

IRC

Annual report 2025

Supporting water sanitation
and hygiene services for life



IRC Annual Report 2025

This Annual Report highlights some of our achievements in 2025. For more detailed information about our progress and finances, please read our **2025 Monitoring Report** and our **Financial Report 2025**.

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The story of our cover photo: Vida Dutu, Country Director, IRC Ghana and Head of Strategy and Programme Quality speaking at the Sanitation and Water for All Sector Ministers' Meeting in Madrid (2025), presenting the Heads of State Initiative during the ministerial dialogue on high-level political prioritisation. Credit: Natalia Ibarra

Other photos: p4 Ameer Umar, p10 Lothar Mikulla / UN-Habitat

Measuring progress is complicated.

These are the definitions and methods that we use, and that you'll see throughout this report:

We use definitions from the WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme (JMP) for water supply, sanitation, and hygiene to assess the quality of services that people are receiving and to set targets for the future. In this report, we share progress towards our 2030 vision for services at national and district levels - but for detailed reflections on these please see our 2025 Monitoring Report.

The JMP outlines a 'service ladder' of five service levels for water and sanitation: no service (surface water or open defecation); unimproved; limited; basic; and, safely managed. Each level up from the bottom represents a significant improvement in the safety and security of the supply. A similar ladder exists for hygiene, and water and sanitation in healthcare facilities and schools.

Like the JMP, we use a combination of household surveys, infrastructure, water quality, and administrative data to estimate the proportion of the population being served at each level. We also consider other criteria including technology type, protection from contaminants, distance from home and availability. Reported changes in service levels since the 2017 baseline are based on geographies in which multiple data points are available between 2017-2025.

The JMP definitions do not always match perfectly to national norms and standards. In particular, there is disagreement about what constitutes 'safe' services. Despite this, we believe it makes sense to use JMP wherever possible. For more information on the JMP methodology, go to <https://washdata.org/monitoring/methods>.

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Message from the CEO and Chair

Ready to thrive in a changing world

The dismantling of USAID in January 2025 was an inflection point for global development – a rupture with long-lasting aftershocks. When we compared it to an earthquake, we anticipated deep, sustained disruption to a model of aid that had been living on borrowed time.

Progress is real — even if uneven

Despite the rupture, our mission has not stood still. Nearly six billion people now have access to safely managed water – roughly the global population in 2000. While much remains to be done, we are not just keeping pace with population growth; we are outrunning it. Water, sanitation and hygiene is a story of steady, often overlooked progress.

Change in complex public systems cannot be attributed to a single organisation. Our role is to contribute to strengthening the system, in collaboration with others, so that services continue to improve and sustain over time. The strongest evidence of our impact is not a single number, but a pattern of change over time.

For us and many of our partners, while 2025 brought real setbacks the overall pattern held:

- Systems becoming stronger with sustained engagement
- Institutions improving their ability to plan and finance services
- Service levels rising over time as a result.

You will find specific stories and examples of that pattern throughout this report, and we will continue to improve our ability to tell the story of this kind of gradual change and progress. We'll celebrate those who are being served and whose lives are becoming more resilient, alongside the strengthened systems that allow this, – while always maintaining our focus on those who are underserved or not served at all.

Partnerships that endure

Partnerships remain central to our mission and our model, particularly our One For All alliance and Destination 2030 strategy. Across our network, we work with governments, technical agencies, financiers and civil society. Looking ahead, these partnerships will be central to a new strategy, defining our ambition, deepening impact, and positioning us as a force for systemic change.

Systems leadership matters more than ever

In an increasingly complex world, the ability to lead across silos is essential. Safe water and sanitation underpin resilience, economic development and healthy lives. We need leaders with the vision to understand this fundamental truth and the political, technical and managerial skills to act.

Our systems leadership essay and course, launched in December, provide an entry point for those seeking to build these skills. Leadership and nation building also underpin the Africa Water & Sanitation Systems Leadership Symposium 2026, in Kigali, Rwanda, in August.

Facing the financial realities

The USAID stop-work orders hit us hard. Nevertheless, our teams delivered a near breakeven result – an achievement we are proud of. With a structurally lower income base in 2026, stabilisation must come before growth. At the same time, we remain convinced we are on the right path and that our transformation will create new opportunities to deliver our mission. We remain grateful to our partners, clients, donors, supervisory board and staff – your trust enables our work.

Transforming tomorrow

The inflection in global development that we opened with presents us with a challenge: not whether to change, but how fast. That rupture is also an opportunity: to rethink resilience and relevance, to localise leadership and decision-making, to focus on high-impact interventions, to diversify funding sources – including domestic – and to build deeper partnerships.

For us, the answer is Riva – a new name for a new, networked model: a federation of independent, locally rooted organisations, each grounded in and accountable to its own context, drawing strength from shared mission and global reach. This is a culmination of more than a decade's work. We will build Riva by converting branch offices into independent national entities – locally-led and nationally registered, united by shared expertise, standards and ambition. Late 2025 saw the registration of a network hub and our first independent members in Ghana and the Netherlands, with Uganda to follow early in 2026.



Patrick Moriarty,
Chief Executive Officer,
IRC



Wambui Gichuri,
Supervisory Board Chair,
IRC



How we work and what we've achieved

We exist to support nations to build strong local and national services, underpinned by resilient systems, that transform lives and build equity, justice and opportunity for all. We work with Water For People in the **One For All alliance**. Our joint mission is to close the gap in water and sanitation services for 20 million people locally – insights from which directly inform how we influence change for 200 million people nationally, 2 billion people globally.

We work through and beyond water, sanitation and hygiene to inform, influence and inspire the political leaders, decision makers, wealth generators and citizens who are remaking the systems that shape people's lives. Together we strengthen systems that transform lives.

What this meant in practice in 2025

In 2025, our work focused on helping governments turn ambition into strong and resilient systems. Some highlights include:

At local level, improving how services are planned, managed and delivered:

- **In Burkina Faso**, we supported the rollout of a digital platform that consolidated performance data from 168 rural water systems, enabling municipalities, operators and national authorities to jointly monitor services and take corrective action.
- **In India**, we strengthened local government capacity to plan and spend public finance more effectively, showing that service performance depends not only on funding levels, but on how well funds are used.
- **In Bangladesh**, we worked with partners to pilot climate-resilient sanitation solutions and support local innovation in response to flooding and salinity challenges.

At national level, translating practice into structural change:

- **In Uganda**, we supported the establishment of legally recognised district water authorities, embedding new governance arrangements in law and clarifying mandates for service regulation and long-term performance oversight.
- **In Ghana**, district-level water and sanitation master planning informed national policy dialogue, bringing local experience directly into decision-making and planning processes.
- **Across countries**, we strengthened sector coordination, financing approaches and institutional frameworks to support more effective and accountable systems.

At regional and global level, turning evidence into influence:

- We translated local and national experience into global learning through research, partnerships and convening.
- Platforms such as the WASH Systems Academy helped scale capacity and share lessons across countries, connecting insights to drive wider systems reform.

What an independent evaluation confirmed

An independent evaluation provided an external perspective on these results. In 2025, the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs conducted an evaluation of our programme. It affirmed that our work is making a difference, including to partner governments' policies and priorities. The evaluation recognised our distinctive contribution as systems experts - in policy development and integration across departments and disciplines; planning, finance, monitoring, service delivery; and capacity development. Our action research and collective impact initiatives have generated data and insights that governments need to make evidence-based decisions on reforms and investment. Our role as facilitator and mediator, bringing parties together for policy development, agenda setting, learning and networking (e.g., through the All Systems symposia) and local planning (e.g., through master planning in districts) has been highly acclaimed by our partners.

