SUSTAINING WASH INFRASTRACTURE THROUGH COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP

A Post-Project Study of the Disability-Inclusive WASHCOM (Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Committee) Approach in the BMZ-TDA-Funded NOCTRAiN Project in Plateau State, Nigeria

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Content

List of Abbreviations

ACRESAL	Agro-Climatic Resilience in Semi-Arid Landscapes
BMZ	German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development
BMZ- TDA	BMZ Transitional Development Aid
CBM	Christian Blind Mission
CDC	Community Development Committee
LGA	Local Government Area
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NoCTRAiN	North Central Transitional Aid in Nigeria
RUWASSA	Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Agency
TASTE	Transfer of Appropriate Sustainable Technology & Expertise
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
WASHCOM	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Committee

Community latrine with an accessible ramp, improving safe and inclusive WASH. ©CBM

Abstract

This report offers a qualitative, field-based study of how Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene Committees (WASHCOMs) established under the BMZ-TDA funded North Central Transitional Aid in Nigeria (NoCTRAiN) project have functioned following the project closure in 2023 in twelve communities across five (5) Local Government Areas (LGAs – Barkin-Ladi, Bassa, Bokkos, Mangu, and Riyom) of Plateau State, Nigeria. Drawing exclusively on post project data gathered in these communities, the report examines the extent to which the committees have sustained their activities, the types of roles they continue to play, and the factors that influenced their performance over time.

The findings revealed significant differences in how the WASHCOMs have evolved over time. In several communities, the committees remain active and continue to oversee the maintenance of water points, promote hygiene practices, and mobilise community members to participate in Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) activities or contribute funds towards the repairs of the waterpoints. However, in other communities, the WASHCOMs have become partially functional or have collapsed entirely due to challenges such as conflict, weak leadership, financial constraints, or unmet expectations around compensations.

Where WASHCOMs have continued to thrive, their sustainability is closely linked to committed and trusted leadership, a shared sense of community responsibility and ownership, visible improvements in household wellbeing such as reduction in water related illnesses, and supportive relationships with local government structures or non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Conversely, when these elements are missing, committee functionality tends to decline.

The report concludes with tailored recommendations aimed at strengthening the long-term effectiveness of community-based WASH governance systems and enhancing the resilience of WASHCOMs beyond the lifespan of donor-supported interventions.

1 Introduction and Background

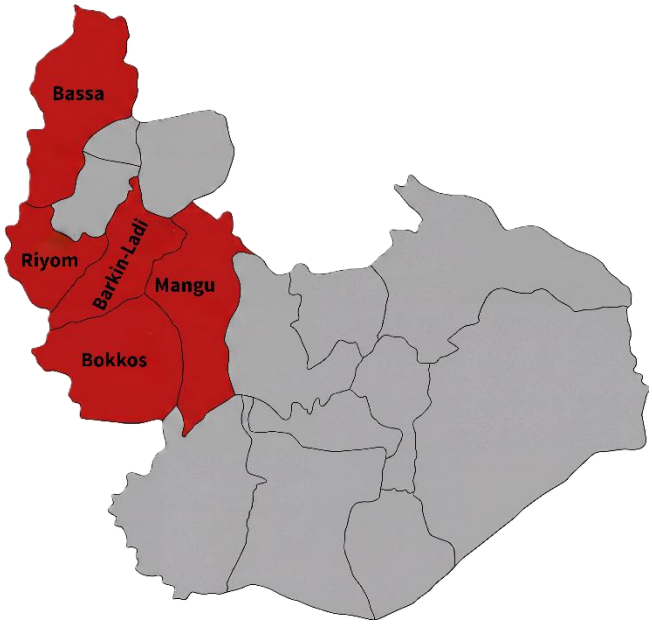
Community-based management of water and sanitation services has long been recognised as a critical strategy for sustaining rural WASH infrastructure. In many low-resource settings, Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene Committees (WASHCOMs) serve as the primary governance structures responsible for keeping water points operational, managing sanitation facilities, and promoting essential hygiene practices. Their role becomes even more essential in communities affected by disasters or conflicts, and in contexts where government services are limited, inconsistent, or unable to adequately meet growing WASH needs.

Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Committee (WASHCOM) is a community-led group responsible for the day-to-day management of WASH facilities. It plays a key role in encouraging good hygiene practices, maintaining shared facilities, and promoting transparency and long-term sustainability within the community. A disability inclusive WASHCOM actively includes persons with disabilities as members, decision makers, and leaders. By doing so, it ensures that community WASH decisions reflect the diverse needs, experiences, and rights of all members of the community.

The BMZ-TDA funded NoCTRAiN project, implemented across several local government areas in Plateau State, Nigeria, invested significantly in the formation, training and equipping of WASHCOMs. The project was designed with the expectation that, once the project ended, these committees would assume full responsibility for managing and sustaining the water and sanitation systems provided through the intervention.

However, WASHCOMs operate in a complex and often challenging environment. Rural WASH systems in Plateau State face chronic issues including low public investment, periodic communal conflict, population displacement, and difficulties accessing spare parts for borehole repair. Households also experience widespread poverty, which limits their ability to contribute financially to routine maintenance of the water points.

Despite these constraints, communities in the state maintain strong traditions of collective leadership, mutual support, and voluntary service; traditions that enabled the establishment and functioning of WASHCOMs under the project. Each WASHCOM typically comprises between 10 to 15 members including men, women and persons with disabilities ensuring inclusive representation and shared responsibilities for managing water and sanitation systems in the community where it is located. Depending on the community population size, WASHCOMs in the NoCTRAiN project communities cover an average of approximately 100 households.



Understanding what happened to these committees after donor support ended in 2023 is vital for designing future rural WASH programmes. This report explores the experiences of twelve communities across Five Local Government Areas (LGAs) of Barkin-Ladi, Bassa, Bokkos, Mangu, and Riyom. The communities included in the study are Luwe, Pillar, Dorowa Babuje, Kuba, Maikatako, Tenti, Heipang, Binchi, Miango, Sopp, Gongpang, and Gashet. Each community offers a distinct perspective on the opportunities and obstacles influencing community-managed WASH systems, providing valuable insights into the conditions that support or undermine long-term sustainability.

The analysis provides an in-depth examination of the structure, activities, challenges, motivations, and current functionality of the WASHCOMs across these communities. Together, these findings offer practical lessons about factors that supports long-term sustainability, as well as conditions that place community-based WASH systems at risk after project closure.

1.1 Methodology

This report is based entirely on qualitative data collected through community interviews, field observations, and structured questionnaires administered to WASHCOM members. The dataset consists solely of narrative responses that capture committee members' experiences, perceptions, and practices following the conclusion of the NoCTRAiN project.

A qualitative content analysis approach guided the interpretation of the data. The analysis began with multiple close readings of all responses to develop an overall understanding of recurring ideas, challenges, and perspectives across the communities. These initial impressions were then coded into thematic categories including:

1. WASHCOM functionality
2. Current activities of the WASHCOM
3. Meeting frequency
4. Sustainability drivers
5. Resource mobilisation practices
6. External support
7. Motivations for sustained volunteer engagement
8. Operational challenges
9. Recommendations/Request for support

Through an iterative process, these codes were refined, expanded, merged, and reorganised into broader themes that form the analytical backbone of the report.

The findings were subsequently synthesised into a narrative that reflects the lived realities of WASHCOM members and the practical challenges of managing water and sanitation services in rural, resource constrained, and unstable environments. No external theories, literature, or secondary data sources were used; all findings presented in this report are drawn directly from the field collected qualitative data.

1.2 Limitations of the Study

1. **Limited sample size (12 communities across 5 LGAs):** The findings are based on data from only twelve communities, which limits the extent to which the results can be generalised to all WASHCOMs across other states or Nigeria as a whole.
2. **Self-reported narratives:** The study relies heavily on self-reported accounts from the WASHCOM members, which may introduce recall bias or social desirability bias, potentially influencing the accuracy of the reported experiences.

