

Endline Evaluation of the PRO-WASH Associate Award

Summary Brief

Introduction

The Practices, Research, and Operations in Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (PRO-WASH) Associate Award is an initiative funded by USAID's Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA) and led by Save the Children. PRO-WASH aims to provide support to implementing partners in order to strengthen the quality of WASH interventions through capacity strengthening, knowledge sharing, and applied WASH research opportunities. PRO-WASH's approach to providing support is driven by a commitment to empower BHA implementing partners (IPs) to become technical leaders in WASH, particularly for vulnerable and food insecure communities.

This brief provides an overview of key findings and recommendations from the Awards' endline evaluation. It also includes key takeaways from a WASH Capacity Strengthening, Learning, and Knowledge Sharing Event held in conjunction with the evaluation.

This evaluation was conducted over a period of five months in PRO-WASH's final year and examined the outcomes of the PRO-WASH Associate Award, with a particular focus on the:

- internal delivery dynamics,
- service delivery mechanisms, and
- management practices established through the Award.

The evaluation focuses primarily on **learning**, by examining the range of factors influencing participation, utilization, training uptake, and relevance of PRO-WASH's support among target audiences.

Methodology

The evaluation employed both qualitative and quantitative methodologies to elicit feedback from a wide range of stakeholders. Stakeholders included implementing partners (IPs), current and former PRO-WASH team members, colleagues from other Associate Awards,¹ including Strengthening Capacity in Agriculture, Livelihoods, and Environment (SCALE) and Program Cycle Support (PCS), PRO-WASH Steering Committee members, USAID/BHA representatives, and USAID Mission staff who have engaged with the activity. A total of:

- 38 respondents participated in 27 key informant interviews (KIIs) and focus group discussion (FGDs), and
- 178 individuals responded to the quantitative survey.

The evaluation also reviewed key literature provided by the PRO-WASH team, such as learning products produced and disseminated, training reports, and internal monitoring data generated throughout delivery.

WASH Capacity Strengthening, Learning, and Knowledge Sharing Event

Co-hosted by PRO-WASH & Causal Design on September 13, 2022, the main objectives of the event were to:

- Share topline findings of the PRO-WASH Final Evaluation with the broader WASH and food security community that focus on capacity strengthening, learning, and operational research.
- Dialogue on if findings resonate with other capacity strengthening and learning efforts.
- Hear participants' ideas to address recommendations around project governance, on convening and collaborating, and on the cross cutting theme of localization.

¹ SCALE is a Technical and Operational Performance Support Program (TOPS) Associate Award and PCS is an Implementer-Led Design, Evidence, Analysis and Learning (IDEAL) Associate Award. Both are funded by USAID/BHA.

Key Findings

Overall, the data **clearly and consistently present a remarkably positive image of the PRO-WASH Associate Award.**

Figure 1 presents key words or phrases provided by qualitative respondents to describe PRO-WASH. Respondents invariably provided positive descriptors of PRO-WASH, while only PRO-WASH team representatives noted more constructive terms such as ‘lack of clarity’ and ‘busy.’

Figure 1 | What Three Words or Phrases Do You Use to Describe PRO-WASH?



Award Design and Objectives

Data demonstrate that PRO-WASH was generally considered responsive and flexible to the needs of IPs. This was influenced by both the design of the Award by USAID and the management and delivery of the technical advisory support by PRO-WASH.

PRO-WASH is a demand-driven function by design and delivery. While data suggest that this is recognized as a positive factor within PRO-WASH’s value-add to IPs, the design does create challenges such as an ambiguity over PRO-WASH’s mandate to have sustainable impact on IPs’ activities, particularly in cases where IPs did not request the support. Data also suggest that PRO-WASH has been instrumental in informing, as well as responding to, IP demand.

Numerous factors emerged from the data as influencing the uptake of technical assistance by IPs, including:

- IPs’ knowledge of how to access support
- IPs’ perception of the relevance and quality of support
- Time availability within the IPs
- Personalities and team dynamics within the IPs
- Digital connectivity and language barriers

PRO-WASH team members have been instrumental in the Award’s success, though challenges faced by an under-resourced staffing structure were noted. PRO-WASH worked with consultants to deliver technical support, which, in some cases, created risks of lower quality and less relevant support. Issues relating to the aid localization agenda emerged from the data with particular reference to engaging international rather than national consultants.