How we understand and measure change

To interpret these results, we use an approach that focuses on contribution rather than attribution. In complex systems, outcomes such as stronger institutions and improved service coverage cannot be attributed to a single actor. The way we measure our impact recognises that lasting change depends on collective action and mutual accountability among all actors involved.

We track progress using a combination of:

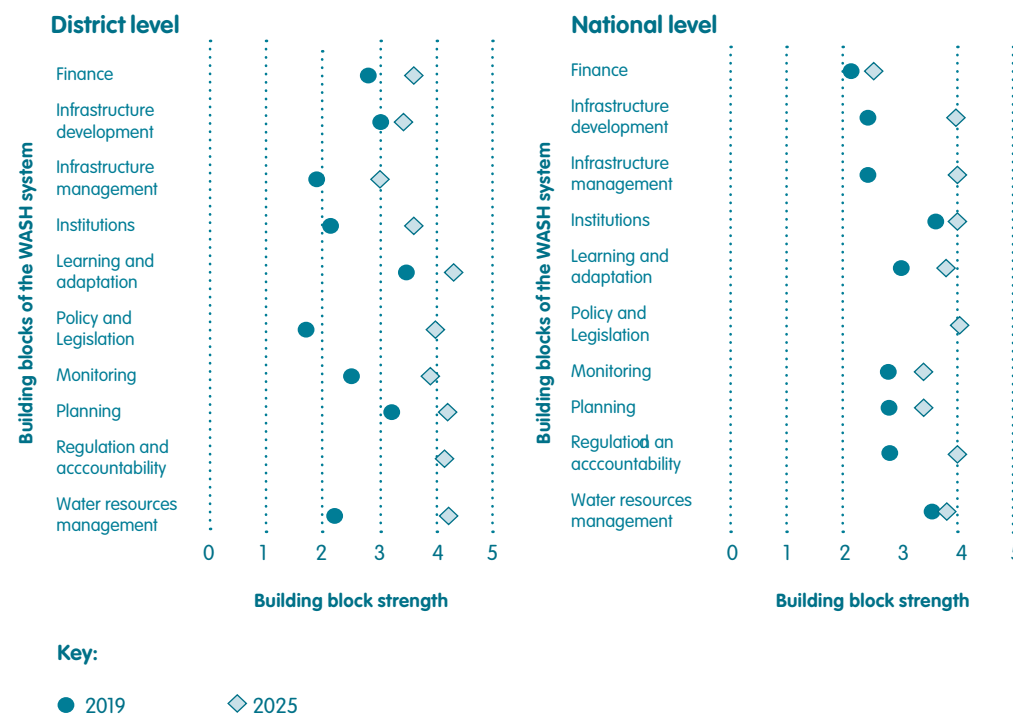
- Assessments of how system building blocks – such as planning, finance and accountability – are improving over time, and
- Service level data aligned with WHO / JMP standards.

What this shows overall

Our contribution can be seen in how change happens over time: sustained engagement leads to stronger systems and improved services, while progress slows where reforms are interrupted or constrained. In several cases, from analysis to policy and financing, our role can be directly traced – for example, contributing to earmarking 20% of district funds for water and sanitation in Ghana and to the development of national standards for healthcare facilities in Niger.

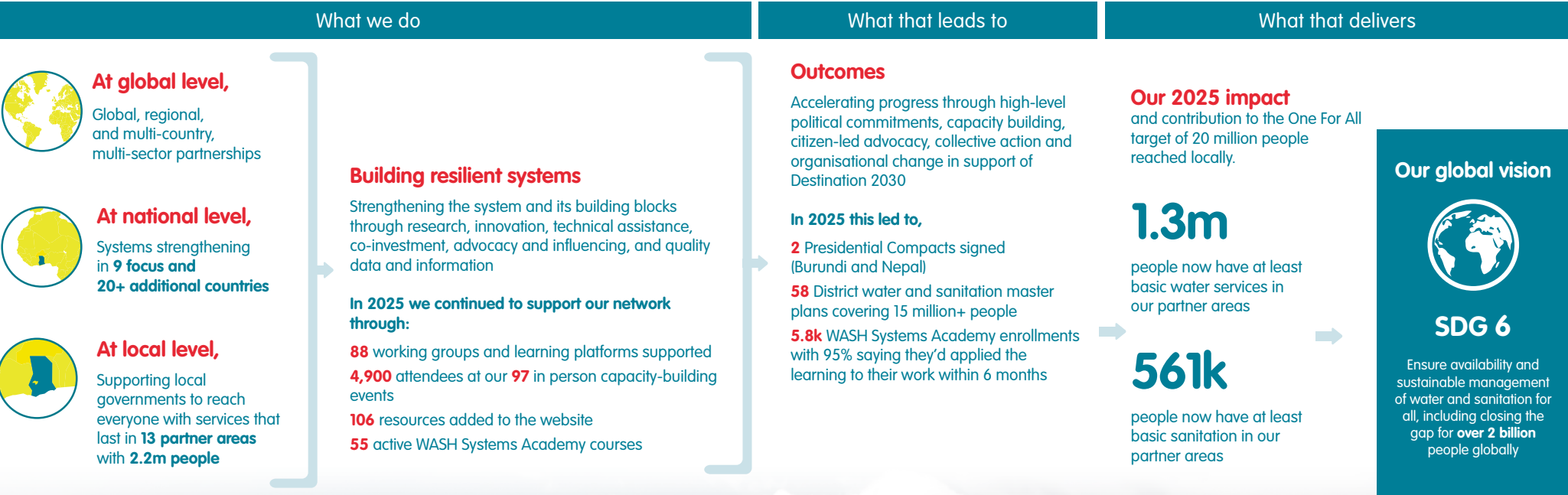
Since 2019, average national systems strength has gone up from 2.8 to 3.3, and for partner areas from 2.7 to 3.1. Across our partner areas, access to basic water services increased from 51% in 2023 to 58% in 2025, reflecting gradual improvements as systems strengthen.

Figure 1: Change in building block strength from 2019 to 2025 in our focus countries and partner areas.¹



¹ We capture systems strengthening by measuring progress on building the essential, interconnected components required to create sustainable, high-functioning water and sanitation systems (policy & legislation, planning, institutions, finance, infrastructure, regulation and accountability, monitoring, water resources management, and learning and adaptation). These are rated 1 (worst) to 5 (best). For more information about the methodology, please refer to Annex 1 of our 2025 Monitoring Report. Also see Understanding the WASH Systems and Its Building Blocks, 2018, Huston A. and Moriarty P.

IRC at a glance



The context of our work in 2025

108 people

in our flexible workforce:
79 staff, 8 hosted,
1 intern and 20 associates

85

Active programmes/
projects in 27 countries

€10.3

Million spent from
23 donors and
28 clients

Index



The largest part of our work happens in the following countries: Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Ghana, India, Mali, Niger, Rwanda and Uganda.



Through the One For All Alliance we contribute to impact in Bolivia, Cambodia, Central African Republic, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Honduras, India, Malawi, Peru, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda.



Through projects, consultancy and partnerships, we also worked in Burundi, Côte d'Ivoire, Djibouti, Kenya, Liberia, Mozambique, Nepal, Netherlands, Nigeria, Pakistan, Palestine, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Africa, South Sudan, Sudan, Tanzania and Zimbabwe.

Snapshots from our focus countries

These updates from our countries show how we're achieving systemic change at scale, driven by systems leaders working at local and national levels and influencing at the highest levels of decision making. Follow the links for more detailed stories on our website. For more information about our country, regional and global programmes and their latest challenges and achievements, see our **2025 Monitoring report**

Photo caption (right): The official transfer of a new water facility to communities and municipal authorities of Pouni.
Credit: IRC Burkina Faso.

