Harmonisation amongst CSOs, aligning with government and incentivising for change

Improving aid effectiveness: a global initiative

Aid effectiveness is about ensuring the maximum impact of development aid to improve livelihoods, reduce poverty and to support the achievement broad development goals. It is about improving the *quality of aid* and *its impact on development* through the implementation of various commitments for delivering and managing aid by developed and developing countries. The need to improve aid delivery to developing countries (across all sectors) has been recognised for some time and a set of principles has been developed with input of both donor and recipient countries, most significantly at the around the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness in 2005 (see box 1 below), with follow-up in 2008 (Accra) and in 2011 at the fourth high level forum on aid effectiveness in Busan, Korea.

Box 1: Paris Declaration

Paris Declaration aid effectiveness principles

1. **Ownership:** Partner countries exercise effective leadership over their development policies, and strategies and translate them into prioritised, results-oriented operational programmes which are effectively coordinated
2. **Alignment:** Donors base their overall support on partner countries' national development policies, strategies, institutions and procedures
3. **Harmonisation:** Donor countries and development partners co-ordinate their actions, simplify their procedures and share information
4. **Managing for Results:** Developing and donor countries manage resources for improved decision-making for development results.
5. **Mutual Accountability:** Donors and partners are mutually accountable for development results

Source: OECD-DAC http://www.oecd.org/dac/effectiveness/parisdeclarationandaccraagendaforaction.htm

The role of aid in the WASH sector

International aid (official development assistance or ODA) is delivered through many channels, ranging from government grants, charitable donations of individuals, NGOs and larger philanthropic funds, multi-lateral grants and concessional elements of loans. The proportion of ODA varies widely, but can be significant in many sub-Saharan African countries[1]. However, the WASH sector in many countries is generally more dependent on aid when compared to other sectors (DFI/Oxfam 2013), which makes the proper and effective use of this financing even more important. The provision of badly needed money to invest in the sector can bring many benefits and is generally focussed on financing infrastructure development for increasing first time access. Aid can also be used to have a catalytic role, supporting research, innovation and change processes that can strengthen the entire delivery 'system' from institutions, to policy and financing itself.

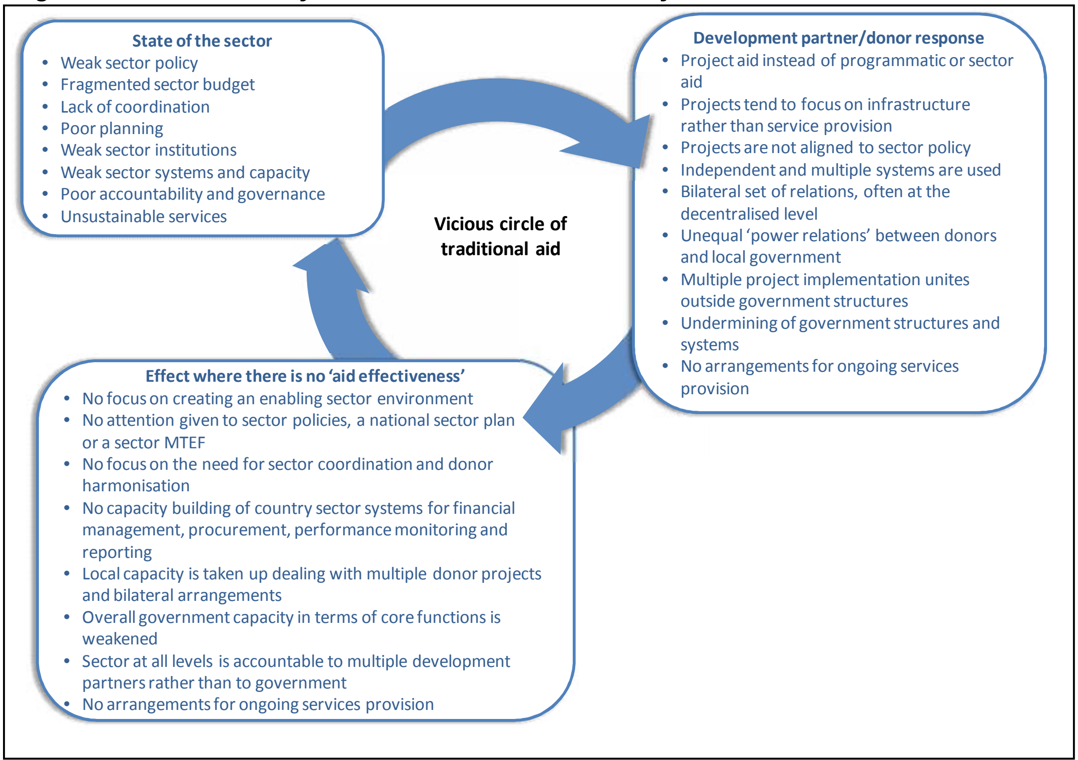
[1] ODA expressed as a % of GNI for the southern African region includes: Lesotho, 11.2%; Malawi, 31.5%; Mozambique, 14.9%, South Africa, 0.4%; Swaziland, 3.4%; Zambia, 4.4%; Zimbabwe, 6.5%; all figures, World Bank, 2014: http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/DT.ODA.ODAT.GN.ZS

