

Strengthening WASH Coordination in St. Vincent and the Grenadines & Grenada

SUMMARY

This WASH Diary explains how UNICEF, in partnership with governments, has been enhancing water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) coordination in the smaller islands of St. Vincent and the Grenadines and Grenada, which heavily rely on rainwater catchment systems.

The reliance on plastic water tanks in these islands makes them vulnerable to hurricane damage as seen during Hurricane Beryl on the Caribbean in July 2024. However, the event also initiated collaboration to strengthen water security and quality for the future.

In the aftermath of Beryl, UNICEF and partners provided relief supplies while addressing long term needs by increasing water supply capacity has resulted in stronger alignment between emergency response and long-term development, making the island communities more resilient to future hazards.

Background

The Eastern Caribbean Area is a region highly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, particularly the increasing frequency and intensity of extreme weather events. The Small Island Developing States of the region experience a range of natural hazards, including hurricanes, tropical storms, floods and drought which pose significant risks to the well-being of children and their communities. As climate change accelerates, the region is witnessing more intense hurricane seasons, with storms growing in strength and unpredictability. Hurricanes Maria and Irma of 2017 are a stark reminder of the region's vulnerability. On July 1, 2024, Hurricane Beryl pummeled the islands of St. Vincent and the Grenadines and Grenada, damaging vital infrastructure and disrupting access to clean water and sanitation and complicating good

hygiene practices. In general, approximately over 80,000 people were potentially affected by Hurricane Beryl in the two countries.

Figure 1. Water distribution at a Shelter in Union Island, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, August 2024



Story

Shortly after the impact of the hurricane, members of UNICEF's Eastern Caribbean IRT, with support from WASH Manager from the Latin America and the Caribbean Regional Office in Panama were deployed in the first weeks, to conduct initial needs assessment to better understand the situation on the ground in order to prioritize response efforts and coordination for Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH).

UNICEF along with the Governments have been at the forefront of enhancing WASH coordination efforts, particularly in the smaller islands that make a portion of St. Vincent and the Grenadines and Grenada. These islands (Bequia, Canouan, Mayreau, Union Island of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and the sister islands of Grenada-Carriacou and Petit Martinique), are known for their reliance on rainwater catchment and harvesting systems. At the household level, rainwater is typically collected from rooftop guttering that provides drainage and storage into tanks. Plastic tanks are often used in combination with the larger storage tanks, where water is pumped to the tank positioned on a raised platform, allowing the water to be gravity fed to homes for use. There are many benefits to this design in smaller and more remote islands, as it allows for water storage and aligns with the self-sufficient culture that is required in such locations. However, plastic tanks are particularly vulnerable to being destroyed during hurricanes. Hurricane Beryl underscored this vulnerability as many plastic water tanks were destroyed. However, this sparked collaboration aimed at increasing water security and quality for these resilient communities in the future.

A STORY OF COLLABORATION

Figure 2. Large water catchment area at Union Island



- A story of collaboration and resilience in St. Vincent and the Grenadines
- After cleaning the large water catchment on Union Island, the rains came, filling the tank with much-needed water. But just a few days later, disaster struck, a goat wandered into the uncovered manhole, contaminating the water supply. It was a tough lesson, but one that sparked action.
- Local NGO Environmental Alliance sought technical support from Water Mission to design a cover and slip to prevent future incidents. The Central Water and Sewerage Authority (CWSA) stepped up to provide fencing and to bring on local laborers to ensure that it is protected from future wandering animals.
- In the end, one lost goat and a lot of teamwork has resulted in a safer, cleaner water source for the community, demonstrating the power of collaboration and resilience.

Bridging Gaps with Local Partners

In response to the immediate needs following Hurricane Beryl, UNICEF coordinated meetings with key actors including national governments, UN agencies, NGOs, and community leaders to discuss sustainable solutions for water and sanitation and good hygiene practices. Initial efforts focused on emergency relief such as short-term water distribution, collapsible water containers, and hygiene kits for shelters and communities. Clean drinking water was being delivered through to distribution sites. A few of the islands had small desalination systems provided by partners while others, such as Mayreau did not have this option available. None of the islands had the capacity to provide the minimum standards or water needs for their residents. As a result, the focus shifted to increasing capacity on each island. Infrastructure and behavior change, technical support and supplies were coordinated to meet the needs of all, including vulnerable women and children.

Coordinating Humanitarian and Development Efforts

One of the most significant outcomes of these coordination efforts was the strong alignment between immediate humanitarian responses and long-term development goals.

Coordination with partners such as Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA), OCHA, Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO), Global Support and Development (GSD), Red Cross and Water Mission allowed for immediate needs, such as the distribution of water containers, purification tablets, and emergency essential supplies as hygiene kits to be addressed, while simultaneously planning for longer-term solutions such as desalination plants, building resilient raw water pipes and relocation of dams. This is accompanied with capacity building activities to strengthen preparedness.

Prior to the Hurricane Beryl, the local water authority agencies (National Water and Sewerage

Authority (NWASA) of Grenada and Central Water and Sewerage Authority (CWSA) of St. Vincent and the Grenadines had little presence within the more remote islands that make up a portion of each country. However, both agencies have shown their capability, willingness, and expertise by becoming key partners in the response and recovery efforts. The collaboration has resulted in not only meeting the immediate needs, but also allowed for an investment in improving the medium-term needs through the establishment of public water storage and distribution sites along with longer-term access to water, making all the communities within the countries more resilient and better prepared for future disasters including hurricanes and droughts.