In terms of feedback loops, though the general trend in the data portrays PRO-WASH as open and receptive to continuous dialogue with IPs and proactive in seeking feedback on training workshops, one anecdote suggests that the absence of a specific platform for providing more critical feedback relating to consultant support may have prevented IPs from sharing challenges. When one respondent noted their dissatisfaction with work delivered by a

consultant, the respondent noted that they had informed the consultant of their concerns, but not PRO-WASH, as “there was no platform to give feedback.”

The findings relating to the Steering Committee (SC) include strengths such as the SC’s role in providing a sounding board for PRO-WASH and expanding the network of technical experts available to the Award. Challenges include:

- A lack of clarity over the purpose of the SC,
- Limited knowledge of SC members regarding PRO-WASH management and delivery,
- Limited interaction between the SC and USAID,
- A lack of clarity and consistency on time expectations of SC members, and
- The composition of the SC membership, which did not include representatives of nationals from countries in which Resilience Food Security Activities (RFSAs) are implemented, or members of often-marginalized groups.

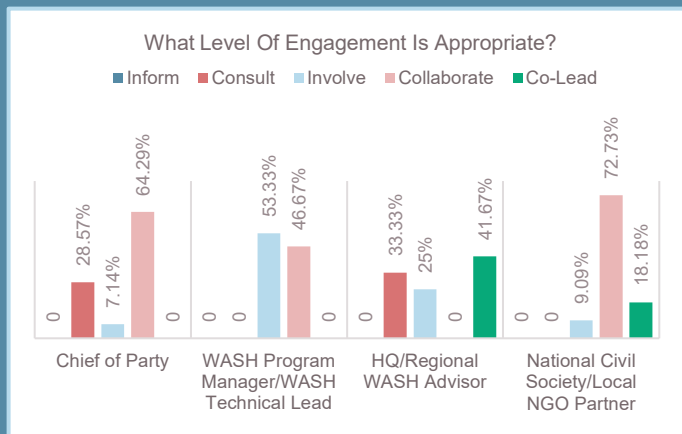
In terms of support to BHA-funded emergency partners, the small sample of emergency IPs engaged in the evaluation limits the extent to which rigorous findings can be identified. Data do suggest, however, that PRO-WASH was limited in its ability to support some emergency partners, given restrictions associated with the funding streams used to invest in PRO-WASH.

As part of the WASH Capacity Strengthening, Learning, and Knowledge Sharing Event, participants were asked to consider the different ways in which they engaged with PRO-WASH along a spectrum from informed (receiving periodic newsletters) to co-lead (working on the design of a resource center or serving as a member of the Steering Committee). While higher levels of engagement can help ensure a more implementer-led program, collaboration and co-leading can also result in a demand for more time and resources from partners. Through a series of polls, participants reflected on what level of engagement they felt was appropriate for four different actors within their organizations: Chiefs of Party, WASH Program Managers or WASH Technical Leads, HQ or Regional WASH Advisors, and national civil society and local NGO partners.

The results showed a split in respondents’ views on these levels of engagement, though responses did tend towards one side of the spectrum or the other, giving some insight into general preferences. These results aligned with data collected through the final evaluation. Causal Design reflected that while having no clear right or wrong answer can make it difficult for programs like PRO-WASH to know how best to engage with different stakeholders, it does provide an opportunity to continuously reflect on engagement and to tailor to specific individuals’ preferences.

When asked how PRO-WASH could overcome some of the barriers to effective engagement, participants shared recommendations, including making engagement a part of award terms and gaining support from RFSAs Agreement Officer’s Representatives by informing them of expectations for engagement. They also proposed leveraging tools for better engagement, such as using translation tools (e.g., DeepL) for better cross-linguistic engagement, and offering more opportunities for in-person engagement and learning to help strengthen relationships between PRO-WASH and partners.

Figure 2 | What Level of Engagement is Appropriate?



Implementing Partner Engagement and Impacts of Technical Assistance and Influence

“Interfacing with PRO-WASH who would actually assure you that WASH is something; WASH is a subject; WASH means something; WASH will add value and change lives. You refine and renew your commitment to your subject area, your program area, and say no, I think I know I’m in the right sector and I will be able to drive with the strength and confidence that it requires because it matters.” – Implementing Partner (IP) Respondent

Data suggest that PRO-WASH offers significant added value above that which an IP can independently offer to a RFSA. This added value manifests in PRO-WASH’s ability to:

- Convene RFSA’s for collaborative work and shared learning.
- Profile RFSA’s work to external audiences.
- Draw on networks of specialists and attract researchers thanks to their strong reputation in the field.
- Support IPs to staying abreast of emerging learning and relaying this to RFSA teams, who may not have time to engage beyond their delivery work.
- Use its positional power to influence RFSA decision-makers who may deprioritize WASH within the spectrum of issues covered by their RFSA.

