



WASH System Building Blocks in Rwanda: From Assessment to Action

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Executive Summary

This case study highlights how the Building Blocks Assessment (BBA), conducted annually between 2022 and 2024, has become a cornerstone tool for strengthening Rwanda's water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) sector, providing evidence-based insights that informed national policies, sector coordination, and investment strategies while guiding targeted interventions to address the sector's weakest areas.

The findings show steady improvement, with the overall building block score increasing from 3.4 in 2022 to 4.0 in 2025, signaling a more resilient and better-coordinated WASH system. Harmonized policies, improved planning, and consistent regulation have strengthened governance, yet challenges remain. A stronger legal framework, enhanced monitoring at the sub-district level, and additional financing, particularly for sanitation, are needed to sustain progress. Efforts to ensure that no one is left behind have progressed through dedicated budgets and monitoring; however, further capacity building remains necessary.

The case study recommends consolidating policy and legal reforms, enhancing financial efficiency, mobilizing additional resources, upgrading monitoring systems, and promoting behavioral change in hygiene and sanitation. These actions provide a clear pathway towards achieving universal, sustainable WASH services by 2030.

Context

The Isoko y'Ubuzima¹ project is a five-year intervention (2021-2026) funded by the U.S. government to expand access to safe, sustainable drinking water and sanitation services in Rwanda. It is implemented by a consortium led by Water For People in partnership with IRC, Vitens Evides International (VEI), CARE International, and African Evangelistic Enterprise (AEE).

The Government of Rwanda's (GoR) commitment to water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) is a core component of its economic development, as outlined in the Second National Strategy for Transformation (NST2). The country has made significant progress, with national access to improved drinking water sources reaching 90% in 2023/24, from 87% in 2016/17. Similarly, access to improved sanitation facilities has increased from 86% to 94% over the same period, according to the EICV 7 thematic report on utilities and amenities for the 2023/24 fiscal year. While these gains are notable, a significant disparity remains, with urban areas enjoying better access (97% for water) than rural areas (87%)².

Rwanda is focused on increasing water production and ensuring that every village has water for both household and productive uses. This involves a strategic approach to maintaining, repairing, and expanding water infrastructure, including the construction of new treatment facilities that will nearly double daily water production capacity. However, challenges remain. Despite an increased government budget for WASH, it is insufficient to meet demand and sustain services. There is a need to attract and mobilize additional funds in the sector through private sector investment in WASH and other emerging sources of funding for WASH projects. To address these challenges, the Isoko y'Ubuzima project supported the government in conducting a WASH Performance Review for 2023/24, which led to the development of the WASH Multi-Year Action Plan for 2024-2029. This plan outlines detailed, costed activities across all nine WASH system building blocks, providing a roadmap for strengthening the system and outlining commitments from WASH partners to support these efforts.

¹ *Isoko y'Ubuzima* (Kinyarwanda for "Source of Life")

² [Water & Sanitation | National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda](#)

WASH System



Figure 1. The Nine Building Blocks of Strong WASH Systems analyzed in Rwanda

The WASH System Building Blocks Methodology

Building blocks are broad lenses through which to analyse a WASH system and are closely aligned with the main functions in the WASH sector. IRC uses nine building blocks when carrying out WASH sector assessments (based on Huston and Moriarty, 2019): policy and legislation, planning, institutions, finance, monitoring, water resources management, learning, and adaptation.

The evaluation of the building blocks combined qualitative analysis and quantitative scoring, using a traffic-light-type system. The qualitative assessment revolves around five statements, representing fundamental elements of an ideal scenario for each building block. This analysis gauges the degree to which the actual situation aligns with the ideal.

After the qualitative assessment, each statement is scored on a scale of 1 to 5. A score of 1 reflects a significant gap between the current sector situation and the ideal, whereas a score of 5 indicates that all elements of the ideal situation are in place. The scores are then averaged to obtain a single score for each building block.

In March 2019, the WATSAN Sector Analysis Workshop identified crucial building blocks through collaborative consultations, guiding the government and its partners to prioritize actions for the National Strategy Transformation (NST1) WASH targets. The subsequent June 2019 workshop by the WATSAN Sector Working Group generated a comprehensive Sector Analysis Report. Recognizing challenges, a consultant reviewed the June 2019 report on September 21, 2021, recommending a more in-depth WASH sector assessment³ via building blocks to gain a clearer picture of the WASH sector in Rwanda.

This detailed assessment was captured in the Rwanda WASH Sector Performance Review Report, incorporating insights from the building blocks assessment and other planning documents. Serving as a key input, this report informed a WASH sector analysis workshop organized by the Ministry of Infrastructure (MININFRA) in May 2022, which was supported by the Isoko y'Ubuzima Project and UNICEF. The workshop aimed to formulate a revised multi-year action plan (2022-2024) and propose medium- to long-term plans for the WASH sector.

The building block assessment was repeated in 2023 and 2024 with a core group of stakeholders who also participated in 2022. They are representatives from MININFRA, the Water and Sanitation Corporation (WASAC), WASH partners, the Local Administrative Entities Development Agency, the Rwanda Environment Management Authority, and the National Council of Persons with Disabilities.