2 Key Findings on WASHCOM Functionality

2.1 Functionality of WASHCOMs

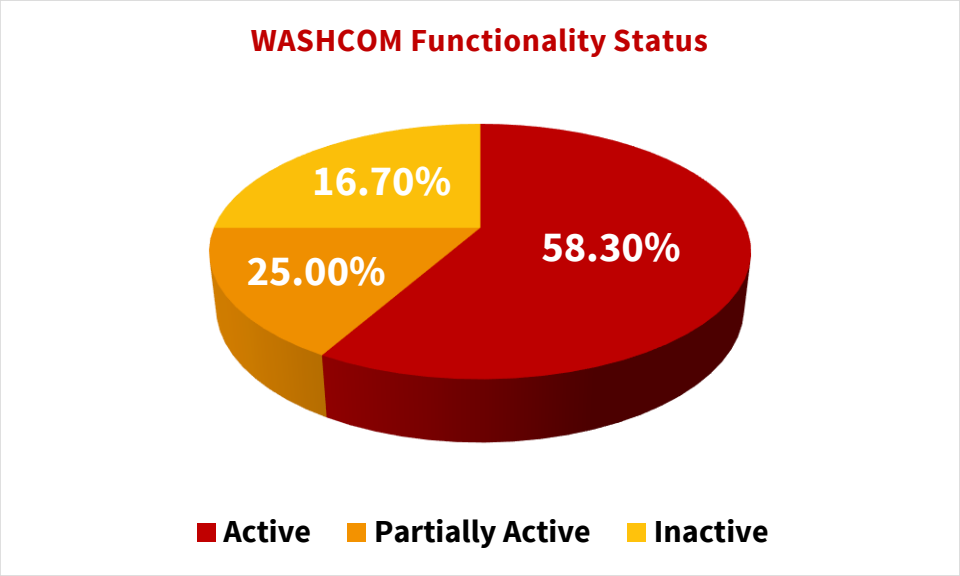
WASHCOM functionality varied widely across the twelve communities covered in this assessment. Several communities maintained highly active committees that continued to carry out their responsibilities with notable enthusiasm and commitment. In Pillar, Miango, Gokpang and Heipang, for example, the WASHCOMs were described as very active, with members holding regular meetings, conducting hygiene awareness activities, and responding promptly to repair needs. In Heipang, all thirteen committee members remained fully engaged long after the project ended, indicating strong community ownership and sustained motivation.

In contrast, communities such as Luwe, Tenti, Maikatako, and Dorowa Babuje exhibited only partial WASHCOM activity. While these committees still undertook repairs or hygiene related tasks, when necessary, they lacked the consistent engagement seen in the more active communities. Reduced functionality in these locations was often linked to factors such as the relocation of key members, weak or absent leadership, and a gradual decline in interest.

Gashet community emerged as the most striking example of a largely inactive WASHCOM. Conflict and displacement had significantly disrupted the social fabric of the community, leading many committee members to flee to safer areas. Those who remained were unable to keep the committee operational due to a combination of damaged infrastructure, including a non-functional water point, strained community relationships, and limited

financial capacity. The interplay of insecurity, population displacement, and high repair costs resulted in an almost complete collapse of WASHCOM operations in this community.

2.2 Functionality Status and Reasons



The above chart shows that majority (58.3%) of the WASHCOMs remain functional several years after the NoCTRAiN project ended. An additional 25% are partially functional, while only 16% are completely non-functional.

The active committees continue to carry out essential responsibilities such as repairing water points, regulating borehole usage, mobilising community contributions, and conducting hygiene promotion activities.

2.3 Reasons Why WASHCOMs Are Active

Reason	Description
1. Demonstrated Community Health Improvements	Respondents reported notable reduction in cases of diarrhoea, typhoid, dysentery, and malaria following the project intervention. These improvements in household wellbeing strengthened members' motivation to remain active, as communities could clearly see evidence that their efforts were directly contributing to healthier families. Some respondents even reported a drastic decline in annual deaths compared to pre-project years. These health gains have helped establish WASHCOMs as trusted, community-based institution that play an essential role in promoting and safeguarding public health. In Gongpang, for example, WASHCOM members reported a dramatic reduction in WASH related diseases and mortality from an estimated 7 to 10 deaths per year before the intervention to almost none afterward. This visible improvement further reinforced the community's confidence in the WASHCOM and the value of sustaining its activities.