Burkina Faso

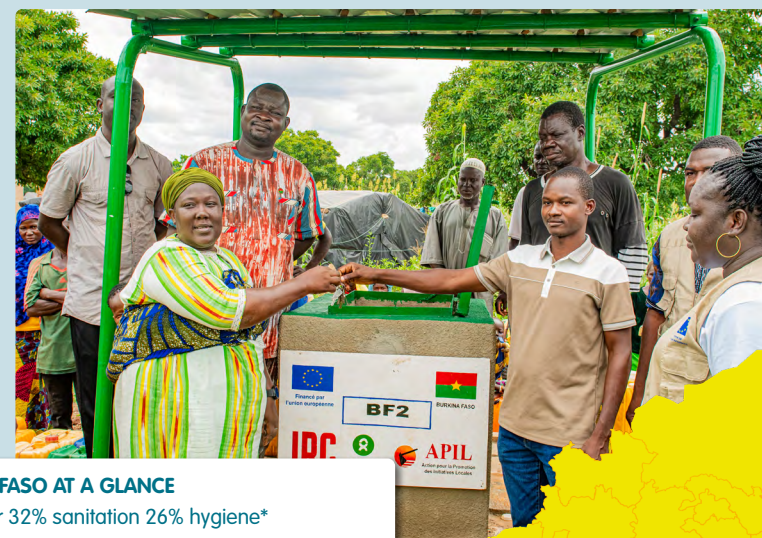
When data becomes a tool for governance and accountability

In Burkina Faso, rural piped water systems are operated under lease arrangements ('affermage') where private operators manage infrastructure on behalf of municipalities. For years, tracking the performance of these systems meant chasing paper registers across communes and waiting months for data that was outdated by the time decisions were made. The contracts and reporting obligations were in place. What wasn't, was a shared, reliable picture of how systems were actually performing.

Together with ONEA and the General Directorate of Drinking Water, we helped roll out a digital platform to track key performance indicators across leased water systems. We trained and supported operators in seven regions (Centre, Centre Ouest, Centre Est, Centre Sud, Boucle du Mouhoun, Plateau Central, Cascades) to regularly input technical and financial data: water volumes produced and sold, revenues collected, breakdowns, maintenance interventions.

For the first time, performance data from 168 water systems (of the 195 water systems under affermage across the programme's seven regions) was consolidated in one place, and visible to all operators, municipalities, state technical services and other stakeholders. This has improved transparency, ensured everyone was working from the same information, and strengthened the ability of public authorities to monitor service delivery and enforce contractual obligations.

The real breakthrough came when that data stopped being a reporting exercise and became a governance tool. Regional performance review workshops brought more than sixty stakeholders together per region (operators, municipalities, technical services, regional governors) to interrogate the reports. They asked questions like, 'Why do breakdowns persist?', 'Why are revenues insufficient to cover maintenance?', 'Why are contracts not enforced?'. These weren't comfortable conversations, but they led to concrete decisions. Ten critically underperforming systems have already been prioritised and developed into ready-to-finance investment projects, targeting real needs instead of assumptions.



BURKINA FASO AT A GLANCE

50% water 32% sanitation 26% hygiene*

11 staff

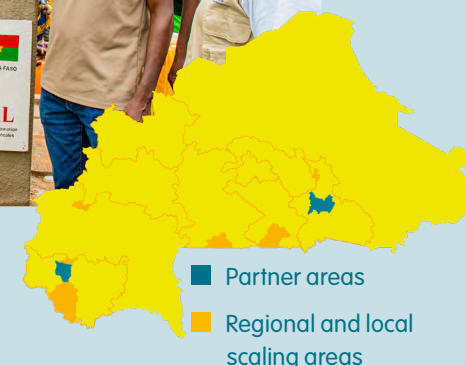
5 projects

€ 1.5 million project revenue

2 partner areas

379,835 population of partner areas

* Percentage of country population with at least basic services (JMP) - applies to all service level data



There have been challenges. Institutional reforms – like reorganising the Ministry of Water – slowed engagement at national level. Data quality varied. Supporting operators to report consistently required time, coaching and repeated presence in the field.

“Despite the efforts made, sustainable access to safe drinking water remains a challenge. This requires us to improve the management of our infrastructure and strengthen our collective responsibility to ensure reliable services for communities.”

- Adama Jean Yves Bere, Governor of the Centre-Ouest Region.

Bangladesh

Innovation in the face of climate change, flooding and salinity

Climate change is reshaping how people access water and sanitation – most visibly in the flood-prone Haor wetlands of the northeast and the saline-affected coastal belt.

In the Haor, for nearly half the year, seasonal floods turn villages into islands. Toilets are washed away, pits collapse, and many households are forced back into open defecation. Together with BRAC, we launched an innovation effort to address this – supporting communities to adopt climate-resilient latrines, understand contamination risks and commit to becoming open defecation free. BRAC leads implementation on the ground: mobilising communities, forming local sanitation groups, and supporting households and sanitation entrepreneurs. We provide technical guidance, support troubleshooting, and ensure learning is captured.

We've developed two technical manuals – [Sanitation options for Haor areas](#) and [Sanitation option for Haor areas: Septic tank](#) – alongside a Bengali version of our [community mobilisation guideline](#) to improve sanitation. Progress is now being monitored on a monthly basis.

The [BRAC-IRC Water Hackathon](#) held in Dhaka in July 2025, focused on safe drinking water in climate-vulnerable coastal areas. We received more than 240 submissions, with 11 finalists pitching their ideas to a multi-sector jury. The winning innovation, JolBondhu, proposed a smart, community-driven water grid combining rainwater harvesting, reverse osmosis, and digital tools for local management. The runner-up, Atmospheric Moisture for Coastal Communities, explored capturing water during wet and dry seasons. Both solutions will be piloted through the BRAC-IRC programme.



BANGLADESH AT A GLANCE

99% water 68% sanitation 72% hygiene

1 staff

Our projects in Bangladesh and India are part of our Asia Regional Programme with a total of:

9 projects

€ 220 thousand project revenue



Scaling area

“This Hackathon is a powerful way to capture the organic thinking of the young generation – what they truly think, unfiltered and full of potential. The ideas went beyond just technology and embraced social solutions as well.”

- **Professor Tanvir Ahmed**, Hackathon jury member.

Photo caption: Haor, where we're turning climate vulnerability into a spur for lasting systems change.

India

Helping local governments make the most of public finance

Our work focused on a critical question at the heart of sustainable water and sanitation services: how can public finance translate more effectively into local action? This question was particularly relevant in the context of India's Finance Commission.

Every five years, the President of India appoints a Finance Commission to decide how public money is shared between national, state and local governments. Recognising water and sanitation as national priorities, the 15th Finance Commission (covering 2021/2 to 2025/6) recommended that 30% of grants to rural local bodies be used for drinking water-related activities, including rainwater harvesting and water recycling; and another 30% for sanitation and maintaining open-defecation-free status.

We analysed how these recommendations translated into practice. Reviewing allocation and expenditure data for rural local bodies, the analysis revealed a persistent challenge: Finance Commission grants were underused. Spending on water and sanitation, in particular, remained below the recommended combined 60% in most states.

However, the picture was notably different in four rural local bodies where we had supported targeted capacity-building activities through the Watershed programme between 2016–2020. These local governments showed significantly higher levels of expenditure, showing that when local institutions have the skills, confidence and systems to plan and spend, public funds are used more effectively.

The findings point to a clear conclusion: the challenge is not the absence of funding, but the capacity to use it well.

Photo caption: A water tank created under Jal Jeevan Mission in Assam.