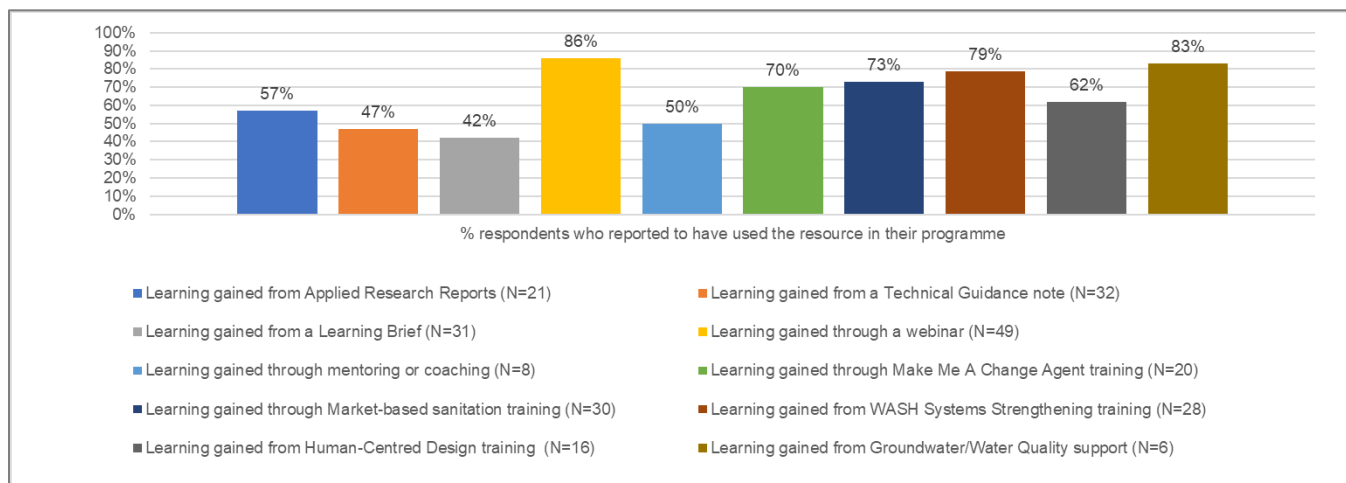
Findings suggest that IPs generally felt that PRO-WASH support was relevant, of high quality, and useful. Exceptions to these general findings were incidents where a lack of contextual adaptation of tools and resources diminished an IP’s ability to apply them in the field. Language barriers and COVID-19 also emerged as issues inhibiting use of tools and resources.

Respondents generally noted high satisfaction with all approaches to providing technical advisory support adopted by PRO-WASH. Coaching emerged as a catalytic approach that acts as a cornerstone to other methodologies. Respondents who engaged in multiple approaches appreciated the combination of different types of support. Of the 65 survey respondents who reported to have engaged in PRO-WASH support, 65% (N=42) reported to have combined various types of support, citing examples of attendance at webinars and training courses, use of learning briefs, technical guides, newsletters, and engagement in one-on-one dialogues (referred to within this evaluation report as coaching). Data suggests that PRO-WASH’s multiple approaches to technical advisory support created greater opportunity, not only to engage and cascade support, but also to retain WASH and Integrated Water Resource Management as priorities within the RFSA strategy and work plan.

“Remote coaching, exchanges through calls, training workshops, webinars and technical knowledge sharing events as well as the knowledge available through applied research results, newsletters, technical guides, learning sheets, have allowed me to better organize and monitor my activities, to acquire new knowledge and to exchange ideas with other WASH specialists from various backgrounds.” – Survey IP respondent

Respondents shared multiple examples of how RFSA’s used PRO-WASH tools and resources, including for adaptations to behavior change strategies, development of new strategies, and development of new monitoring processes to track delivery. As shown in Figure 3, quantitative survey respondents who reported to have engaged with particular forms of support reported high levels of ‘use within their program’ of learning gained from webinars, support focused on water quality, and support focused on WASH systems strengthening. Given the low number of respondents, however, these findings should be interpreted as suggestive, rather than conclusive.

Figure 3 | Proportion of Respondents Who Have Used Tools and Resources in Their Program, of Those Who Engaged with the Tool or Resource



Key factors that influence the use of PRO-WASH tools or resources emerged to be ‘respondents’ understanding of the guidance,’ ‘respondents’ time availability to apply new learning’, and ‘the degree to which respondents’ teams are open to adapting their work.’

