

Evolution to enhance impacts: 25 years of partnership and change

Through a series of bilateral projects between Finland and Ethiopia over 25 years, joint efforts to find better ways to improve Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) services have led to the widespread scaling of innovative approaches. Five regional governments now drive investment in Community Managed Projects (CMP) through its unique approach to empowering communities in WASH. It is estimated that around 10% of the rural water supply infrastructure built nationwide has been delivered through this approach. The schemes developed supply services to over 6 million people at households, schools and health facilities.

Over the past 25 years, Finland has been a long-term development partner of Ethiopia. Together the Finnish and Ethiopian governments have funded a series of projects to improve access to WASH services. Four major projects including RWSEP, FinnWASH-BG and COWASH (see Box 1 for key details about each project) were implemented with a degree of continuity which

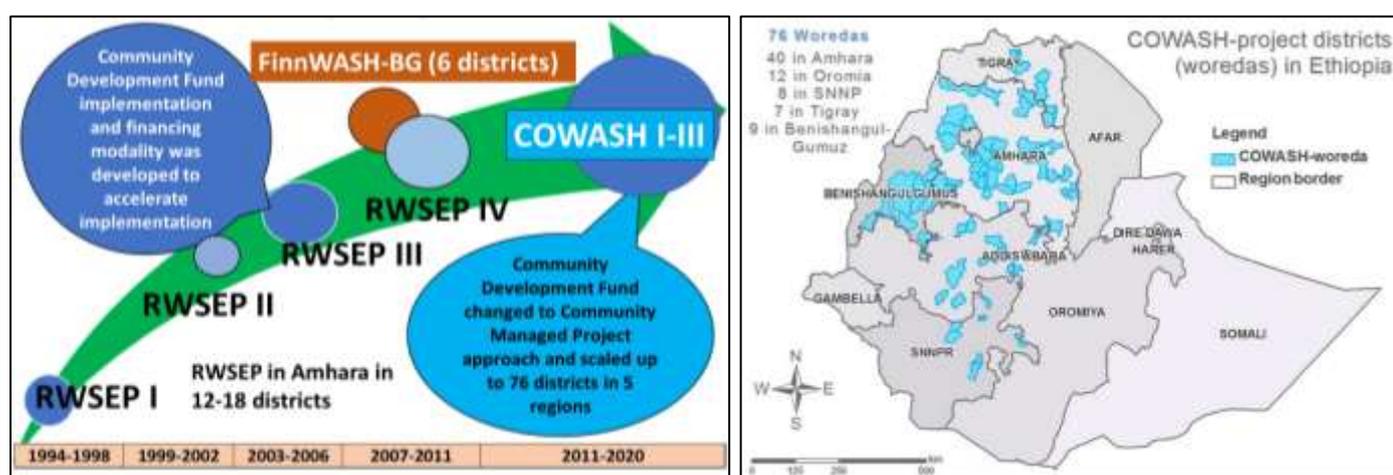


Figure: Evolution of Finland-Ethiopia bilateral WASH projects, 1994-2019.

COWASH woredas

has led to both the emergence of key innovations – better ways of doing WASH – and later, the widespread scaling of those innovations. This is evolution: making changes over time to address challenge and to achieve better results. The long-term partnership has also enabled systems and capacities to be built at all levels from communities to woredas, regions and at the federal level. Hosting and leadership of the projects by the Ethiopian government – with regional governments now contributing most of the financing – has facilitated scaling of impacts.

How did it all begin?

In 1991, after the fall of the Derg, Ethiopia was recovering from a long civil war. The interim Ethiopian government at that time requested the government of Finland to support the development of rural water supplies and address environment degradation. RWSEP was born in 1994 and was actually the first development project in the Amhara region. Finnconsult Oy (later Ramboll Finland Oy) was selected to provide technical support for the implementation of the project. A first phase in 12 districts started in 1995 and ran until the end of June 1998. There were no water and environment offices at the district level so implementation was led by district agriculture offices. Participation of communities in planning and implementation, and the empowerment of women were emphasised, and the project became highly appreciated by local communities due to its participatory bottom up approach.