Key findings from 2022 to 2024

The Building Blocks assessment indicates evident progress in strengthening Rwanda's WASH system over the past three years. The overall score increased from **3.4 (2022)** to **3.8 (2023)** and reached **4.0 (2024)**, placing the system firmly within the green performance range. The table below highlights the comparative scoring of the WASH sector for 2022, 2023, and 2024 using the building blocks assessment tool⁴. While the standard Building Blocks Assessment framework comprises nine building blocks, including Infrastructure, the Rwanda assessments disaggregated this building block into two distinct components—Infrastructure Development and Infrastructure Management. This distinction was made to better capture both the progress in expanding and rehabilitating WASH infrastructure and the performance of systems related to operation, maintenance, and service delivery over time.

In this brief, the discussion following the table focuses on selected building blocks that were most prominently addressed in the WASH Sector Performance Review reports and sector reflection processes between 2022 and 2024. The purpose is to highlight key areas of progress, persistent challenges, and priority actions identified over time, rather than to provide a detailed interpretation of all building block scores. Full scoring criteria and assessment methodology are described in the methodology section and in the underlying assessment reports.

³ [RWSN Resources - Rural Water Supply Network \(rural-water-supply.net\)](https://www.rwsn.gov.rw/)

⁴ [WASH system building block assessment tool: IRC \(ircwash.org\)](https://www.ircwash.org/)

Table 1: WASH sector building blocks scores

	Building Blocks	2022	2023	2024
1	Policy and Legislation	4	4	4.5
2	Water Resources Management	3.8	4	4
3	Infrastructure Development	3.8	3.8	3.8
4	Monitoring	3.4	3.4	3.4
5	Regulation Accountability	3.4	4.2	4.2
6	Learning and Adaptation	3.4	4	4
7	Institutions and Coordination	3.2	3.6	4
8	Planning	3.2	4	4.5
9	Infrastructure management	3	3.6	3.8
10	Finance	2.4	3	3.8
	Average	3.4	3.8	4.0

- Policy and Legal Framework:** Harmonised policies for domestic water supply, water resources, and sanitation are in place, with clear institutional roles; however, a stronger legal framework is needed with the enactment of a water and sanitation law.
- Planning:** Well-coordinated planning and budgeting cycles, overseen by the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning; master plans exist at national, urban, and district levels.
- Regulation and Accountability:** Enforcement mechanisms are applied consistently across national and district WASH institutions.
- Monitoring:** WASH monitoring systems function effectively, but the WASH Management Information System (MIS) needs upgrading and integration with the National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda (NISR) to improve data management.
- Sector Coordination:** There is a sector coordination framework through Sector Working Groups and thematic platforms led by MININFRA and WASH partners; more efforts are needed to strengthen the operationalization of the thematic working groups and District WASH Boards, both at centralized and decentralized levels.
- Financing:** Funding has increased from government and partners but remains a challenge as there is still a budget gap compared to the national targets in WASH; the sanitation sub-sector requires additional investment.

Strengthening the Building Blocks

In 2022, the building blocks of **finance** and **infrastructure management** were identified as the weakest and prioritized for strengthening accordingly, along with the building blocks of planning and regulation, and accountability.

In **finance**, the project supported the development of the WASH finance strategy in 2022, which highlighted the budget required to achieve the SDG 6 targets, budget gaps, and the way forward to bridge these financial gaps in the WASH sector, including the attraction of private sector investment in WASH. In addition, Isoko y'Ubuzima also supported the study on expanding access to commercial finance for the WASH Sector in Rwanda, where private operators can access loans through loan products developed in partnership with Equity Bank and Bank of Kigali. Moreover, the government is committed to increasing the WASH budget during the NST2 period (2024-2029), and the Ministry of Infrastructure is finalizing a private sector investment framework to attract additional funding in the sector.

Regarding the building blocks of **infrastructure management**, the Isoko y'Ubuzima project addressed the issue of poor management of rural WASH infrastructure, resulting in a new delegated water supply management model where WASAC has been given oversight management of rural water supply. In addition, Isoko y'Ubuzima has supported WASAC in the development of the operationalization of the approved delegated rural water supply management model.

Regarding the building block of **planning**, Isoko y'Ubuzima supported 10 districts in developing detailed engineering designs and investment plans to close coverage gaps. So far, all ten districts of the project intervention area have started using them as planning and resource mobilization tools. For instance, the Isoko y'Ubuzima project has supported district annual reflection meetings, fostering joint planning with all stakeholders and reducing duplication among the district WASH partners.

Moreover, the planning cycles are well-coordinated by the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning, which organizes planning consultations at both the national and district levels. It is in this context that the WASH sector strategic plan (2024-2029) and the WASH multi-year action plan (2024-2029) were developed and validated in a workshop supported by the Isoko y'Ubuzima project.

