

# HOW TO CONSIDER WASH ASPECTS WHEN DESIGNING AN MEB

(The below is adapted from the publication by the Global WASH Cluster, [Evidence-building for cash and markets for WASH in emergencies](#)<sup>1</sup>, UNICEF, Geneva, 2020) and CALP (2022) [MPC Outcome Indicators and Guidance](#)<sup>2</sup> (WASH section) Grand Bargain Cash Workstream).

MPC can contribute to overcoming financial barriers to accessing WASH goods and services. However, in most cases, MPC needs to be implemented together with complementary programmes that address WASH-related supply-side barriers, nonfinancial demand-side barriers, systemic issues, or behavioral changes to contribute to WASH outcomes.

## PRE-CONDITIONS FOR EFFECTIVENESS

MPC can contribute to achieving WASH outcomes for recipient households in emergency response for the water, sanitation and hygiene subsectors by increasing households' overall income and thereby enabling the purchase of WASH goods and services. However, the Global WASH Cluster (GWC) considers it critical for certain conditions to be met for MPC to be effective in responding to basic needs for water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) at humanitarian standards<sup>3</sup>. MPC is likely to contribute to WASH outcomes when:

1. WASH technical experts are involved during the phases of assessments for MPC, response analysis, design and monitoring.
2. The minimum expenditure basket (MEB) is sufficiently resourced.
3. Recipients are accustomed to purchasing WASH-related goods and services in sufficient quantity and quality from local markets (which may vary greatly between subsectors and relevant goods and services) and no other negative coping mechanisms are foreseen (using river water to save money, practicing open defecation, washing hands without soap).
4. WASH markets are accessible, including for women, girls, and vulnerable groups.
5. WASH markets are functioning and can adequately respond to an increased demand of WASH goods and services.

In terms of **the monitoring of MPC**, if all the conditions above are met, then WASH access indicators should be included in monitoring of the MPC, regardless of whether WASH expenditures are included in the MPC transfer value. If only some, or none of these conditions are met, the achievement of WASH indicators at outcome level cannot be assured at sector standards. However, these indicators are still recommended for monitoring, adaptation, or advocacy.

In practice, the Wash Cluster (2021) report suggests that although there were some documented attempts to measure higher-level WASH outcomes, the focus of MPC monitoring was mostly on how households spent the cash, rather than on the quality of the WASH goods and services accessed and how they were used within the home.

WASH actors note that **coordination needs to improve**. Despite the continued increase in the use of MPC, challenges remain for agencies and sector leads to work together throughout the humanitarian programme cycle and to maximize the effectiveness of MPC in responding to basic needs across sectors. Complementary programming of this sort is complex and requires strong intersectoral leadership and the close involvement of WASH staff in MBP response analysis and implementation.

Although there are **Sphere standards** governing minimum standards for the composition of hygiene baskets that can be directly applied to the WASH portion of the MEB, using the SPHERE standards to inform the hygiene component of the MEB is not a standard practice, and WASH practitioners differ in their views on the Sphere standards. For example, current evidence suggests that while MEB calculations for water costs often referred to the quantity of water recommended by Sphere standards (the cost of accessing a minimum of 15L of water per person per day, multiplied by the average household size and the number of days in a month) these were often adapted, especially when the target population was used to a much higher quantity of water. This reinforces the recommendation that a **hybrid approach** is usually best when making MEB calculations and the paragraphs below explore this in greater detail while suggesting that supply side interventions are often required. WASH actors know that since, developing an MEB and setting the MPC transfer value is a highly political process, and there is often pressure

to keep these amounts relatively low to align with national poverty lines and existing social assistance programmes, and also to take into account the budgetary constraints faced by humanitarian organizations. For these reasons, the MPC value rarely covers all the basic needs of a crisis-affected household, and while it is likely that water will always be prioritized by MPC recipients, there is a risk that they may purchase cheaper (and therefore low-quality) water.



In Lebanon, while the 'survival minimum expenditure basket' (SMEB) included 15L per person per day (2250L per household per month), the MEB went beyond Sphere standards and included 35L per person per day (5250L per household per month) of water for all uses (drinking, cooking, washing) (Juillard, 2016).