Progress is being made in terms of improving the way that aid is delivered to the WASH sector, with more and more donor organisations now recognising that supporting and strengthening national systems and processes as the only long-term viable exit strategy. However, aid is often limited in duration and focus and delivery cycles can be short. In addition, upward accountability to donor institutions may create perverse incentives to show progress and deliver 'quick results' meaning that there is potential to negatively impact the development of long-term, national capacity and strengthening of 'indigenous' delivery systems.

Despite these risks and constraints, signs of progress are visible. For example, in 2010, the African Development Bank commissioned a two-part study, entitled '*Water governance sector in Africa', in which it states that 'eleven African countries are using the sector-wide approaches (SWAps) in their water sectors and many more in health or education sectors'*, namely Benin, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, South Africa, Senegal, Tanzania, and Uganda (nonetheless, the extent to which some of these constitute a full SWAp may be debatable). Increasingly countries themselves are establishing joint sector performance frameworks and issuing one common report for all donors, thereby eliminating duplication and parallel reporting systems. Since 2010, Ethiopia has moved to a fully-fledged SWAp named 'ONE WASH National Programme' which provides a common framework for all interventions in the sector for a country of some 94 million people.

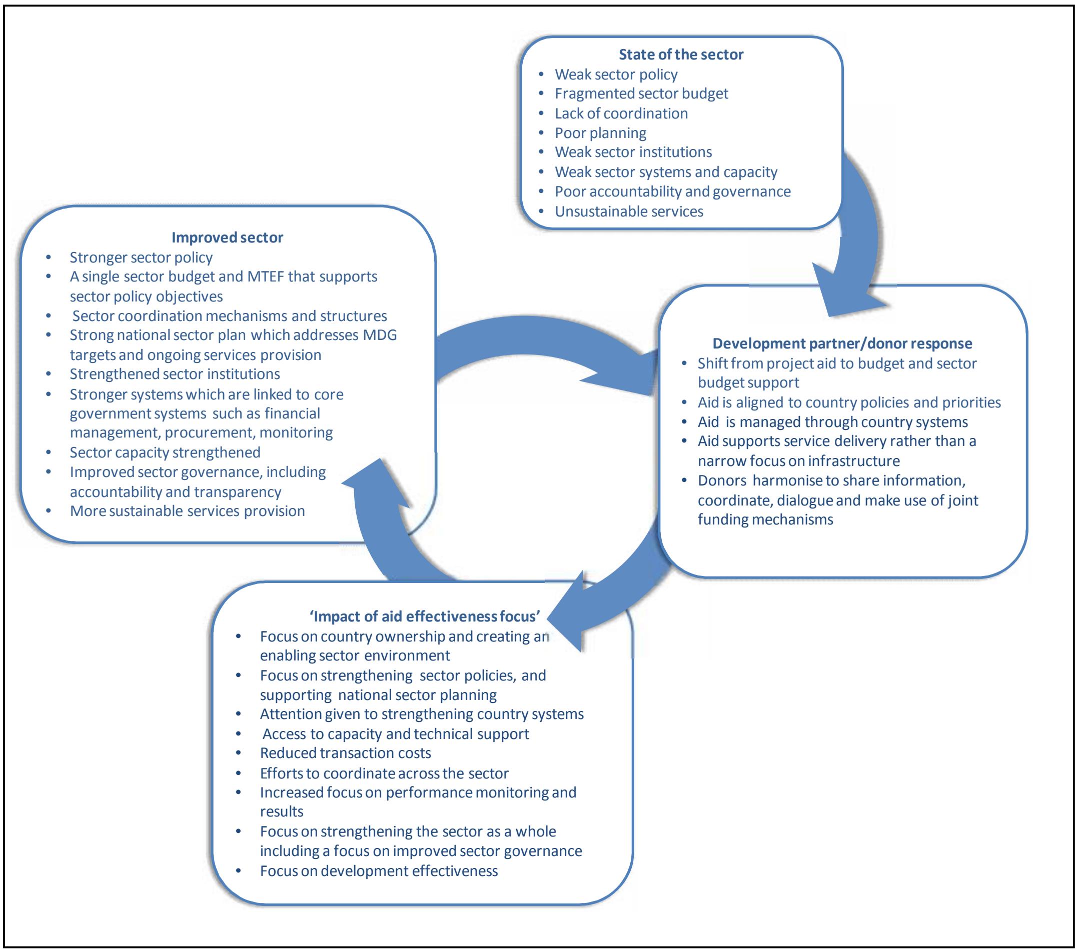
These developments bode well for the future and create a framework for the positive impact of aid which should move WASH sectors away from an uncoordinated, fragmented and parallel way of working to a more positive cycle of support to building country systems and leaving behind real capacity (see figures 1 and 2 below).