2. Strong Leadership and High Commitment	The functional WASHCOMs were characterised by committed leaders and cohesive team members. In some cases, all committee members remained actively engaged. For example, the WASHCOM in Heipang reported all 13 members fully participating. Leadership was particularly strong in communities where committees held regular monthly or quarterly meetings, maintained clearly defined roles and responsibilities, and ensured timely response to repair needs. This combination of strong leadership, shared commitment, and coordinated effort directly contributed to the continued functionality and effectiveness of these WASHCOMs.
3. Community Ownership and Trust	Communities where members trusted the WASHCOM and recognised its critical role in maintaining water points demonstrated higher levels of sustainability. In several communities, WASHCOMs were the only institutions residents relied on for WASH related matters, giving them moral authority and reinforcing their continued activity. This trust was strengthened by transparent practices, active community engagement, and regular sensitisation sessions, all of which helped build confidence in the committee's work and encouraged sustained community support. A clear example of this was seen in Kuba community, where community members rely exclusively on the WASHCOM for guidance on sanitation and water issues, reflecting the strong trust, legitimacy, and respect the committee has earned.
4. Continued Relevance of WASH Facilities	The functional WASHCOMs operate in communities where boreholes remain the primary source of water and, in many cases, the only safe alternative to rivers or streams. This reliance on boreholes creates a strong incentive for communities to keep their WASHCOM active, particularly in communities where population growth or seasonal water shortages place additional pressure on existing water points. The essential role of these boreholes reinforces community commitment to maintaining a well-functioning committee.
5. Supportive Linkages with Government and NGOs	Some of the functional WASHCOMs benefited from continued partnerships with local government WASH departments, RUWASSA, the Red Cross, and NGOs such as TASTE and ACRESAL. These collaborations provided additional training, water system upgrades, borehole rehabilitation, and broader capacity building support. Collectively, this assistance strengthened committee performance and improved their resilience over time.

2.4 Reasons Why WASHCOMs Are Partially Active

Partially active committees exhibited reduced participation and irregular meeting schedules, but they continued to mobilise when emergencies arose typically when a borehole malfunctioned.

Reason	Description
1. Member's Relocation and Displacement	In some communities, insecurity forced several WASHCOM members to flee, significantly reducing the active core of the committee. Those who remained lacked sufficient capacity to sustain full operations, resulting in reduced functionality.
2. Inconsistent Leadership	As seen in Dorowa-Babuje, committees in transition, where chairpersons stopped convening meetings or leadership interest declined, experienced a gradual reduction in activity. Leadership gaps remained one of the most critical factors contributing to partial functionality.
3. Reduced Morale and Lack of Follow-Up Support	Some of the communities without external technical or institutional support in some cases remained only partially active and struggled to sustain momentum. Without refresher training or periodic encouragement from external actors, these committees found it difficult to maintain consistent engagement or carry out more complex maintenance tasks.

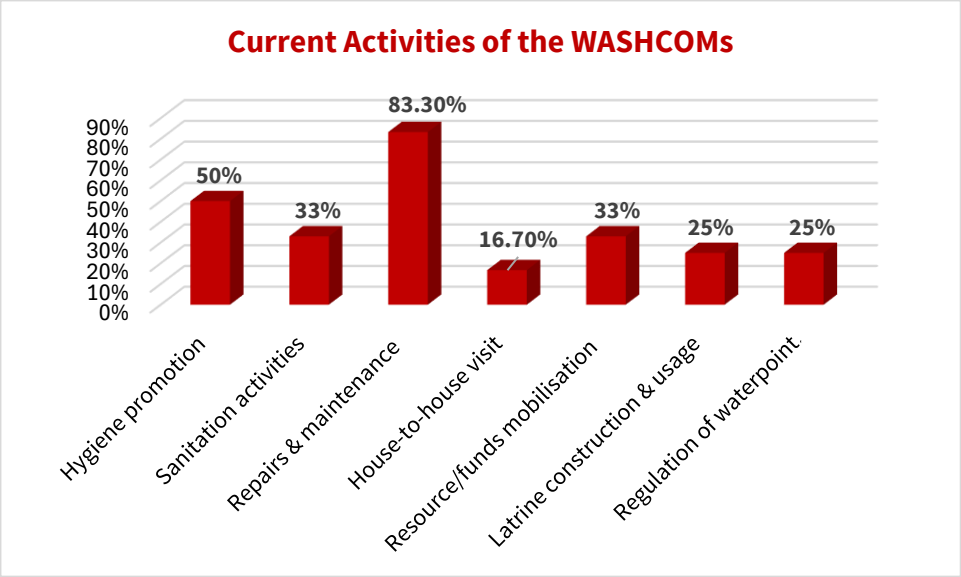
2.5 Reasons Why WASHCOMs Are Non-Functional