Regarding the building blocks of **regulation and accountability**, Isoko y'Ubuzima supported the Rwanda Utility and Regulation Authority (RURA) to develop a customer management system (a digital billing system) that private operators in rural water supply management are currently using. So far, RURA can access information related to billing, revenue collection, areas, and new connections. For non-prioritized building blocks, improvements have also been made, such as the endorsement of the new water and sanitation policy in 2023, where the project supported the dissemination of the policy.

In line with **institutional coordination**, Isoko y'Ubuzima supported the Ministry of Infrastructure in restructuring the thematic working groups and facilitated national WASH reflections meetings, sector working groups, and meetings of the district WASH boards. However, at the National level, the Ministry of Infrastructure led the restructuring of WASAC with the creation of WASAC group, WASAC Development, and WASAC utility. This restructuring is in line with policy guidance, where WASAC has established additional branches to ensure that each district has a branch to provide oversight and management of rural water supply operations by private operators.

Regarding the building blocks of **water resources management**, the project supported the development of water resource management plans in the district, following the harmonization of the national water supply policy, the national water resource management policy, and the sanitation policy.

“The Building Blocks Assessment has provided a clear framework for evaluating the sector, ensuring that no key components are overlooked. It offers criteria to assess sector performance across the nine building blocks and guides the engagement of stakeholders to enhance the sustainability of WASH services. Complementing other tools such as the WASH MIS and the Multi-Year Action Plan, the BBA helps identify strengths and weaknesses and informs actionable improvements.

The assessment process has also reinforced the importance of continuous learning, as the sector evolves with new ideas, priorities, and results. This approach has encouraged a shift from a static mindset to a more dynamic and adaptive perspective. For instance, the recently released National Water and Sanitation Policy drew on insights from the Building Blocks assessment, with changes such as the delegation of rural water supply management arising from gaps identified in the initial review. More broadly, the assessment informs strategic planning that guides implementation. A specific example is the WASH Finance Strategy for Rwanda, developed following the initial Isoko y'Ubuzima's assessment, which highlighted financing gaps. This strategy has since inspired advocacy efforts that are unlocking various funding opportunities.”

- Emmanuel Hategekimana, Senior Engineer in charge of Rural Water Supply

However, the building blocks of **infrastructure**, particularly the components of infrastructure development and monitoring, did not show significant improvement due to inadequate budgets and delays in completing ongoing projects. For monitoring, there is still an issue with the regular updating of the WASH MIS, and a need exists for upgrading and aligning it with the data collection methodology of the National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda (NISR).

Key recommendations

The following are some of the key strategic recommendations in line with strengthening the WASH system through its building blocks:

- Develop new and/or update existing policy instruments, regulations, standards, and action plans to support implementation of the current Water and Sanitation Policy.
- Improve efficiency and the effective use of existing funding for the WASH sector by reducing non-revenue water, improving billing, reducing unit costs, improving asset management, strengthening climate resilience, reducing operational costs, and using innovative technologies.

- Mobilize additional financing for the sector through increased engagement with bilateral and multilateral donors, innovative funding, and public-private partnerships.
- Work closely with NISR and strengthen data collection for WASH, especially data on coverage at the sub-district level, and ensure that SDGs indicators are considered.
- Ensure regular monitoring of WASH interventions.
- Strengthen climate resilience and disaster risk reduction for the WASH sector, especially in flood and drought-prone areas.
- Launch a national campaign to mobilize communities to build latrines and adopt safe hygiene practices.

Key Takeaways

Progress achieved: Rwanda’s WASH system score improved from 3.4 (2022) to 4.0 (2024), showing stronger governance, coordination, and planning.

Critical gaps remain: Financing (especially sanitation), legal frameworks, and monitoring at the sub-district level require urgent attention.

Isoko y’Ubuzima’s contribution: Enabled joint planning, water resources management, infrastructure rehabilitation, financial mobilization, and peer learning.

Path to 2030: Sustaining gains will require consolidating reforms, mobilizing resources, strengthening climate resilience, and engaging all stakeholders.

Shared responsibility: Government, partners, and communities must continue working together to ensure universal, sustainable WASH services that leave no one behind.

Conclusion

The Building Blocks assessment has proven to be a robust framework for strengthening Rwanda’s WASH systems, guiding both national policy and district-level practices. Isoko y’Ubuzima used the prioritized building blocks to design and execute effective capacity building for WASH sector actors in planning, resource mobilization, infrastructure rehabilitation, and peer learning. The steady improvement in scores from 2022 to 2024 demonstrates that progress is possible when evidence, coordination, and stakeholder commitment converge. Yet sustaining this trajectory will require deepening reforms, closing financing gaps, and ensuring that monitoring, legal frameworks, and climate resilience keep pace with national ambitions.

Looking ahead, maintaining momentum will depend on a collective responsibility, including government leadership, partner engagement, and community participation. By continuing to build on the foundation laid through the Building Blocks Assessment, Rwanda’s WASH sector is well-positioned to achieve lasting transformation that leaves no one behind by 2030.

Disclaimer

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