**Expenditure-based approach<sup>4</sup>:** conducting (or contributing to) expenditure surveys. The implications of selecting an expenditure-based approach means surveying the WASH expenditures of households. This may require identifying which expenses are seasonal, which are recurrent, and which are one-off expenses, and this will require inputs from the WASH sector. An expenditure-based approach can also be problematic from a WASH perspective: households may not be spending their limited resources on WASH goods/services so

that they can meet their other basic needs. Where this is likely to be the case, the WASH sector may advocate for a rights-based or hybrid approach to ensure WASH needs can be included within the MEB. On the other hand, expenditure surveys may find households spending an excessive percentage of their income on WASH, indicating potential difficulty for people to meet other needs. This may also indicate a need for WASH supply-side market-based interventions to increase the availability of affordable goods and services.

**Rights-based and hybrid approaches: identifying WASH items** MEBs built by the CWG or other inter-agency coordination forums are often constructed following the rights-based approach, with each sector or cluster contributing to the needs in their respective sectors. In some contexts, the MEB is verified through multi-sector market assessment. In such cases, the WASH sector can play a verifying role for the WASH component of the MEB. Additionally, market assessments may be led by an agency such as REACH, which will involve a collaborative process using agency enumerators, in which WASH agencies may be involved. However, note the fact that there is debate regarding the applicability of Sphere standards above.

**Deeper dive:** The following sections explore more deeply the different elements of WASH programming and the enabling factors for MPC, the role and benefits as well as the risks and limitations.

## MPC AND WATER

<b>ROLE AND BENEFITS</b>	MPC can have a strong role to play in overcoming financial barriers to water access. It can be used by households to purchase water outside the home (water points, vendors, water trucking), to pay for piped water supply in the home (utility bills) or, potentially, to purchase household water treatment (though no documented practice of this was identified). Benefits include using and strengthening the existing local water market and giving households flexibility to choose their preferred water source or household water treatment (HHWT) product.
<b>ENABLING FACTORS</b>	Good governance of the water sector is an enabling factor, and safe water or HHWT should be available locally, affordable and physically accessible. Households must prioritize purchasing safe water, be aware of how to access it and have safe water practices. In most humanitarian contexts, other modalities (market support to improve water availability, quality and governance, hygiene awareness to improve safe water practices etc.) need to be used in combination with MPC to create this enabling environment.
<b>RISKS AND LIMITATIONS</b>	If the enabling environment is not conducive, there is a risk that MPC will not be used for water-related costs or that the quality and quantity of the water accessed are not sufficient to achieve water outcomes, therefore potentially leading to public health issues. While MPC can cover the regular purchase of water, it is unlikely to enable beneficiaries to improve and maintain the water infrastructure in the home, particularly in contexts where housing conditions are unstable and tenants' rights are not protected, making affected households unlikely to invest in improving water infrastructure, for fear of rental prices increasing or even being evicted (Chaaban, et al., 2020; KII with CAMEALEON Lebanon).  MPC has limitations in terms of its effectiveness for HHWT, which is unlikely to be prioritized in an emergency unless the household already has a well-established practice of purchasing HHWT products.

4. The discussion of different approaches to the MEB is taken from the Global WASH Cluster Technical Working Group for WASH and Market Based Programming's (2021) Market-Based Programming in Wash Technical Guidance for Humanitarian Practitioners <https://www.washcluster.net/node/30391>

**Monitoring of water outcomes when MPC is used**

It is evident that MPC is more likely to be spent on water or HHWT in contexts where recipients are used to paying for them, and monitoring of expenditure will reflect this. The MPC transfer value is usually less than the MEB, calculated to cover only households' unmet needs – i.e., the gap between total

needs (as defined by the MEB) and households' own income and resources. These values are based on averages, and many recipient households still struggle to cover their basic needs with the transfer they receive and therefore must prioritize what they can buy.

**MPC AND SANITATION**

In areas covered by a sewage network, faeces are in most cases mixed with other domestic wastewater and evacuated from the house to the sewage network. In many cases, the cost of household wastewater management services is included in the water bill, as it is calculated based on the quantity of water consumed.