Respondents noted high intention to continue using resources, though data suggests this would be primarily dependent on need. Data suggest a general lack of institutionalization of tools and resources beyond use in specific RFSAs or emergency programs.

Outreach to Implementing Partners

Respondents typically appreciated PRO-WASH’s approach to outreach. Data suggests that initial contact at early stages in the RFSA cycle is related to higher perceived relevance and use of tools and resources. As the Program Cycle Support (PCS) Associate Award was established, USAID/BHA and PCS began to introduce PRO-WASH to IPs during their initial Refine and Implement activities, which appears to have created greater buy-in for PRO-WASH support, at the early stage of RFSA commencement. The data suggests that this engagement is linked to greater perceived relevance and utility, and reported use, of learning and resources. Overall, qualitative respondents who had engaged with PRO-WASH through the PCS Inception and Culmination Workshops noted that this support was effective and influential in setting their strategic objectives for the refinement and implementation periods.

Thought Leadership and Influence on BHA Policies, Standards, and Program Quality

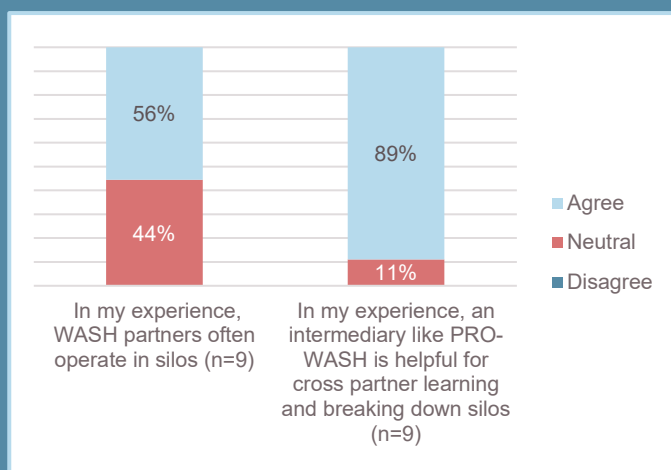
Respondents with positional insight into PRO-WASH’s thought leadership cited some examples of PRO-WASH’s influence on BHA policies, standards, and program quality, including:

- PRO-WASH driving interest in innovations such as human centered design.
- PRO-WASH promoting the need for the Make Me a Change Agent curricula where it met some resistance.
- PRO-WASH technical guides being included in USAID literature.
- PRO-WASH promoting adaptations in technical assistance processes, such as the inclusion of PRO-WASH at the start of the refinement period for new RFSAs.

However, challenges that limited PRO-WASH’s ability to influence in this regard include the complexity of USAID/BHA structures and processes and limited level of effort (LoE) available to the PRO-WASH team.

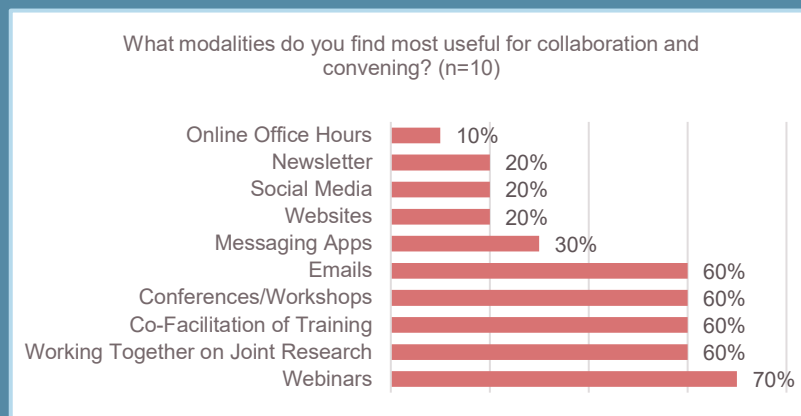
Following the presentation of evaluation findings, participants of the WASH Capacity Strengthening, Learning, and Knowledge Sharing Event were asked to reflect on their experiences with PRO-WASH as a connector and convener. Through a series of polls, they were asked to rate their level of agreement related to the tendency of WASH partners to operate in silos and how helpful an intermediary like PRO-WASH has been for cross partner learning and breaking down these silos. A majority of respondents, 56%, agreed that WASH partners often operate in silos, with 44% neutral, and no respondents disagreeing. Nearly all respondents, 89%, agreed that, in their experience, an intermediary like PRO-WASH is helpful for cross-partner learning and breaking down silos, with only one respondent (11%) neutral and no respondents disagreeing.