The fully inactive WASHCOMs (16.7%) displayed a distinct set of structural failures.

Reason	Description
1. Conflict and Displacement	Gashet community provides the clearest example of WASHCOM collapse. Conflict led to widespread displacement, destruction of facilities, and damage to key infrastructure, including broken overhead tanks. The community itself became fragmented (by the split between Gashet 1 and Gashet 2) which further weakened coordination. With many committee members living outside the community and the water systems severely damaged, the WASHCOM was unable to function and collapsed in the end.
2. Expectations of Financial Incentives	Some committees such as the one in Binchi community, became inactive due to unmet expectations of stipends or compensation for what was intended to be volunteer service. When these expectations were not fulfilled following the end of the project, member motivation and engagement declined, resulting in reduced participation and eventual committee inactivity.
3. Leadership Breakdown	The inactive committees frequently suffered from ineffective leadership as observed in Binchi community. In cases where leaders stopped convening meetings or failed to coordinate repairs, the committee structure deteriorated rapidly, leading to a decline in participation and eventual inactivity.
4. Lack of Capacity to Finance Major Repairs	The limited financial capacity of community members to support major repairs often undermines the efforts of WASHCOMs and can eventually lead to committee inactivity. Since repair and maintenance are core responsibilities of WASHCOMs, the lack of adequate resources to address breakdowns weakens their ability to

	coordinate and execute repairs. Over time, this constraint contributes to reduced functionality and, in cases like Gashet community, eventual committee collapse.
5. Weak Cohesion or Community Division	In communities with strained relationships or internal divisions, WASHCOM operations could not be sustained, leaving water systems unmanaged and further weakening community cohesion.

3 Current Activities of the WASHCOMs: Post-Project



As illustrated in the graph above, borehole maintenance and repair emerged as the most prominent and consistent activity carried out across the communities, with 83% of the WASHCOMs engaged in this function. WASHCOMs coordinated financial contributions from households, procured spare parts, and mobilised the technical skills of trained members to keep water points functional.

In Maitkatako community, the Community Development Committee funded repairs directly from its own resources. Some WASHCOMs (25%) also established rules for borehole use such as designated water collection times, and intervened when these rules were violated. These measures helped reduce misuse, manage queues, and prolong the lifespan of the facilities.

Beyond infrastructure maintenance, hygiene promotion emerged as another recurring responsibility of WASHCOMs with 50% of WASHCOMs actively engaged in this area. WASHCOM members conducted house-to-house visits, shared messages during church gatherings, and encouraged families to adopt improved hygiene behaviours. Their efforts typically focused on handwashing, consistent latrine use, maintaining clean surroundings, and proper waste disposal. In several communities, these activities became routine, and respondents noted that they had contributed to visible reductions in water related illnesses.

Several committees also played an important role in broader community mobilisation. In Sopp and Miango, for example, WASHCOMs organised quarterly awareness campaigns during community meetings. In other locations, WASHCOMs (25%) supported latrine construction and maintenance, supervised sanitation activities, and collaborated with schools or religious institutions to reinforce hygiene messages.

