and will eventually be deployed as support to a sanitation business. Sanergy will commence by leveraging their technical expertise in sanitation to conduct the sanitation location assessments, supporting the identification of a location for the piloting of the sanitation model. This remains in line with the original implementation plan, which demonstrates Sanitation interventions beginning in Year 3.

Tetra Tech expanded their depth of engagement in technical advising on the business and infrastructure design, fulfilling the advisor role previously played by E4i. LSE also proceeded to lead the consortium in the design of the research component, ensuring overarching alignment with USAID's Water for the World Research Agenda.

Team Structure and Staffing: Following refinement of partnerships and activities, the team developed the updated organizational chart, with a focus on cross-partner integrated teams to build a culture of collaboration and leverage partner strengths. Teams then worked in component functions (Program and Quality (PAQ), Governance, Market Systems Delivery (MSD), Infrastructure and Sanitation) to refine their sub-activities and plans, resulting in a detailed Y1-Y5 implementation gantt chart. Importantly, the Market Systems Delivery and Governance teams were integrated under a single point of leadership (Deputy Chief of Party) to further solidify the cross-team learning and adaptive approach needed.

Recruitment progressed steadily throughout the Inception Period. In November, a Start-Up Team Leader was hired to support inception, this role complemented Mission level support in ensuring a smooth start up process. Within the inception period, the Chief of Party, MEL Director, Program Development and Quality Manager and Research Fellow (LSE) were all recruited. Tetra Tech deployed an interim team to support the startup of Infrastructure and Market System Development activities.

Interviews were held to fill the remaining positions on component teams, including staff for Governance, Infrastructure, Market Systems Delivery, Gender and Youth, Communications, and MEL teams.

Activity Launch: The Activity was successfully launched with public events in Bukavu and Goma in November.

Additional Start Up Outputs: In addition to the work above, the Activity developed and submitted several key start up deliverables for USAID review. These included:

- › Inception Workplan
- › Activity MEL Plan (initial and revised)
- › Branding and Marking Plan
- › Communications Plan
- › Environmental Monitoring and Mitigation Plan
- › Year 1 Supplemental Workplan
- › Revised Program Description
- › Updated Activity Budget

Furthermore, the Activity team and USAID established biweekly check in calls throughout the inception period and an issues tracker, to capture pending action items and review program progress, has been implemented. Internally, the team also invested in institutional structures, ensuring the Activity exceeds Mercy Corps' minimum standards for program implementation. In order to ensure full resource support and accountability, the team established a Complex Program Board, which engages key team members from Mercy Corps' headquarters and global team, to provide additional oversight and to capitalize on the Activity's potential for impact and learning. To support this effort, the team established a risk register, issues tracker, and compliance tracker. Partner and support team staff also participated in a United States Government Rules and Regulations training in February 2021.



PHOTO: Screenshot from USAID Compliance Training to all Consortium Staff and Partner HQs

Goal Level

Objective 1: Improved understanding of the impact and scalability of the water and sanitation sectors in the Kivus region

Result 1.1: Increased evidence base for informing design, replication and scale of water and sanitation interventions in the Kivus region

Over the course of the last six months, the Activity Research team has been focused on the methodological approach to mapping the existing evidence base and identifying gaps relating specifically to Activity objectives. This approach stems from USAID's Water for the World Implementation Research Agenda and targets Activity-relevant priority areas, including: '*Strengthening sector governance and financing*' and '*Increasing sustainable access to safe drinking water*'. The identified method includes mixed methods systematic literature review, combining a living and scoping literature review and origin. The methodological approach will be verified by all partners to ensure it aligns with USAID priorities and high level Activity concerns and specific workstreams.

The focus on North-South collaboration throughout research has been maintained, with an initial long list of potential universities and independent research centers in the Kivus region for partnership having been developed. The team has successfully determined the first and second stages of criteria for consideration of partnership. The longlist and selection criteria will be verified by all Activity partners before any engagement with the institutions commences.