Box 1: A family of four Finland-Ethiopia projects

1994-2011: Rural Water Supply and Environmental Programme (RWSEP) implemented through four phases in Amhara region (12-18 districts).

2009-2015: FinnWASH-BG project in Benishangul Gumuz region (5 districts)

2011-2020: Community-Led Accelerated WASH (COWASH) project implemented in five regions of Ethiopia (76 districts) in three phases

2017-2024: Support to One WASH National Programme - Consolidated WASH Account (OWNP-CWA)

The first phase of RWSEP (1994-98) had five themes all related to sustainability: institutional, financial, social, technical and environmental sustainability. The project's participatory and multi-sectoral approach - seeking efficiency and sustainability – was new for the country where projects normally focused on one sector i.e. water only. The approach was widely tested in the Amhara region and eventually became the starting point for the planning and implementation of the national WASH project (COWASH) in 2011. RWSEP I started to train local artisans/contractors who were labour-contracted by the Woreda Agriculture Office to support the communities in construction



In its second phase (1998-2002) RWSEP expanded to 18 districts. It focused on building capacity of the districts while, at the same time, following the principles of empowering and ensuring the participation of the communities that were established in the first phase. Local artisans/contractors were used in Phase II as established in Phase I. Despite hard work, implementation was too slow to keep up with the 3% population growth. Bottlenecks included inefficient government procedures that had to be followed, high turnover in project staffing at the regional level and poor capacity of local contractors.

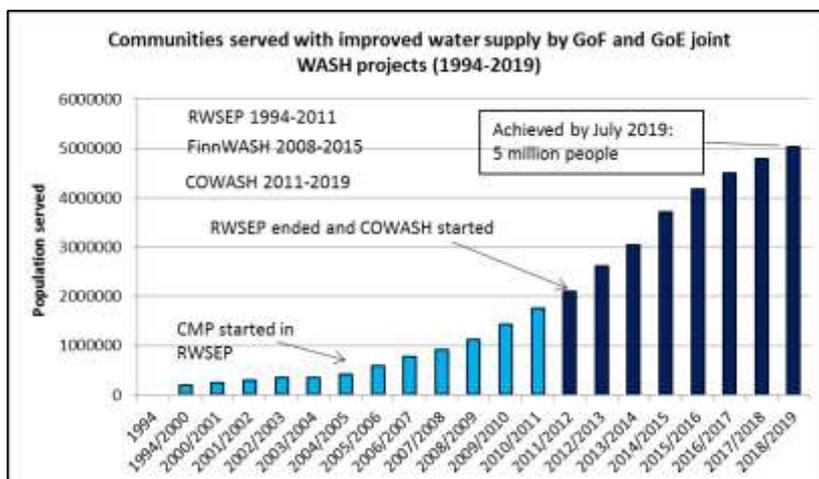
The third phase of the RWSEP project (2003-2007) tackled this problem by taking the new nationally

endorsed decentralisation principle down to the community level. An innovative financial mechanism was devised to route funds to the communities in the 12 focus districts. Six districts were cut-off due to overlapping with another project. This is how the Community Development Fund (later the Community Managed Project) approach was born. The implementation of CDF was helped by the previous multi-sector, participatory approach, private sector development and strong communications. During this phase, the establishment and capacity building of water offices in all districts was also supported and funded by the project.



The CDF approach and its modality of directly funding the communities changed the role of government in developing water supply schemes. This shifted to providing strategic support rather than being just an implementer, while communities took the role of leadership and responsibility for practical implementation. Instead of the normal meagre participation in water scheme development, communities' potential was built to do practical construction, financial management and maintenance works. The channelling of the funds to communities through microfinance institutions (MFIs) was a key innovation. MFIs have better outreach than banks in the rural areas and were easily accessible. The approach worked very well and communities eagerly took up their new responsibilities. The local artisans/contractors were now contracted by the community instead of the Woreda water office.

RWSEPs fourth phase from 2007-2011 involved 12 same as in Phase III and 2 new districts and focusing on improving the CDF model. The rate of water scheme development increased five folds than it was before. Finally, the project started addressing the real needs of the community and country at scale. The newly established water offices were further strengthened and more of the responsibilities for project management and capacity building of the communities was handed over to the districts by the project. It was clear at this time that the regions had a strong interest to expand and fund this type of project implementation.