INDIA AT A GLANCE

96% water 83% sanitation 72% hygiene

2 staff

Our projects in Bangladesh and India are part of our Asia Regional Programme with a total of:

9 projects

€ 220 thousand project revenue

Scaling area

“As the cardinal source of funds for local bodies in India, Central Finance Commission grants are of great interest to policy and financing enthusiasts. As someone who has worked with IRC colleagues on WASH financing for over a decade, I am glad to see **this analysis** of the 15th CFC allocation and utilisation by rural local bodies in India, with a spotlight on Odisha state. The eGramSwaraj portal has major limitations; still, as the only public source of data on the local use of CFC funds, it remains key to leveraging change. Many thanks to Ruchika Shiva, Shiny Saha and others behind this important report.”

– **V. R. Raman**, WASH Policy and Financing Expert, formerly associated with WaterAid India and the Centre for Budget and Governance Accountability.

Ethiopia

South Ari: eight years of systems strengthening are paying off

We've been working with South Ari district since 2017, supporting local government to move beyond short-term infrastructure fixes towards stronger rural water systems. From the outset, the emphasis has been on planning, monitoring, financing and water resources management – building the conditions for sustainable service delivery.

A turning point came when the district chose to develop its own water and sanitation master plan – led and owned by the district Water and Energy Office, supported by our tools and facilitation. The plan has become a practical guide for budgeting, annual planning and reporting – and a foundation for long-term decision-making.

In 2025, this investment paid off. When water quality tests mid-year showed that drinking water failed WHO standards, district authorities acted quickly, implementing Water Safety Plans. Within seven months, water quality improved through frequent chlorination, protection of water sources, enforcement of safety regulations and communities taking ownership.

The results reflect deeper change. Since the master plan was completed in 2019, water service coverage in South Ari has increased from 21% to 40%. Building block assessments now show most system components rated green – in 2017 they were mostly red and orange.

As district leadership and community members emphasised during [our video of Shishir Kebele's water journey](#), the difference lies in ownership and mindset.

South Ari's experience has since spread – all woredas in the zone now have their own master plans and a cloud-based monitoring system.



ETHIOPIA AT A GLANCE

56% water 10% sanitation 6% hygiene

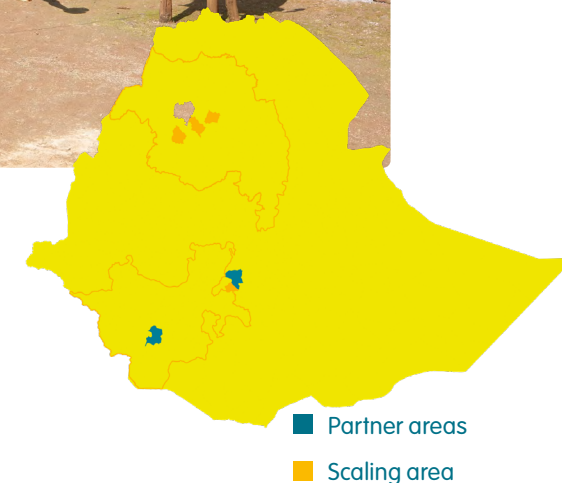
12 staff

9 projects

€ 666 thousand project revenue

2 partner areas

513,249 population of partner areas



“The community mobilisation improved community awareness and reduced dependency on the woreda government budget alone.”

- **Ajele Getu**, Head of the South Ari Water and Energy Office.

Photo caption: In Shishir Kebele, South Ari Woreda, health is flourishing as water services improve – with the community at the forefront of change.

Ghana

How district practice in Ahafo is reshaping national policy

Our systems-strengthening work in Ghana is grounded in long-term district engagement. Since 2017, we've worked closely with Asutifi North district in the Ahafo region, to pilot and refine a district-wide approach to water, sanitation and hygiene, supporting master planning that links infrastructure, service management, behaviour change and coordination. Over time, this approach has expanded across the Ahafo Region and created a foundation for regional learning and informed national dialogue.

We convened the [National Learning Exchange](#) in Accra with the National Development Planning Commission, WaterAid Ghana and CONIWAS. More than 95 stakeholders, including 17 Municipal and District Assemblies came together to draw lessons from district-wide water and sanitation work, and agree how to strengthen planning and scale effective approaches.

District leaders from Asunafo North, Asutifi North, Tano North and Tano South shared their experiences of leading master planning. Their reflections highlighted the importance of political leadership and local ownership. As the Municipal Chief Executive of Asunafo North said, "If we don't lead, no one else will. Water and sanitation must be part of our political priorities, not just donor projects."

Districts discussed integrating water and sanitation master plans into Medium-Term Development Plans. Asutifi North's Ahonidie Mpontuo model (meaning 'the cleanliness initiative') illustrated how district-wide planning can combine infrastructure with behaviour change, monitoring and stakeholder engagement including communities and traditional leaders. It also revealed persistent challenges such as financing gaps, sanitation backlogs and weak maintenance systems.

Photo caption: Dr. Beata Akanyani, CONIWAS Chair, shares key lessons and recommendations from the National Learning Exchange – where Ahafo's lessons went national.



GHANA AT A GLANCE

90% water 32% sanitation 45% hygiene

13 staff

10 projects

€ 1,3 million project revenue

4 partner areas

430,722 population of partner areas

■ Partner area

■ Former districts of engagement



We've also shared learning from Ahafo through regional platforms, including research on drivers and barriers to safely managed rural water services which we shared via the [Ahafo Regional Learning Alliance Platform](#). These insights have also informed [national policy discussions and professional forums](#), including the [Mole Conference](#) on professionalising rural water services.

"We must influence our peers - what works in one district can inspire others."

- **Hon. Pius Sampson Opoku**, Municipal Chief Executive for Tano North.



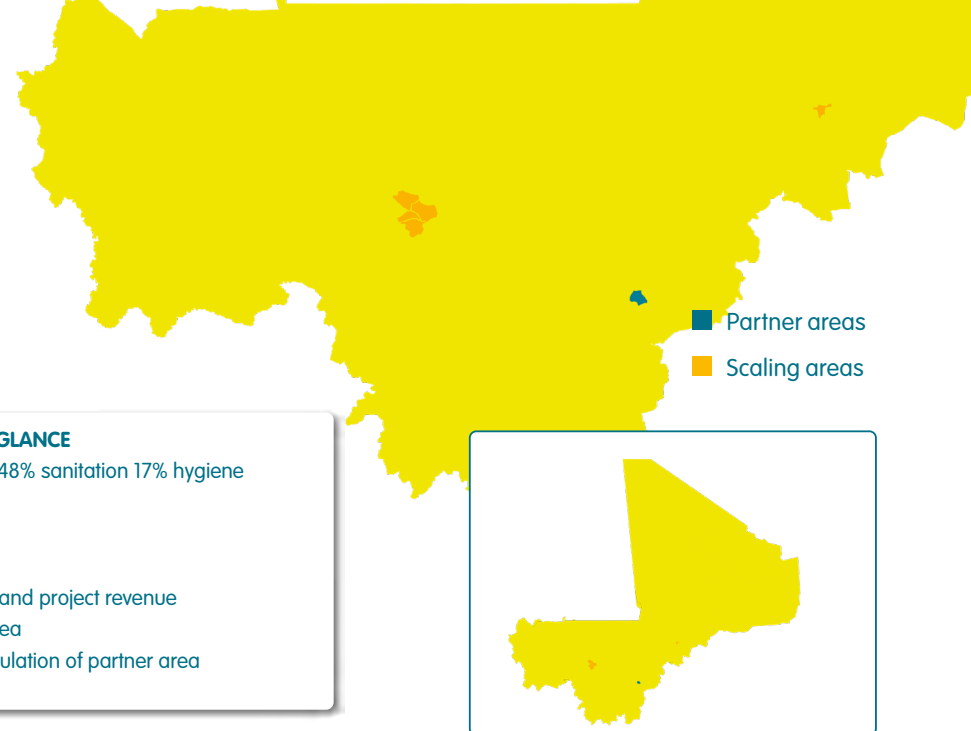
Mali

Standardising the cost of water and sanitation in healthcare

For years, Mali has had the roadmaps, the standards, and the WASH FIT evaluation tools for water and sanitation in healthcare. But no one knew how much it would cost to put these plans into reality. Prices for equipment and labour vary from one region to the next, and finding clean financial data can be a headache.