3.1 Meeting Frequency

Meeting frequency closely reflected the level of vitality within each WASHCOM. Active WASHCOMs tended to meet either monthly or quarterly, often blending formal discussions with informal check-ins. In Pillar, and Heipang communities, for example, members met every month and every quarter respectively to plan activities, review challenges, and address emerging issues. In communities like Miango and Gongpang, meetings occurred less regularly typically every two months or whenever a problem required collective action.

Where leadership was weak or membership had declined, meetings became infrequent and mostly reactive. In Luwe, for instance, the committee convened only when repairs were needed. Maikatako and Tenti reported similar patterns, with sporadic gatherings shaped largely by reduced commitment levels and the relocation of key members.

Gashet presented the most extreme case, where the committee hardly met at all. Ongoing conflict and displacement meant that many members no longer lived in the community, making coordination nearly impossible. Those who remained were discouraged by extensive infrastructure damage and the absence of external support, resulting in a near total breakdown of committee operations.

3.2 Sustainability Factors

Sustainability of WASHCOM activities was shaped by a combination of personal, social, and environmental factors. Personal commitment emerged as one of the strongest drivers of continued functionality. Many members described their service as a duty to protect community health. Several reflected on how the improved water systems had reduced cases of diarrhoea, malaria, dysentery, and childhood illnesses, benefits that strengthened their motivation to stay engaged.

Health improvements were frequently cited as powerful incentives. In Gongpang community, members reported a remarkable decline in annual deaths related to water-borne diseases, from and estimated seven to ten deaths per year prior to the WASH intervention to almost none afterward. Many households also experienced fewer water related illnesses, reinforcing community appreciation for the WASHCOM's contribution to wellbeing.

Community trust and cohesion also played a critical role in sustaining committee activities. Where WASHCOM members were viewed as transparent, competent, and genuinely committed, residents willingly provided financial support and actively participated in

WASH initiatives. By contrast, committees with leadership conflicts or low levels of trust struggled to maintain operations and often experienced declining participation.

The continued relevance of the boreholes served as a strong incentive for sustainability. In many communities, these boreholes remained the primary and, in some cases, the only, reliable source of clean water. With no effective alternatives available, community members were strongly motivated to keep their committees active to ensure the steady functioning of these essential water sources.

3.3 Resource Mobilization Practices

Communities used a variety of strategies to mobilise resources for borehole repairs and ongoing maintenance. These approaches included household levies, per-bucket or per-jerrycan fees, freewill donations, and annual contributions. While some communities established more structured and predictable fee collection systems, others relied on ad-hoc contributions, particularly during emergencies or major breakdowns.

In some cases, WASHCOM members trained in borehole repair offered their services to neighbouring communities and channelled the earnings back into their own committee's repair fund. This innovative approach helped sustain maintenance activities, especially in communities with limited financial resources or inconsistent contributions.

Where Community Development Committees (CDCs) were active and well organised such as in Maikatako community, they played a central role in fundraising and financial oversight of WASH facilities. Their involvement strengthened accountability and ensured a more reliable flow of resources for maintenance and repairs. In comparison, communities without functional CDCs often struggled to raise sufficient funds, particularly for high-cost repairs that exceeded what households could contribute on short notice. This gap underscored the importance of strong community-level governance structures in sustaining rural WASH systems.

However, in Binchi community, community members consistently refused to contribute funds to the WASHCOM, preferring to negotiate and fund repairs directly with commercial pump-mechanics outside of the WASHCOM.

3.4 External Support After Project Closure

Post project external support varied widely across the communities. Several WASHCOMs reported receiving no assistance from government agencies or NGOs after the NoCTRAiN project ended. This lack of continued support limited their ability to handle major repairs and contributed to declining motivation among committee members, especially when breakdowns required resources beyond what communities could mobilise on their own.

Where external support was available, however, it made a meaningful difference. In some communities, local government WASH departments partnered with WASHCOMs to

promote sanitation and even construct new boreholes. Organisations/agencies such as TASTE, the Nigerian Red Cross, RUWASSA, and ACRESAL provided technical training, repair assistance, and infrastructure improvements that strengthened committee capacity and helped stabilise WASH services.