Scaling through a national WASH project

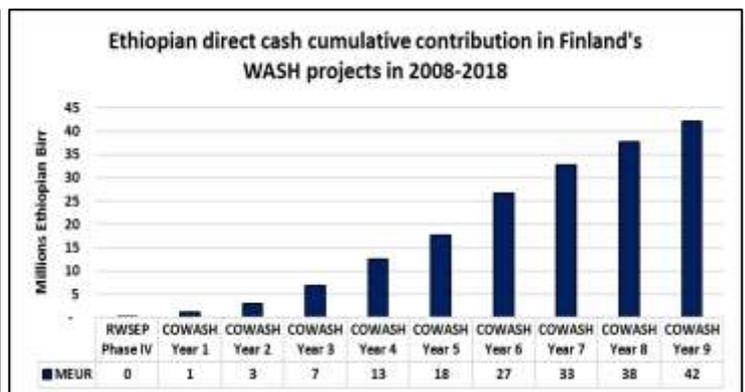
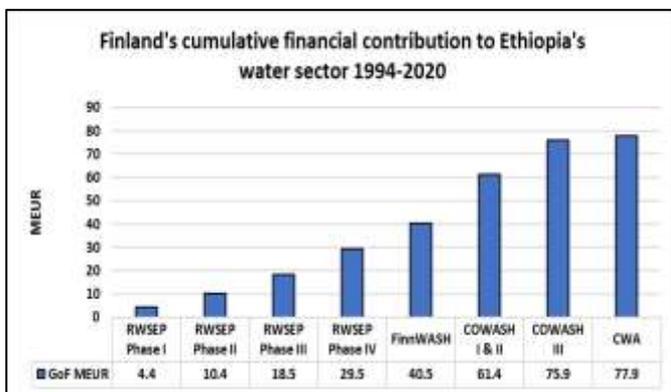
In 2010, the Ministries of Finance and Economic Development and the then Ministry of Water Resources - currently Ministry of Water, Irrigation and Energy - evaluated the CDF approach. A second evaluation was conducted by the Water and Sanitation Program of the World Bank. Both evaluations came to similar positive conclusions and based on the recommendations, a national project called Community-led Accelerated WASH (COWASH) Project was designed. COWASH started in July 2011 and runs until June 2020.

COWASH targeted 76 districts in five regions, covering approximately 10% of rural Ethiopia. Building on the earlier projects in Amhara and the interest developed, funds for construction were committed from regional governments (approx. 60% from the total grant funding including the Federal level support). These are transferred directly to communities through MFIs. The Finnish funding (approx. 40%) is channelled through the regions to the districts and is mainly used for capacity building of the districts and the communities.

The increased regional government investment, and the expansion to new regions enabled further rapid growth in the numbers of people reached with water supplies through the CMP approach. By 2019, the projects had improved rural water supplies for a 5 million rural people. As well as improving community water supplies, the CMP approach has also been adapted to use the same principles to develop water supplies for 1,157 schools and 314 health facilities. Improved latrines have also been constructed in many of these schools (449) and health facilities (296). An estimated 1 million students, teachers and administration staff, health facility staff are reached with these institutional facilities.

Together the water schemes created have substantially contributed to Ethiopia's achievement of the 2015 Millennium Development Goal target in water supply. Between 1990 and 2015, access to improved water supplies was extended nationally to about 40 million people in rural areas. Out of this total, the Finnish-Ethiopia projects reached 4 million or about 10% of the total. By 2019 the bi-lateral cooperation has benefited cumulative sum of 6 million rural people including institutional beneficiaries.

Since 1994, Finland's has invested 78.5 million Euros while the Ethiopian government has invested was 42 million Euros (1.1 billion Birr). Over time the Ethiopian share has risen, and now at regional level, the government contributes 70% of COWASH budget. This is a unique feature of the project and CMP approach that no other bilateral or civil society organization project matches.



It is recognised that much of the access provided through the CMP approach has been to low-cost technologies such as springs or hand dug wells and boreholes with handpumps. The limits of such technologies, which provide a relatively low level of service, (and don't fully match the ambitions of the new Sustainable Development Goals), and the limits of the community management model to keep schemes running has challenged COWASH. True to its roots as a project concerned about sustainability, COWASH has been innovating further to address these issues.