<b>ROLE AND BENEFITS</b>	MPC can be used to cover regular sanitation costs (such as desludging for households using on-site sanitation systems), paying for sanitation utility bills (when connected to sewage networks) or (rarely) contributing to irregular or ad hoc costs such as latrine rehabilitation or construction. While MPC can contribute to meeting these costs, in contexts where sanitation facilities are lacking, the main barrier to improved sanitation may not be financial. In such situations, MPC will likely play a limited role in improving access to sanitation.
<b>ENABLING FACTORS</b>	MPC can be effective in contexts where there is good governance of the sanitation sector and beneficiaries have regular and predictable sanitation-related expenses – i.e., paying utility bills that include sanitation, in urban contexts with sewage networks, or paying for latrine desludging, when beneficiaries use on-site sanitation systems (pit latrines, septic or holding tanks), usually in camps or informal urban settlements. The use of MPC for the construction or rehabilitation of sanitation facilities, although infrequent, is enabled when housing conditions are stable, there is a demand for improved sanitation facilities, and the costs are low.
<b>RISKS AND LIMITATIONS</b>	Where housing conditions are unstable and tenants' rights are not protected, affected households are unlikely to invest in constructing or rehabilitating latrines, for fear of rental prices increasing or even being evicted (Chaaban, et al., 2020; KII with CAMEALEON Lebanon). This instability and lack of protection of rights is ever more frequent in humanitarian contexts. In first-phase emergency response, direct latrine construction is likely to be faster and more appropriate than MPC or even conditional cash. When using cash for desludging, there is a risk that households will not prioritize it and may use the cash for other purposes. Desludging companies may also be unwilling to travel to certain locations for only a few customers, and beneficiaries may have to group together to negotiate with the companies. Safe disposal of sludge is also often a challenge. MPC for sanitation may be less successful in contexts where the population is on the 'first step of the sanitation ladder' – i.e., where open defecation is still common and demand creation is required (UNHCR, 2016).

**Monitoring of sanitation outcomes when MPC is used**

As regular expenditure linked to sanitation is generally very low, monitoring for MPC and sanitation focused more on access to toilets (are there toilets/within the home/shared) and less on sanitation related expenditure.

**MPC AND HYGIENE**

<b>ROLE AND BENEFITS</b>	MPC is well suited as a modality to meet the hygiene needs of affected populations in many humanitarian contexts, as hygiene items are a regular and predictable expense, hygiene markets are typically resilient in times of crisis, and most families will purchase basic hygiene items such as soap or water containers.
<b>ENABLING FACTORS</b>	Hygiene items corresponding to humanitarian standards must be available on the local market, and there should be demand for these products so that households prioritize buying hygiene items when given the choice. Households must be aware of where to access hygiene.
<b>RISKS AND LIMITATIONS</b>	MPC alone is not likely to achieve adequate hygiene practices when baseline practices are poor and demand for hygiene items is low, unless combined with behaviour change communication. MPC is unlikely to be effective when barriers to accessing hygiene items are cultural, or when beneficiaries are not in the habit of using certain products (e.g., menstrual hygiene products or baby nappies/diapers). In contexts where the value of MPC assistance is not sufficient to meet all basic needs, spending on food and shelter may be prioritized over hygiene items (El Khoury and Hajal, 2016).

**Monitoring of hygiene outcomes when MPC is used**

In the monitoring reports reviewed, the percentage of expenditure on hygiene items was generally relatively small but included a wide variety of items (depending on the context), such as soap, nappies, jerrycans, buckets, basins etc. Expenses are generally lower than what was planned in the MEB, but as the value of hygiene items is often small (soap etc.), it may go unmeasured, and/or there may be under-reporting by beneficiaries in post-distribution monitoring (KII with former UNICEF staff in DRC). If monitoring focuses only on the spending of MPC assistance, as opposed to overall household expenditure, beneficiaries may under-report WASH-related spending, considering that they use 'other income' to purchase WASH goods and services on a regular or daily basis and reserve the MPC for larger monthly expenditures (KII with former UNICEF staff in DRC).

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, while MPC is inherently a multi-sectoral tool which increases financial access to goods and services, it cannot respond to all sectoral needs. This is particularly true for the WASH sector, for which the success of MPC in achieving WASH outcomes depends on the quality of public (or private) WASH infrastructure and services, as well as on households having safe WASH practices. In most humanitarian contexts it is therefore necessary to implement other modalities such as market support, technical assistance, in-kind support and behaviour change communication, alongside the delivery of MPC to overcome the risks and limitations and create a conducive enabling environment for achieving WASH outcomes.