Result 1.2: Improved communication of research findings related to the water and sanitation sector in the Kivus region

The team have made progress in mapping the communication landscape to ensure effective dissemination of research findings. This has involved identifying pertinent groups of stakeholders in line with their sectors and high level, overarching dissemination channels. The communication landscape mapping has fed into the initial development of the dissemination approach, which has been prepared by the Stakeholder Relations and Research teams, and will be reviewed by critical stakeholders in the months to come. In line with the CLA approach, the dissemination strategy will be further refined in order to tailor it to key stakeholders preferences in terms of content, format, frequency and channel.

Objective 2: Improved enabling environment for investment in the water and sanitation sector in the Kivus region

Result 2.1: Improved governance and regulation of the water and sanitation sectors

The Activity Governance team have commenced with initial engagement of critical stakeholders within North and South Kivu, focusing on ensuring early support from key decision makers within the provinces. In Goma, the team met with the Provincial Minister of Energy and Water Resources, and in Bukavu, they met with the Minister of Plan and the Minister of Energy. These meetings were to provide an update on progress from the

last six months, and share plans for the months to come. Inclusion of governance considerations was paramount throughout the site selection process, to ensure the Activity is not proceeding in an area which is politically unviable. An initial field visit was made to Sake, a town located about 30km from the city of Goma, to test the site selection tool. This offered the chance to make initial contact with the ETD authorities and gather basic information on stakeholders within this locality.

Result 2.2: Improved capacity of supply chain actors to respond to demand for water and sanitation service delivery

The Activity Market Systems Delivery (MSD) Team developed a Market Systems Delivery Strategic Implementation Plan to inform the exploration, design, and testing of context-appropriate, performance-based business models for the delivery of portable water services in target communities in the Kivu regions. The overall MSD strategy is based on a commitment to sustainability and the desire to drive large-scale systemic change in how water services are delivered to communities in North and South Kivu. This MSD approach relies on the Activity's consortium partners to play a facilitating role that seeks to catalyze the core, "permanent" actors in the local market for water supply - but not to become a part of it.

The Activity's MSD strategy aims to achieve systemic change based on two key features. The first is selecting, differentiating, and amplifying new business models that create competitive pressure in the market system. The second is ensuring that market actors own and drive this competitive pressure and are not displaced by external forces (i.e. donor programs with distorting subsidies), which will be achieved by ensuring any external intervention is temporary and facilitative in nature.

Result 2.3: Community members are empowered to demand and improve water and sanitation service delivery

Work on this result has not yet commenced.

Objective 3: Market potential is proven through implemented models of economically sustainable delivery of water and sanitation for communities in the Kivu region

Result 3.1: Sustainable and equitable performance based business models for water service delivery in use

The Activity plans to conduct interventions in three sites in both North and South Kivu. The site selection framework and tools were developed through a series of workshops, meetings, and a site visit during the first six months of the program. Site selection will occur in two stages, known as Level 1: Candidate Site Selection and Level 2: Site Assessments. Both utilize a multi-criteria decision analysis (MCDA) to evaluate sites based on pre-determined criteria. The Level 1 analysis, facilitated through desk research, was carried out in March 2021 and considered all possible implementation sites, which were identified based on population, access, security and several other high-level criteria. Using the Level 1 tool, the team reduced the list to ten candidate sites, which will be evaluated in more detail under the Level 2 assessment. The outcome of the Level 2 tool will be the selection of the six implementation sites. Level 1 and 2 assessment

provide information required for site selection decision-making and will be followed by pre-implementation activities, in-depth assessments occurring over 2-3 months, that will determine implementation activities for each site.

The Activity Infrastructure Team also developed the Water Infrastructure Strategic Implementation Plan as a guide for water supply infrastructure improvements that will be prioritized, evaluated, appraised for financing, and implemented under Objective 3 of the Activity. The plan will serve as a guidebook of procedures that can be used by consortium members in preparing infrastructure improvements acceptable within the scope of the Activity. The plan aims to attain the Activity objectives of overall water service improvement through:

- Implementing approved water infrastructure improvements with maximum efficiency;
- Delineating the roles and responsibilities of consortium members and external partners (e.g. contracted engineering firms, etc.) at various implementation stages; and,
- Providing guidelines for assessment and design standards to ensure the design and construction of quality infrastructure.