Figure 3. In coordination with Government, UNICEF and other partners, Water Mission supported the delivery of safe water to a community distribution site



Challenges

WASH Coordination may face the following challenges:

- High staff turnover, shifting priorities, and the involvement of numerous actors (government agencies, NGOs, UN agencies, private sector, etc.) can lead to inconsistent attendance and participation

- Different stakeholders may have varied communication protocols, languages, or tools, leading to misalignment and delayed responses
- Lack of reliable internet or power can disrupt virtual coordination meetings, especially in remote or severely impacted area
- UNICEF and sector partners need to invest in preparedness mechanisms that ensure a coordinated, rapid and effective response, with human resources, capacity building and contingency or anticipatory activities.
- Limited capacity for emergency response, presence of international cooperation is key
- Emergencies are often the start of coordination platforms in WASH and other sectors. Maintaining them over time is a challenge, but it is essential to invest to be better prepared for the future.
- Flexible Planning: Develop adaptable response plans that can be adjusted as the situation evolves.
- Efficient Resource Allocation: Set up pre-arranged partnerships to ensure quick access to funds and resources during emergencies.
- Community Engagement: Engage local communities early to ensure culturally appropriate and sustainable solutions.
- Leveraging Technology: Use mobile and digital tools for real-time data collection and decision-making.
- Cross-Sector Coordination: Integrate WASH efforts with health, shelter, nutrition, and education to maximize impact.
- Monitoring & Accountability: Implement tracking systems for action points to ensure follow-through and accountability

Lessons learned

Effective WASH coordination during emergencies is critical to guarantee rapid and sustainable responses. Here are some key lessons and how they can be operationalized for better outcomes:

- **Timely Debriefing:** Conduct frequent post-action reviews to capture insights early and ensure continuous learning.
- **Centralized Information Management:** Establish a dedicated platform for sharing critical data and reports, ensuring smooth coordination.
- **Clear Roles and Responsibilities:** Define roles and leadership before emergencies to avoid overlap and confusion among actors.
- **Strengthen Local Capacity:** Empower local organizations and authorities to lead the response, leveraging their contextual knowledge.

Conclusions

Every year the Caribbean region is prone to extreme weather events as hurricanes, drought caused by climate change. Many Caribbean Island communities depend on decentralized systems, such as rainwater harvesting from rooftops, to satisfy their domestic water needs. However, Hurricane Beryl significantly damaged or compromised many of these systems, restricting water access. Coordination within the WASH sector has been crucial for articulating these community needs and initiating the planning of the recovery that incorporate more sustainable and climate-resilient solutions tailored to the specific contexts of the affected communities, also integrating, and coordinating the response with the shelter sector as well as health sector for integrating behavior change can maximize the impact for future emergencies in this region. This integration helps ensure that recovery efforts are holistic, addressing not just immediate needs but also long-term resilience. It also facilitates the sharing of resources and information, leading to

better planning, more efficient use of funds, and ultimately improved outcomes for affected communities.

Looking Ahead

UNICEF is committed to addressing WASH challenges in the Eastern Caribbean through a comprehensive, multi-faceted strategy. Operating across 12 countries. UNICEF, in collaboration with its regional office, and the WASHLAC Group is working to strengthen WASH coordination and information management efforts.

By facilitating regular meetings and workshops with national governments, NGOs, and local communities, the program aims to assess needs and share best practices. Capacity building initiatives will empower local stakeholders to manage water resources effectively, while WASH coordination forums will support innovative pilot projects, such as rainwater harvesting and solar-powered purification systems.

Community engagement is essential, ensuring that residents are involved in decision-making processes and that solutions are tailored to their unique contexts. Through research and data sharing, evidence-based insights will be provided to stakeholders, and comprehensive emergency response planning will enhance preparedness for crises. By building partnerships with private sector entities and academic institutions, UNICEF Eastern Caribbean Sub-region (ECA) seeks to introduce new resources and technologies, fostering a collaborative environment that addresses immediate water needs and promotes long-term sustainability and resilience in the Eastern Caribbean region.

References

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About the Series

UNICEF's water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) country teams work inclusively with governments, civil society partners and donors, to improve WASH services for children and adolescents, and the families and caregivers who support them. UNICEF works in over 100 countries worldwide to improve water and sanitation services, as well as basic hygiene practices. This publication is part of the UNICEF WASH Learning Series, designed to contribute to knowledge of good practice across UNICEF's WASH programming. In this series:

Discussion Papers explore the significance of new and emerging topics with limited evidence or understanding, and the options for action and further exploration.

Fact Sheets summarize the most important knowledge on a topic in few pages in the form of graphics, tables and bullet points, serving as a briefing for staff on a topical issue.

Field Notes share innovations in UNICEF's WASH programming, detailing its experiences implementing these innovations in the field.

Guidelines describe a specific methodology for WASH programming, research or evaluation, drawing on substantive evidence, and based on UNICEF's and partners' experiences in the field.

Reference Guides present systematic reviews on topics with a developed evidence base or they compile different case studies to indicate the range of experience associated with a specific topic.

Technical Papers present the result of more in-depth research and evaluations, advancing WASH knowledge and theory of change on a key topic.

WASH Diaries explore the personal dimensions of users of WASH services, and remind us why a good standard of water, sanitation and hygiene is important for all to enjoy. Through personal reflections, this series also offers an opportunity for tapping into the rich reservoir of tacit knowledge of UNICEF's WASH staff in bringing results for children.

WASH Results show with solid evidence how UNICEF is achieving the goals outlined in Country Programme Documents, Regional Organizational Management Plans, and the Global Strategic Plan or WASH Strategy, and contributes to our understanding of the WASH theory of change or theory of action.

COVID-19 WASH Responses compile lessons learned on UNICEF's COVID-19 response and how to ensure continuity of WASH services and supplies during and after the pandemic.

Readers are encouraged to quote from this publication but UNICEF requests due acknowledgement. You can learn more about UNICEF's work on WASH here: <https://www.unicef.org/wash/>

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