Under the leadership of the National Health Directorate (DGSHP), the national WASH Task Force composed of organisations such as IRC, World Vision, WaterAid, WHO, and UNICEF, shifted from estimation to evidence-based planning. At IRC, Mohamed Kané, Country Coordinator for the Mali office, served as the focal point. This was the birth of the WASH Costing Tool.

Our role was to turn technical ideas into a practical system. Instead of trying to solve every complex problem at once, we focused on finding a national average cost first. We identified more than 70 different cost lines, from physical pipes and toilets to staff training and the time needed to keep them running. We then helped structure the costs to match the minimum standards that every healthcare facility in Mali is expected to meet.



The real breakthrough came when the government, through the General Directorate of Health and Public Hygiene, decided this was a tool for the whole country, rather than just a project tool. Now, whether you're a government official or an international partner, everyone will use the same framework to plan and advocate for funds.

We are now moving into the field, where Mohamed Kané, alongside representatives from partner organisations, is leading the testing of the tool across multiple regions of the country, including Koulikoro, Ségou, Koutiala, Sikasso, and Bamako. This phase involves validating the model in five health facilities by comparing estimated costs with actual market prices, ensuring that the tool reflects real-world conditions.

"With this tool, we are no longer just talking about the ambitions of WASH FIT; we are beginning to quantify exactly what is needed to make it a reality across the entire country."

- Mohamed Kané, Country Coordinator, IRC Mali.

Photo caption: Fatoumata matron at the N'Gountjina Community healthcare facility.

Niger

How reliable data is opening new doors for investment

When the Ministry of Public Health and Hygiene established a Technical Working Group around our WASH FIT evaluation tool in 2020, no one knew where it would lead. But over time, we've developed trust, a shared vision, and a decision by government to make WASH FIT the common entry point for all water and sanitation work in healthcare facilities.

This year, alongside the Ministry, we rolled out WASH FIT 2.0 in the Dosso region, training health and water and sanitation officials who would go on to train others. We also documented WASH FIT experiences across the Sahel (Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger) in a [learning note](#).

But what's truly changed is that for the first time, we now know precisely who funds the sector, by how much, and where the gaps are, using WHO's TrackFin methodology. We worked with the Ministry, WHO, WaterAid, World Vision, and UNICEF, to develop an SDG 6 roadmap for healthcare facilities and we're now preparing a national roundtable to plan how we'll finance it.

Getting partners on board has taken time. Collecting data was another obstacle: CSOs are not always used to sharing financial information. And staff leaving means the loss of knowledge and relationships. This reminded us why it matters so much to anchor processes within systems, not individuals.

"What we're building in Niger is a culture where decisions are made on facts, not assumptions. That's the real lever for change."

– **Ismaël Ousmane**, IRC Sahel Niger.

Photo caption: Group photo taken during the development of IRC Niger's strategic plan.



NIGER AT A GLANCE

53% water 16% sanitation 22% hygiene

1 staff

2 projects

1 partner area

€ 135 thousand project revenue

224,533 population of partner area



Rwanda

The numbers behind Rwanda's systems transformation

Through the Isoko y'Ubuzima project, we helped strengthen governance of water and sanitation in ten districts while supporting WASAC – Rwanda's national utility – and the Ministry of Infrastructure to improve planning, regulation, and financing of services.

The results were both institutional and practical. Rwanda's water and sanitation system building blocks score increased from 3.4 to 4.0, reflecting progress in policy, regulation, infrastructure management and finance. At the Ntora pilot site in Kigali, lessons from Odisha, India, informed concrete action: new district metering areas, bulk meters, and 12 kilometres of replaced pipelines slashed the share of water lost through leaks or taken without being metered from 41% to 23% in Kacyiru Branch and to 9% in one isolated area of Ntora. These improvements were implemented by WASAC with support from JICA.

We also coached WASAC staff to prepare bankable feasibility studies, trained 41 district officers in market-based sanitation, and supported the inclusion of Systems Academy courses in Rwanda's universities. In districts, 138 board members responsible for water and sanitation oversight were trained to use community scorecards, giving citizens a stronger role in accountability.

Important challenges remain, including vandalism of infrastructure, weak urban sanitation systems, and funding gaps for rural projects, but the shift is clear.



"Kirehe District valued IRC's support in joint planning and implementation, which equipped district staff and water and sanitation board members with the knowledge and skills required for inclusive planning."

– **Modeste Nzirabatinya**, Vice Mayor, Kirehe District

Photo: Mr Modeste Nzirabatinya, Vice Mayor (economic affairs), Kirehe District – one of 10 districts where systems reform is taking hold.

Uganda

Making reform stick: building the legal foundations for lasting services

Uganda's rural water and sanitation sector is undergoing one of its most significant governance shifts in decades, moving from fragmented, volunteer-based maintenance to a professionalised, accountable, and climate-resilient service delivery system.

Throughout 2025, we worked with the Ministry of Water and Environment and district local governments to turn the national Operations & Management (O&M) Framework into practice. A major milestone was the formation and gazettement of District Authorities and Water Boards. Gazetting means formally recognising these bodies in law through publication in the national Gazette, giving them legal status, clear mandates, and the authority to oversee tariffs, contracts, and service regulation. Without it, reforms remain temporary and unenforceable.

We also contributed to three influential national policy documents: the new Sanitation and Hygiene Policy, the WASH National Adaptation Plan (NAP) and the Climate-Resilient WASH in Schools Manual. Our ability to influence these processes was the result of long-term systems leadership. Years of district-level work in Kabarole and Bunyangabu gave us grounded insights into what works, what doesn't, and why. Global thought leadership on climate-resilient water and sanitation and alignment gave us the credibility to bridge global concepts with local realities and shape national policy direction.

Challenges remain, such as slow gazettement, limited O&M financing, and resistance to tariffs – but Uganda now has the institutional foundation for long-term sustainability.

Photo caption: Solar pumping station in Uganda, where we are supporting the shift to climate-resilient water services.



UGANDA AT A GLANCE

63% water 24% sanitation 25% hygiene

10 staff

14 projects

€ 1,3 million project revenue

2 partner areas

468,425 population of partner areas



■ Partner areas

■ Scaling area

“We are working closely with local governments and partners to scale up water coverage and ensure that O&M is embedded from the design stage through to long-term service delivery.”

- **Eng. Al Hajji Ssentubwe Ahmed**, Assistant Commissioner, Infrastructure Operation and Maintenance (IOM), Ministry of Water and Environment

Driving change regionally and globally

We build on the work we do locally and nationally to create change across regions and around the world – contributing to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals for everyone, everywhere. This work is coordinated through our Africa and Asia regional programmes, and our Global programme.

Global programme

Professionalisation, regulation and capacity

We build on what we learn locally to drive change globally bringing real voices and experience into global debate and action. Four leading outputs of our work in 2025:

1) Utilities play a crucial role in delivering safe, sustainable and efficient water and sanitation services. Yet many face persistent operational, financial and governance challenges.

Commissioned by UN-Habitat for the Global Water Operators' Partnerships Alliance (GWOPA), IRC and Water For People jointly produced the Global Outlook on Water and Sanitation Service Providers: Water for Sustainable Cities report. This places utilities at the heart of sustainable urban development, presenting new global data, identifying gaps, and outlining pathways to strengthen institutions.