Result 3.2: Sustainable and equitable performance based business model for sanitation service delivery in use

Work on this result included the planning process for the comparative analysis between Goma and Bukavu to select the site for the sanitation pilot. The data collection will commence in the next reporting period.

Gender & Youth

Gender equity and youth engagement remain cross cutting themes throughout the Activity. During the last six months, the recruitment of a Gender and Youth Coordinator and two Gender and Youth Officers progressed significantly, with appointments expected during the month of April. As soon as recruitment has been completed, the team will commence with development of a detailed Gender and Youth evaluation focused on the Activity specific sectors and with the aim of longer term workplan development in mind. Throughout the last six months, attention on the cross cutting issues of gender and youth has been maintained within the development of component strategy. For example, the Water Systems Infrastructure Strategic Implementation Plan references engagement of underrepresented groups within the design stage of infrastructure upgrades and rehabilitation. Furthermore, proactive inclusion based on sex and age is maintained at a program management level, with LSE exploring the possibility to recruit a recent graduate student as one of their researchers. Not only would this fulfil staffing needs within the research team, but it would offer an opportunity to a high achieving student to gain vital early career experience in the world of work and promote South-South and North-South partnerships. The Activity maintains attention on inclusion throughout its staffing and recruitment strategy to ensure that women, young people and those from ethnic groups have equal access to employment opportunities and to better inform the implementation strategy.

Environmental Compliance

In March 2021, the Activity completed the initial Environmental Monitoring and Mitigation Plan (EMMP). This plan outlines the approach to mitigation of any environmental consequences of activities and establishes the monitoring and accountability system for such mitigation. It will be reviewed and updated on an annual basis, with more detailed, site specific information being added after the site selection process and prior to any construction activities. Environmental focal points are anticipated to be hired in the next reporting period.

Lessons Learned & Challenges

- › **The importance of stakeholder engagement:** During the inception period, one of the key emerging lessons learned emerging from IMAGINE close out was the importance of stakeholder engagement. In order to implement effectively, and to manage points of tension or change within the community, engagement and buy in from critical political leaders is essential. It's clear that this deep level of political comprehension is only accessible by local Congolese leadership, and requires additional resourcing than accounted for in the original Activity design. A notable adaptation, recognizing the prioritization of this engagement, was in the redefined Deputy Chief of Party position. In order to ensure better coordination, the leadership of the governance and MSD components was merged under the DCOP. This will help to mitigate risk of silo-ing between components, while ensuring that both components are more adaptive and responsive to new information presented by their respective teams. Additionally, more support was embedded for the heavy time-investment needed for local level engagement, with additional governance assistants and officers. Finally, the Stakeholder Network Analysis (SNA) approach was better articulated to reveal how LSE's expertise in research can be leveraged to ensure the program is aware of how changes in the external environment, particularly the political economy, may impact the program. Importantly, we will also be able to leverage this research to better understand how the program itself impacts the external environment, hopefully strengthening institutions and individuals to deliver more equitable, high performance water and sanitation services.
- › **Virtual communications:** The influence of COVID-19 delayed Consortium member travel to the DRC, and posed additional challenges to internal movements. This was unanticipated and required additional adaptation in the early days of Activity development to ensure the team were well equipped to work across multiple time zones and at a distance. Investing in webcams and speakers to ensure online meetings were easier and more productive, and committing further time to planning the methodology for these workshops and meetings was essential in ensuring the distance had limited impact to Activity outputs.
- › **Greater collaboration between Stakeholder engagement and Research teams:** Throughout the course of the last six months, the importance of the link between Stakeholder Engagement and Research became increasingly apparent. The need to monitor and document both formal and informal exchanges in order to feed into SNA feedback and data collection is more significant than the team is previously used to. A number of tools (including shared calendars, regular meetings etc.) were introduced in order to meet the data collections demands while reducing the administrative burden, allowing immediate ethnographic analysis, feeding into real time Activity adaptation.

Plans for Next Reporting Period

Key priorities for the next reporting period are detailed below.