Beyond the direct support COWASH has worked with the MoWIE to develop a national Operation and Maintenance strategy for rural water supply supported by technical manuals and related training materials for all types of schemes. Approaches to establish WASH enterprises which include rural water maintenance and spare parts selling as well as other areas of WASH business such as sanitation marketing have been tested. The project has successfully tested the CMP approach for higher level technologies such as gravity fed rural piped schemes. In pumped water schemes some parts of the implementation (drilling and pipe and pump installations) has been taken care of by the region or by the woreda according to the level of the technology.



COWASH has also been influential through championing initiatives such as the inclusion of persons with disabilities in WASH, women's empowerment, and pioneering water safety planning and climate resilient WASH programming. In these areas, COWASH has continued to innovate and test ideas in districts, while working with regional and national government to scale up better ways of doing WASH. COWASH has led national efforts to promote disability-inclusive water schemes and institutional sanitation. A Water Safety Planning strategy, implementation guideline and related training materials (national) were developed together with the WHO and the Ministry of Water, Irrigation and Energy. And Social, Environmental and Climate Change Risk Screening and Management in water supply planning, operation and maintenance, and related training materials and training has been provided in the 5 COWASH regions, and trainings have been cascaded down to the woreda level.

As well as constantly looking for improvement and championing innovation, COWASH has sought to be a good partner supporting a wide range of efforts by the national government and the wider WASH sector. Through these partnerships and activities, the role of COWASH has been influential. The voice of the project has also been supported through increased investments during COWASH in communications and knowledge management. Networks across the five regions engage the media and regional WASH stakeholders, and the www.cmpethiopia.org website is widely visited by WASH sector actors. COWASH has also supported the sector through Joint Technical Reviews and Multi-Stakeholder Forums, World Water Days, World Women Days, Ethiopian Water and Energy Week, and international events like the Stockholm World Water Week.

What have we learned in 25 years, and what are the next steps?

As well as extending access to over 6 million people, the Finnish-Ethiopian projects offer some wider insights for development programming. A key ingredient for ultimate success has been long-term support by the government of Finland with multiple projects and phases being carefully designed to ensure continuity and improvement. All the projects have been innovative and have pushed boundaries about what a project should do. Being a project rooted in government has been critical for scaling, and has made financing by government possible.



There remain challenges. The CMP approach could be further mainstreamed. It is not part of Consolidated WASH Account programming under the OWP which remains focused on a region and woreda managed approach to develop water projects. And the country faces a potentially crippling maintenance debt with respect to rural water supply schemes. While much finance and interest is moving towards piped schemes and extending utility management into rural areas, these rural areas will mainly depend on lower level technologies like most of those developed through these projects for decades

to come. Sanitation remains poor in all woredas with limited access to improved latrines and widespread open defecation.

Further Finnish support to WASH in Ethiopia is being planned. A new phase of COWASH is expected to start in July 2020 for a further four years with 18.4 Million Euros invested by the government of Finland, and a further 4 Million euros support to the second phase of the One WASH National Programme – Consolidated WASH Account. It is not certain exactly how these new projects will look but further evolution can be expected to address these challenges.

About COWASH

The Community-Led Accelerated Water, Hygiene and Sanitation Project, COWASH, is a bilateral project (2011-2020) between the governments of Finland and Ethiopia. The project combines capacity development, innovation and the delivery of new infrastructure at scale through the empowerment of communities and government. It works in 76 rural districts of Amhara, Tigray, Oromia, Benishangul-Gumuz and Southern Nations and Nationalities Peoples' regions to extend rural community and institutional WASH services through the Community Managed Project (CMP) approach. Activities are focused on achieving the rural WASH targets of the second Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP II). COWASH is led by the Ministry of Water, Irrigation and Energy and regional water bureaus, with technical assistance provided by Ramboll Finland Oy (lead consultant), Niras Ltd and IRC WASH. For more information, see www.cmpethiopia.org or follow us on FACEBOOK [@cmpethiopia](https://www.facebook.com/cmpethiopia)