2) Our related thematic overview paper, Regulating water supply and sanitation services, consolidated knowledge about regulatory functions, models, costs, and future

directions across diverse contexts – from large urban utilities to rural community management and self-supply systems.

3) We continued to position the WASH Systems Academy at the vanguard of our offer. In 2025 we developed new training modules and campaigns on issues from climate resilience to humanitarian action. We improved our monitoring of users, and increased the number of new clients – 5,858 people learned with us last year.

4) We supported the development of a harmonised set of indicators for monitoring systems strengthening and change through our involvement in Align to Accelerate, led by UNICEF, WHO and the World Bank. This will help shape how the sector tracks progress, sharpening reflection, decision-making and accountability in a more systemic way.

Sign up at:

www.washsystemsacademy.org



Photo: Talk show on the Global Outlook on Water and Sanitation Service Providers: Water for Sustainable Cities at the GWOPA Congress in Bonn, Germany.

Africa Regional

Building a platform for reform from Kigali

We set out to prove that Africa's water and sanitation crisis demands more than projects – it needs systems leadership. We published a working paper, [Financial credibility: key to the systemic transformation of water and sanitation in Africa](#), with a bold argument: that trust and credibility will unlock the investment Africa needs.

Simultaneously, we've been co-building the Africa Water & Sanitation Systems Leadership Symposium (Kigali, August 2026) as a credible political platform. With Rwanda's government as host and AMCOW as the continental anchor, ministers, utility CEOs, regulators, and development financiers joined the preparation as co-creators. They've been shaping transformation sessions, aligning the agenda with the 2063 Africa Water Vision, and positioning Kigali as a stepping stone towards the 2026 UN Water Conference.

"Reform attracts large-scale finance, not the other way around," became a rallying call – grounded in real evidence from Benin, Uganda, and beyond.

The path has not been straightforward. Competing political priorities and uneven technocratic readiness across countries has created structural uncertainty. Translating high-level interest into credible reform pathways requires sustained, patient engagement with a small number of leaders who are highly constrained.

Yet the narrative is shifting. African leaders are moving from asking for funds to discussing how to earn them – through systems that inspire confidence.

www.ircwash.org/africa

Asia Regional

Towards gender equity and social inclusion

We continued our focus on one of the region's most pressing challenges – climate change. Across Asia's most climate-vulnerable communities, water which is too much, too little or too dirty is threatening the very systems people depend on for life.

To meet these challenges, we looked beyond conventional answers. We brought together fresh perspectives – the curiosity of young innovators and the experience of sector experts – to co-create solutions that could ensure access to safe water, even in salt-affected regions. In Bangladesh alone, salinity now touches the lives of around 20 million, underscoring the urgency of our mission.

But our response to climate is rooted not only in science and infrastructure – it is also about people. Strengthening systems means including everyone. That belief guided our work on gender equality and social inclusion (GESI), culminating in a new course on integrating GESI into systems strengthening. This calls for a shift in mindset, acknowledging that equitable systems are resilient systems.

Alongside this, we continued to explore the financial foundations that make progress possible – advancing innovative finance models for sustainable water and sanitation. And in a powerful symbol of political will, the Heads of State in Nepal renewed their national commitment to water and sanitation for all.

Together, these efforts reflect our vision for Asia: a region where resilient systems, inclusive thinking, and shared commitment create lasting change.

www.ircwash.org/asia



"Towards Gender Equity and Social Inclusion Responsive WASH Systems Strengthening is an important document that helps us move from good intentions to real change. It shows that inclusion is not just an add on, but something that has to be built into the system.

This paper moves beyond rhetoric to practical solutions through examples, covering all the building blocks in systems strengthening. It gives practitioners and decision-makers a clear and strong way to build systems that are not only functional, but inclusive. I highly recommend this document to all water and sanitation practitioners."

- **Seema Rajouria**, Head of Policy Advocacy and Campaigns, WaterAid Nepal, Nakhipot, Lalitpur



WASH SYSTEMS academy

80% of countries lack the trained professionals needed to manage their water and sanitation services.
We are here to change that.



Here's how

Photo: Bénigne Ishimwe is a Lead Facilitator for the WASH Systems Academy.

Empowering people to transform systems for the better, for all of us

The WASH Systems Academy, or Systems Academy as it's now known, has come a long way since we first launched it in 2019. And the reason? Because securing universal access is a social and an institutional challenge, not a technological one. More than 80% of countries report that there aren't enough trained WASH professionals to manage on-site sanitation (pit latrines and septic tanks that treat waste from households) and small systems (community boreholes or gravity-fed schemes often in rural or peri-urban areas). Without the right knowledge, skills and tools, practitioners, service providers and governments will underperform. The Systems Academy is there to change that.

We take the latest research, synthesise and enrich it with real-life case studies and lived experience to create content that is relevant and fun. In 2025 alone we launched 16 courses on a wide variety of topics, including the water, sanitation and nutrition nexus, social inclusion, climate resilience and systems leadership. Courses can be taken separately or as a set within one of our thematic learning journeys.

Effective learning must be engaging, practical and tailored. That's why we offer a wide range of unique experiences: from self-paced online courses, to guided cohorts, hybrid programmes, in-country workshops and on-the-job support. We also have a track record of embedding courses in national training institutes and hosting private learning spaces for partners. 95% of people find opportunities to use our course content in their work within six months.

We know what we do works. By equipping individuals with critical skills, the Academy is building a network of empowered professionals working together to achieve systemic change.

To find out more and enrol in a free online course:
www.washsystemsacademy.org

Spotlight on our work in Rwanda

Our unique strength is that we are able not only to create and host course content, but also mobilise our global network of staff and our partners to lead hybrid and blended learning workshops.

In Rwanda, we supported Water and Sanitation Corporation national and district level staff, private operators, and young professionals to apply systems strengthening approaches in their work:



"The Systems Academy redefined how we approach project planning and execution. It gave me new tools to improve our planning processes. We now require consultants to include climate resilience components in their project proposals, and two such projects have already been validated."

Moise Irankunda, Geographic Information System Specialist at Water and Sanitation Corporation, Rwanda

The Academy at a glance

Our platform

50+ self-paced courses
5 learning journeys
7 languages
18,000+ enrolments since 2019

Our users

120 countries represented
81% from low and lower middle-income countries
26% government employees
52% less than 5 years work experience

Our impact

95% recommend our courses
90% report job-relevant improvements

Systems leadership in action

In 2025, IRC continued to advance its systems leadership agenda. Much of this came together through our online, interactive [Systems leadership essay](#) and its launch event in December. This brought together leaders including [Alex Simalabwi](#), a leading architect of Africa's Water Investment Programme and a central figure in repositioning water as a strategic investment priority at continental and global level.

In the essay, we make the case for systems leadership as an essential capability for our sector, calling on leaders at all levels to engage with complexity.

Our paper, [In search of deeper leverage points](#), examined what it takes to shift the underlying structures, relationships and mindsets that shape system performance.

Systems leadership was also evident in IRC's behind-the-scenes role supporting Presidential Compacts and national alliances. In Ghana, IRC played a leading convening role in 2025 to help move the Presidential Compact – committing to mobilise USD 1.7 billion per year to meet SDG 6 – into implementation. Similar alliance-building efforts took place in Ethiopia, Nepal and Uganda, contributing to a growing global movement engaging 25 governments to strengthen national water and sanitation systems.

Reflecting on Ghana's progress, IRC Country Director Vida Duti noted: "It was a momentous occasion. A triumph of systems leadership by many people. Ghana had raised water, sanitation and hygiene to the highest possible political level."