The presence or absence of such support emerged as a possible determinant of sustainability. Communities facing high-cost repairs or complex technical issues were especially dependent on outside assistance, and without it, WASHCOM functionality often struggled to survive.

3.5 Motivational Drivers for Continued Engagement by Members Post Project

The motivation to serve on WASHCOMs was deeply rooted in both personal and collective benefits. Members consistently identified the reduction in disease burden as their primary reason for staying committed. They expressed pride in contributing to improved community health, noting that their volunteer efforts had led to tangible improvements in household wellbeing.

Beyond health outcomes, many members highlighted personal growth as a significant source of motivation. They valued the skills they gained through training, the increased knowledge of water and hygiene management, and the experience of taking on leadership roles within their communities. For some, serving on the WASHCOM also strengthened their sense of civic responsibility and deepened their connection to community development.

In communities where the WASHCOM was visibly appreciated and recognised by residents, this social acknowledgment further reinforced members' commitment. Public appreciation from simple expressions of gratitude to recognition during community meetings helped validate their volunteer efforts and strengthened their sense of purpose.

4 Key Challenges Faced by WASHCOMs

Despite notable successes, WASHCOMs faced a range of serious challenges that affected their ability to function effectively.

1. Technical challenges were among the most widespread. Committees struggled with the high cost of spare parts, limited availability of replacement materials within the community, and frequent breakdowns particularly during periods of heavy use such as the dry season. Solar powered systems posed even greater difficulties, because they required specialised repairs and costly components that were often inaccessible to rural communities.
2. Social challenges also undermined WASHCOM operations. The relocation of members due to conflict or insecurity left some committees understaffed and weakened institutional memory. In some communities, declining youth interest in

voluntary service, leadership disputes, and internal divisions disrupted committee cohesion and reduced overall effectiveness.

3. Economic challenges were deeply rooted in widespread poverty. Many households lacked the financial capacity to contribute to maintenance funds, especially when major repairs were needed. In some cases, community members resisted contributing altogether, expecting WASHCOMs or external actors to cover repair costs. This dynamic placed considerable strain on committee operations and delayed essential repairs.
4. Security challenges were particularly severe in conflict affected areas. In these communities, ongoing violence and displacement hampered committee meetings, disrupted coordination, and fractured social relationships. The resulting instability made it difficult for WASHCOMs to carry out even basic activities, contributing to sharp declines in functionality.

4.1 Required Support Identified by Respondents

Respondents identified several interventions that could help strengthen or revive their WASHCOMs.

1. A common request was a refresher training, both to reinforce technical repair skills and to strengthen committee management and leadership capacity. Many respondents noted that over time, technical knowledge had faded or members had relocated, making renewed training essential for effective operations.
2. Many Respondents expressed the need for greater transparency and accountability in the selection of WASHCOM members. They recommended that only committed, trusted, and community minded individuals should be chosen to serve, as strong leadership and genuine dedication were viewed as essential for long-term committee sustainability.
3. Additional recommendations included the provision of tools and spare parts to reduce delays during breakdowns, as well as the construction of additional boreholes to ease pressure on existing water points especially during dry seasons. Overuse of single boreholes was a common issue, and respondents believed that expanding water access would reduce conflicts and maintenance strain.
4. Strengthening linkages with government institutions was also considered important. Respondents felt that formal connections with local authorities would enhance advocacy, improve accountability, and increase their access to technical and financial support.
5. Respondents also emphasised the need for financial support, particularly for high-cost repairs such as replacing overhead tanks or fixing solar powered systems. These repairs often exceeded what households could afford, leaving committees unable to keep critical infrastructure functional.

5 Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of this assessment show that the sustainability of WASH Committees (WASHCOMs) after project closure depends on a combination of factors. These include the quality of local leadership, the level of community engagement, access to basic technical and financial capacity, and the presence or absence of continued external support. When these elements come together, WASHCOMs are far more likely to endure beyond the lifespan of donor funding.