Figure 4 | Level of Agreement Related to the Rendency of WASH Partners to Operate in Silos



With these trends in mind, participants were then asked what modalities they find most useful for programs like PRO-WASH to ensure more useful, inclusive, and sustainable collaboration. PRO-WASH noted that the results showed some interesting overlap with the results of the earlier poll on levels of engagement. Respondents showed a preference for modalities that would fall on the “consult,” “involve,” “collaborate,” and “co-lead” points of the engagement spectrum. This included webinars, working together on research, and co-facilitation of trainings, over those considered to “inform,” such as newsletters, websites, and social media. Causal Design reflected that participants’ responses very much aligned with those obtained through the evaluation and provided some guidance to PRO-WASH on which modalities for collaboration to build on in the future.

Figure 5 | What Modalities Do You Find Most Useful for Collaboration and Convening?



The event closed with two final questions for participants to consider and continue sharing feedback going forward:

- What are your suggestions for engaging national technical expertise for improved delivery of WASH interventions within countries?
- Sometimes we don't know what we don't know. How can mechanisms like PRO-WASH be implementer-led and still introduce new knowledge and ideas to implementers?

Recommendations

Key recommendations derived from the endline evaluation include those presented in Table 1. For a full overview of all recommendations, please see the [Final Report: An Endline Evaluation of the PRO-WASH Associate Award \(2018-2023\)](#).

Table 1 | Recommendations Derived from Endline Evaluation

USAID/BHA should:	PRO-WASH should:
<p>...continue investing in PRO-WASH, to retain this highly valued WASH technical support for RFSAs.</p>	<p>...position themselves as a 'technical ally' to RFSAs, such that their technical guidance is drawn on in determining strategic direction during the refinement period.</p>
<p>...ensure that the funding streams of future iterations of PRO-WASH are aligned with the intended recipients of support.</p>	<p>...continue adopting similar methodologies, including coaching, applied research, technical guides, and in-person and online self-paced training workshops, to support in future phases of programming, with particular emphasis on coaching and mentoring.</p>
<p>... ensure that any tenders for future phases of PRO-WASH include the explicit requirement that PRO-WASH team members are highly competent in relationship management, adult education, and coordination. Team members should be further required to demonstrate the lived values of partnership and collaboration, which were so fundamental to the success of PRO-WASH in its first phase.</p>	<p>...consider developing a short-term technical advisory (STTA) pool of consultants with relevant expertise based on projections of likely focal areas in the coming year or years. The STTA pool should include multiple consultants with relevant technical expertise and should be submitted to USAID for pre-approval.</p>
<p>...consider increasing its investment in PRO-WASH such that the team can be restructured to bring in roles with specialist foci on knowledge management, adult learning, and communications.</p>	<p>... invest in national or regional technical expertise to build cadres of technical specialists in countries that are likely to receive continued RFSA support.</p>
<p>...consider agreeing on key performance indicators (KPIs) with RFSAs that outline the expectation that IPs will draw on PRO-WASH, thereby motivating RFSA leadership to create space for and encourage team engagement with the award.</p>	<p>...consider the creation of a formal feedback and complaints mechanism for IPs to provide anonymous feedback or complaints regarding the support they have received, should the need arise. Clear policies and procedures guiding each step are required, and should be developed in consultation with IPs.</p>
	<p>...consider being intentional about developing partnership agreements with RFSAs, outlining expectations of the partnership, communication channels, and an agreed redress mechanism should disagreements arise.</p>

Table 2 | Recommendations for USAID/BHA and PRO-WASH

USAID/BHA and PRO-WASH should:

...consider creating a larger 'technical advisory group' comprised of technical experts in the field who would be expected to volunteer their time to review deliverables and provide technical guidance on strategy. From the technical advisory group, a 'steering committee', which would have a more deliberate focus on governing the award, could be elected or selected.

...consider undertaking a process to ensure meaningful engagement of often-marginalized groups within the technical advisory group and steering committee. This could include, but not be limited to, nationals of countries in which RFSA are implemented, particularly women, young people, and people with disabilities.

...consider conducting a further review into sustained use of PRO-WASH resources and tools after a defined period of time following the closure of the first phase of support. This will provide more solid examples and learning regarding sustained use of resources and tools.

...determine whether the institutionalization of resources and thought-leadership with USAID/BHA are clear objectives for PRO-WASH. If it is agreed that this is the case, the design of the award should be reviewed to ensure sufficient budget is allocated to increase the LoE for PRO-WASH to strategically engage toward meeting these objectives.

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