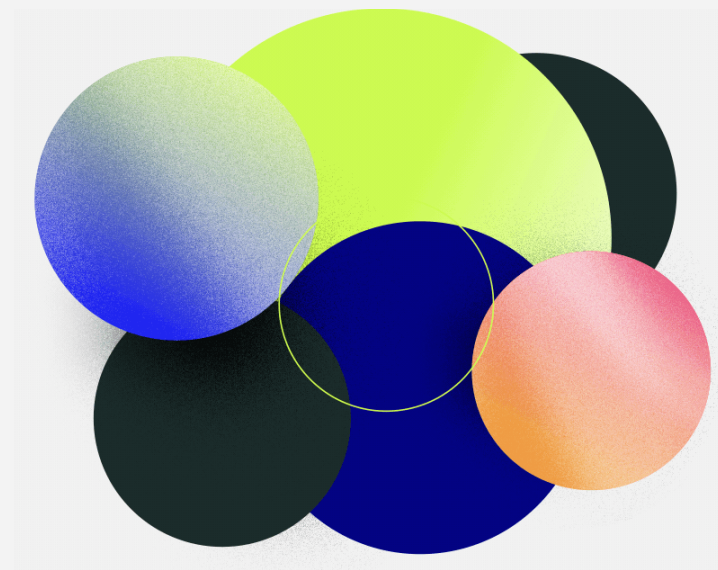
Senior leaders and practitioners across water, energy, climate and governance attended a systems leadership workshop at the Water and Development Congress & Exhibition 2025 in Bangkok, co-organised by IRC with the Asian Institute of Technology and the University of Leeds.

An ever-more complex world, with 'wicked', interconnected, problems, calls for a different form of leadership – **systems leadership**.

Systems leadership is a set of skills, behaviours and actions that any individual or organisation can use to catalyse, enable and support the processes of systems-level change to address the complex challenges of our time.

To build systems leadership capacity beyond our organisation, we launched a new course, [Systems leadership: the basics](#), for both emerging and experienced leaders.

Also in 2025 in partnership with AMCOW, we announced the Africa Water & Sanitation Systems Leadership Symposium, to be held in Kigali, Rwanda in August 2026 – which will launch Africa's Water and Sanitation Systems Transformation Agenda.



Global challenges require a
new kind of leadership

SYSTEMS LEADERSHIP



Speakers for the Systems Leadership campaign launch



Governance, staffing and finances

IRC SUPERVISORY BOARD

Wambui Gichuri (Chair) - Jan Sebel (Treasurer) - Akiça Bahri - Louis Boorstin - Clarissa Brocklehurst - Koos Wieriks

ORGANISATION AND STAFFING

On December 31, 2025, we had 79 staff members (as well as 8 whom we host for other organisations - 6 from Sanitation and Water For All and 2 from Agenda for Change) and one intern. In addition, we had 20 programme associates.

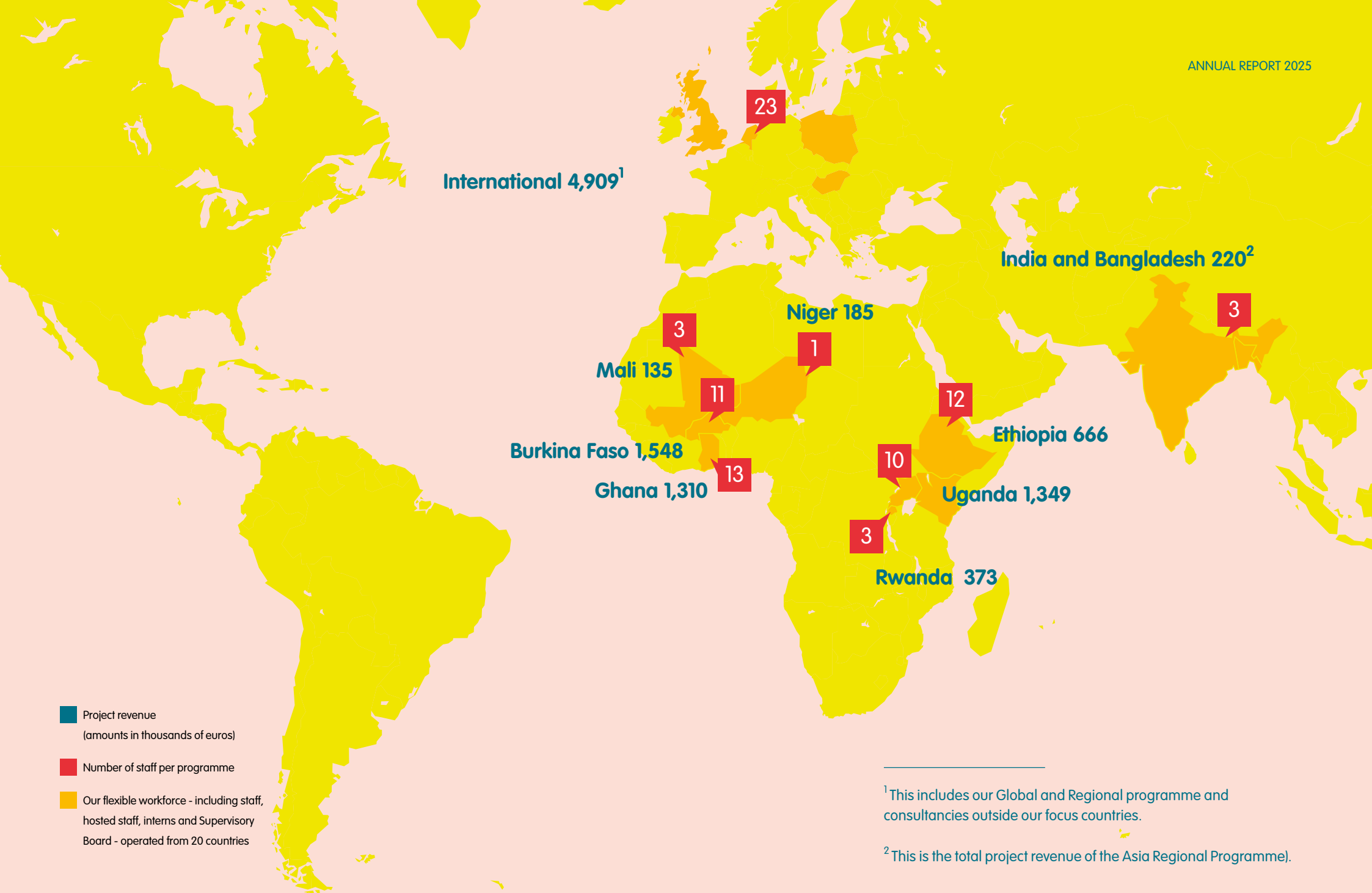
This combined workforce of 108 people was based in more than 25 countries: 61% in the Global South and 39% in the Global North.

In alignment with our transition to a network and a focus on cost efficiency, when staff have left, we've aimed to redistribute responsibilities among existing team members where feasible. When replacements were necessary, our priority has been to place network-wide roles within the Global South wherever possible.

INCOME STATEMENT 2021 - 2025 (AMOUNTS IN THOUSANDS OF EUROS)

Income	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Programmatic Funding DGIS	1,397	1,564	1,487	1,436	1,498
Other project funding	7,287	10,147	10,988	9,788	8,810
Total income	8,684	11,711	12,474	11,224	10,309
Expenses					
Personnel expenses	4,173	4,787	4,873	4,699	4,202
Direct project expenses	4,275	6,781	7,664	6,817	5,975
General admin expenses	488	207	283	110	157
Total expenses	8,937	11,776	12,820	11,626	10,334
Operating result	-252	-65	-345	-402	-25
Financial expenditures	-241	-123	-118	396	-300
Annual result	-12	58	-311	-6	-324

Photo caption: IRC staff and partners planting a tree on World Water Day in the Central-West Region of Burkina Faso.