M&E and Research



- Set up all MEL related tools (e.g. Tableau Dashboard to visualize performance against indicators)
- Consortium wide MEL training including data management and protection, Toladata (Mercy Corps' Indicator tracking tool system), MEL strategy and related tools
- Commencing baseline study on the first sites after L2 site selection has taken place
- Conducting first quarterly monitoring visit in December involving site visits and post training surveys in the community
- Establish the Research Terms of Reference and finalize the existing literature review

Infrastructure and Sanitation



- Finalize and implement the Site Selection tool
- Development of Y2 Construction Plan
- Complete site assessments for the first two implementation locations including Level 2 and Level 3 Water studies
- Refinement and application of the tools to the second group of potential sites including input from all components
- Complete a Sanitation Comparative assessment to identify strengths and weaknesses of Goma and Bukavu intervention zones for the sanitation pilot

Governance



- Deeper engagement with all local authorities in the selected sites
- Development and signing of an MOU for engagement with the Provincial authorities
- Institutional analysis of capacity, strengths and weaknesses of key stakeholders at the provincial level
- Support community engagement at the local level through community engagement launches in the first two selected locations
- Map key actors and influencers within the selected locations

Program Management & Quality



- Development of the Activity Year 2 workplan
- Continued recruitment to ensure a fully staffed team before the end of Y1
- Completion of a Gender & Youth Strategy
- Preparation of a suite of communications resources including Activity factsheets
- All team meeting planned for June 2021, which will share information on component strategies and opportunities for collaboration, training on gender & youth, and finance training
- Set up and implementation of the Activity Community Accountability & Reporting Mechanism (CARM)

Success Stories



Successful launch of USAID's Sustainable Water and Sanitation Systems Activity: the authorities of North and South Kivu support the activity

One, two, three... up to nearly 60 participants arrive for the launch ceremony of USAID's Sustainable Water and Sanitation Systems Activity. Most of them are local authorities, water sector organizations and the media, waiting for the arrival of the Vice Governor of North Kivu to open the ceremony and say a few words about Mercy Corps' new program, made possible by the support of the generous American people.

"Your presence here today testifies to the level of interest you have in finding solutions to the problems of access to drinking water, which is one of the major constraints to economic and social development in the province of North Kivu. I take this opportunity to salute the efforts of Mercy Corps, who are allowing the population to have sustainable access to drinking water in the peri-urban areas of North and South Kivu," said the Vice Governor of North Kivu, Marie Lumuoho Kaombo.

A 5-year program, USAID's Sustainable Water and Sanitation Systems Activity was launched in Goma and Bukavu in November 2020 and aims to improve access to safe water and sanitation services for communities in North and South Kivu in the DRC. It operates in the DRC, in a context where despite the country being home to nearly half of Africa's freshwater reserves, only 50% of the population has access to an improved drinking water source (according to the Demographic and Health Survey conducted in 2016) and even less has access within 30 minutes of their home (as recommended by Sustainable Development Goal 6). Lack of access to clean water coupled with poor sanitation and hygiene practices means that water-borne diseases continue to lead to high infant mortality rates, with 94 out of every 1000 children not making it to their fifth birthday.

"What is interesting, is that the program plans a very relevant approach, that of accompanying the province and the Decentralized Territorial Entities in their responsibility as owner on one side, and on the other side to encourage the public-private partnership in the water sector which comes with a strategy to support the public financing and to assure the public service of quality water, in a transparent and accountable manner to ensure sustainability of the works," continues the Vice-Governor.

Other authorities present at the event had the following positive thoughts on the USAID's Sustainable Water and Sanitation Systems Activity:

"The cooperation between the DRC and the USA has always been fruitful. We take this opportunity to thank USAID for this support. We welcome the Public Private Partnership approach in the water sector that this program takes; to ensure a good quality of water supply here at home. "said Anselme Kyalondawa, Advisor to the Governor of South Kivu.

"For us to say that we are supplied with water, each citizen must have at least 50 liters of water per day. So it is a program that we receive with open arms and we want it to succeed 100%," said the North Kivu Minister of Energy and Hydraulics, Jean Ruyange.

The USAID's Sustainable Water and Sanitation Systems Activity is made possible by the support of the American people through the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and is implemented by Mercy Corps, in partnership with the London School of Economics, Sanergy and the University of London.