Encouragingly, three quarter (75%) of the WASHCOMs established under the NoCTRAiN project remain functional. This reflects a strong sense of community ownership and resilience that has persisted well beyond the period of direct project involvement. In many locations, communities did not view WASHCOMs as externally imposed structures, but as their own institutions with a clear purpose.

Where WASHCOMs have remained effective, trusted and accountable leadership has been a defining feature. Leaders who were transparent, committed, and responsive to community concerns helped sustain regular meetings, mobilise local resources, and organise timely repairs. In these communities, governance structures did not fade after project closure. Instead, they continued to function as legitimate and valued platforms for collective action.

Improved health outcomes also played a crucial role in sustaining these efforts. In communities that experienced noticeable reductions in water related diseases, households were more willing to support WASHCOM activities financially and practically. Seeing fewer children fall ill, or spending less on treatment, reinforced the value of safe water and strengthened collective responsibility for maintaining it. These tangible benefits helped keep communities engaged over time.

At the same time, sustainability was not uniform across all twelve communities. The presence of partially functional or non-functional WASHCOMs highlights how fragile community-based governance systems can be, particularly when donor support ends without a clear transition plan. Leadership disputes, internal tensions, limited financial resources, population displacement, and insecurity all undermined committee effectiveness in certain locations. The case of Gashet community, where insecurity and social fragmentation led to the collapse of the WASHCOM, illustrates how quickly essential water services can be put at risk in unstable contexts.

These challenges were further intensified by the lack of structured post-project support from government institutions. Communities that continued to receive even minimal external engagement such as occasional technical advice, refresher training, collaboration for WASH related activities, or assistance with major repairs showed stronger sustainability and greater resilience. This finding highlights the importance of some level of post-project

engagement by local organisations to help consolidate gains, reinforce local capacity, and prevent the gradual erosion of systems that communities have worked hard to establish.

Notably, even in areas where WASHCOMs were only partially functional or formally inactive, most communities continued to access clean drinking water. This suggests that the skills, norms, and shared understanding introduced through the WASHCOM approach continue to influence behaviour beyond active WASHCOM operations. Where communities clearly connected WASHCOM activities to better health outcomes, they remained motivated to contribute resources, support maintenance, and uphold improved hygiene practices.

Overall, the findings affirm the effectiveness of the inclusive WASHCOM model in promoting long-term water point sustainability while strengthening local leadership and governance. The approach offers strong potential for scale-up, particularly in humanitarian and fragile settings where water infrastructure is frequently disrupted by conflict, displacement, disasters, or limited state capacity. By prioritising community ownership and investing in both technical and leadership capacity, WASHCOMs reduce reliance on external actors and play a meaningful role in sustaining essential water services long after projects come to an end.

6 Recommendations

1. Implementing organisations such as CBM and its partners should strengthen their selection processes for WASHCOM members by prioritising individuals who demonstrate genuine commitment to community service and collective responsibility.
2. Expanding training programmes to include a larger pool of community-based artisans or interested WASHCOM members will broaden local technical capacity and ensure continuity when committee members relocate or become inactive. Organisations, particularly community-based organisations should also ensure that WASHCOMs have consistent access to essential tools and equipment and provide ongoing mentorship or follow-up support (where feasible) to sustain committee performance.
3. As part of transition planning, implementing organisations should facilitate the formalisation of collaboration between local government WASH departments and WASHCOMs by establishing structured mechanisms for technical assistance, capacity building, and spare-parts supply. Creating clearer lines of communication and accountability will strengthen reporting systems and ensure that communities can reliably access government support when faced with complex technical challenges.
4. Communities themselves should be supported to promote transparency in WASHCOM operations, encourage inclusive decision making, and uphold strong norms of community ownership. They should understand that sustainable WASH

governance depends not only on external support but also on the internal cohesion, trust, and long-term commitment of community members.

5. To enhance long-term sustainability, local humanitarian and development organisations as well as local government authorities should consider adopting extended engagement frameworks that go beyond the traditional project cycle. Continued support during the post-project period is essential, particularly in the first one to two years when committees are still consolidating their systems and developing confidence in their roles. This support may include periodic refresher training, routine monitoring visits, and the provision of essential spare parts or subsidies for major repairs.

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