¹ This includes our Global and Regional programme and consultancies outside our focus countries.

² This is the total project revenue of the Asia Regional Programme).

GENDER

Of the 88 staff members (including hosted staff), 42 identified as female and 46 as male. Although we're close to a 50/50 balance in terms of number of staff, when it comes to levels of work, we can see an imbalance in the roles of drivers, cleaners and facilitators (80% male), as well as at officer level and in senior management (at officer level, in management, most are men).

Our senior management consists of:

- 4 women (three from the Global South, one from the Global North)
- 6 men (2 from the Global South, 4 from the Global North)

DEVELOPING OUR ORGANISATION

In 2025, we continued to advance our transition towards a decentralised, networked organisation made up of independent national actors. Power and responsibility increasingly sat with country organisations, supported through the Directors Platform and a strengthened Secretariat. At the same time, we progressed our rebranding work, signalling our evolution towards a locally led, globally connected federation – laying the groundwork for the launch of Riva in 2026.

PROTECTION AGAINST SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE (PSEA)

We actively address PSEA. Initiatives include staff obtaining UNICEF PSEA certificates, having designated 'Trust Persons' that people can turn to, an established working group, improved policies, and bilingual accessibility of relevant information. We're aiming to comply with global standards, including for mediation support.

SUPPORTING OUR WORK

By working together through collective action, we can drive systems change and build resilient local and national water, sanitation and hygiene systems to achieve universal access for all by 2030. We are grateful to our partners and funders for helping us to get closer to our vision once again this year.

DIVERSITY EQUITY AND INCLUSION

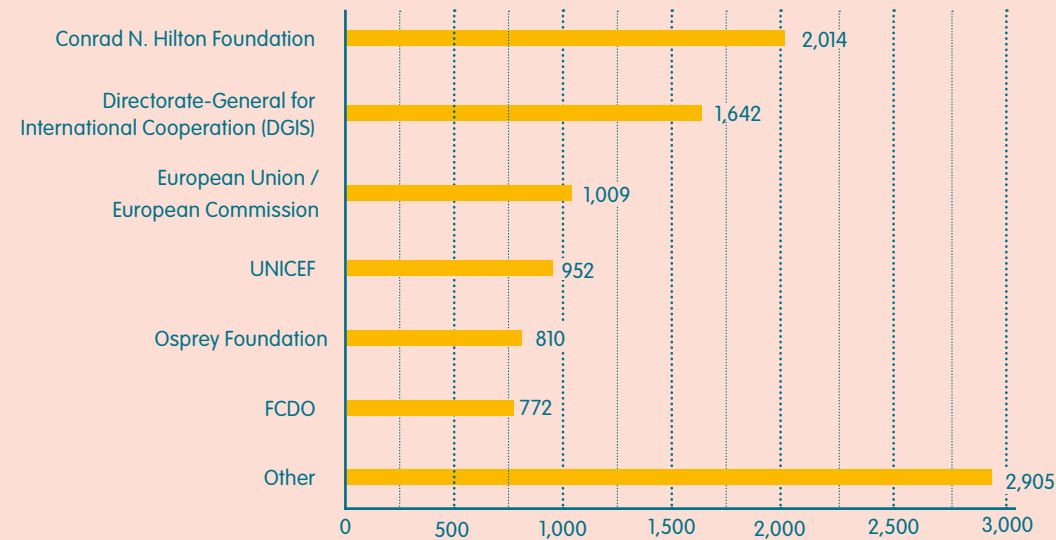
We believe that safe and secure water and sanitation services are a gateway to justice and opportunity for all people. This truth powers our mission.

We believe in diversity, in our teams and in the people with whom we engage, as we work towards this mission. We commit to actively reflect, learn, improve, promote and invest in a culture that supports diversity, justice, equity and inclusion.

We are committed to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and we will strongly advocate and promote the realisation of human rights in all that we do.

We will not engage in or tolerate any breach of human rights by our staff or associates.

OUR DONORS (AMOUNTS IN THOUSANDS OF EUROS)



We thank the following donors and clients - including those who support our consultancy work - for joining and supporting us:

African Development Bank / African Water and Sanitation Association (AfWASA) / Agenda for Change Secretariat / Aguaconsult / Anesvad Foundation / Aquaya Institute / BRAC / Conrad N. Hilton Foundation / Directorate-General for International Cooperation (DGIS) / Dutch Research Council (NWO) / Dutch Water Authorities / Endeavour Foundation / European Commission / Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) / Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) / German Toilet Organization / German WASH Network / Global Centre on Adaptation (GCA) / Global Water Operators' Partnerships Alliance (GWOPA) / James Percy Foundation / Max Foundation / Millennium Water Alliance (MWA) / National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies / Netcentric Campaigns / Osprey Foundation / Pictet Group Foundation / Population Services International (PSI) / Sanitation and Water for All (SWA) / SNV Netherlands Development Organisation / Splash / The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints / The Sanitation and Hygiene Fund (SHF) / United Nations Development Program (UNDP) / United Nations Human Settlements Program (UN Habitat) / United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) / United States Agency for International Development / Vitens Evides International (VEI) / Vitol Foundation / Wageningen Centre for Development Innovation / WaterAid / Water For People / Water Integrity Network (WIN) / Waterloo Foundation / Welthungerhilfe (WHH) / World Health Organization (WHO) / World Vision

Transforming tomorrow



Introducing Riva

The world has changed and so must we. In August 2026, IRC will become something new: Riva, a network of independent member organisations (previously IRC countries). Local teams of systems leaders who are globally connected, and working to support the development of resilient national systems and public services.

Over the past decade, we've been questioning old models of aid and developing an approach where we don't just serve the system in a country, we're part of it. We've been championing an approach where water, sanitation and hygiene sit at the heart of a vision for resilient public services, social justice and sustainable economic growth.

For our partners, this means continuity in what matters most: the same trusted relationships, expertise, and commitment. At the same time, we are evolving - strengthening how we work and expanding our ambition. While our focus remains consistent in the short to medium term, we will continue to grow and adapt alongside you.

What changes is that local leadership and locally driven responses to need, in the form of our services,

are now unequivocally at its heart. And we'll be stepping fully into our role as trusted advisors to nation builders: people at all levels of a nation's systems who, like us, are working to transform the lives of people – for the better, for all of us.

We've moved from a sole focus on a single sector to growing our influence as catalysts of systems transformation and strengthening across public services.

All that we currently do in water, sanitation and hygiene will continue. But we will work more actively and deeply with colleagues in health, education, climate, social justice, economic development and planning. We'll bring our insights and experience to tackle deep-rooted and interconnected problems in an integrated way.

Our mission is to inform, influence and inspire decision makers to place lasting water, sanitation and hygiene services at the core of their priority commitments, policy and investment strategies. As Riva, we look forward to doing that with you.

Explore more:
www.ircwash.org/blog/irc-changing

Across the world, essential public services - water, sanitation, health, education - are failing the people they exist to serve. Not because solutions don't exist, but because the systems that should deliver them are not strong enough.

That's the problem we exist to solve. And the stories in this report show what becomes possible when systems leadership takes hold - when the right people, at every level of government and society, work together with the confidence and skills to drive lasting change.

As the world has changed, so have we. We're stepping more fully into our role as trusted advisors to nation builders – working through and beyond water, sanitation and hygiene to inform, influence and inspire the leaders who can build resilient public services that transform lives.

But systems change is never the work of one organisation. It demands collective action – across governments, communities, civil society, the private sector and partners like you. Leadership at every level and commitment that outlasts any single project.

And as you're reading this, that includes you too.
If you're ready to think differently about the challenges you're facing, we'd welcome the conversation.