Figure 1: The vicious cycle of traditional aid delivery



(Source: adapted from Williamson et al 2008, in de la Harpe 2012)

Figure 2: Moving to the virtuous cycle of aid effectiveness



(Source: adapted from Williamson et al 2008, in de la Harpe 2012)

Aid Effectiveness at the Local Level

Notwithstanding the positive progress being made in improving how aid is planned and delivered in an increasing number of countries, there often can be challenges around how this can be pushed down to lower levels, including a disconnect with local government planning processes and establishing parallel delivery programmes. Indeed a number of studies indicate that improved aid effectiveness (signing up to SWAPs, basket funding mechanisms etc.) does not always translate into improved operational practice at sub-national and decentralised levels; this is seen as the next challenge for the aid effectiveness movement – to ensure partnerships '*reach beyond capital cities*' (Welle, Nicol and Van Steenbergen, 2008).

Most sectors do employ some sort of district level platforms or bodies to ensure the effective coordination of actors from the public, private and aid sectors. These are variously referred to as district WASH committees, coordination teams or groups and should ideally be led and managed by staff from decentralised Local Government with responsibility for service delivery. In some contexts where there has been a transition from an emergency or humanitarian situation, coordination may still be organised around the 'WASH cluster' system, often led by UNICEF.
However, in too many cases such formal coordination mechanisms can be undermined by NGOs, and bi-laterally funded programmes, or disregarded completely. For example, in

Uganda, which is one of the earliest adopters of the SWAp mechanism, coordination of different development partner efforts is not always easy when it comes to local and international NGOs operating at district level. While there are examples of good coordination mechanisms at district level between local governments, user groups, NGOs and development partners (such as the District Water and Sanitation Committee in Uganda), attendance, performance and impact of these committees is patchy, and often depends on the diligence of district level staff. This is perhaps a reflection of the fact that some 47% of assistance for rural water still by-passes the central government's basket funding mechanism (2012). In many countries, despite the fact that local government has the mandate and authority to coordinate the efforts of NGOs and development partners in the sector, it is often merely informed at most, and completely by-passed at worst.

Intra-governmental harmonisation can be problematic

While there has rightly been a focus on development partners to improve their actions and be more in alignment with government led priorities and processes, there is also a case for improving the recipient government's coordination and harmonisation approaches. It is clear that coordination between government ministries or departments can also be problematic, particularly where there is a mix of deconcentrated and decentralised entities. As decentralisation becomes more established, there is a trend for funds for WASH development to increasingly be channelled through ministries of Local Government or special financing for area development planning with a resultant duplication and lack of coherence between different investment schemes.

Strengthening institutional capacity

Strengthening core government systems—national planning, budget and expenditure management, procurement management, human resources management, civil service reform, and decentralized service delivery—establishes a strong base for improving the quality of services. The 2010 AMCOW country status overviews of water supply and sanitation found that between 1990 and 2008, many low-income stable countries—Benin, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritania, Mozambique, Niger, Rwanda, Senegal, Tanzania, and Uganda are examples—made more progress in meeting their water and sanitation targets and reducing open defecation than such resource-rich countries as Angola and Nigeria. The WASH sector was then integrated into these systems: 'connecting the water sector to core government systems better positions countries to implement water and sanitation services at scale' (de Waal, 2010).

Strong national systems cannot make water services universal and sustainable if local authorities are ineffective, and thus initiatives to improve aid effectiveness should include capacity building for local authorities alongside fiscal decentralisation. A challenge in some countries is the inability to maximise opportunities for institutional development at the local level. External support is often limited to national institutions, even when systems at the local level are barely functional. Thus local monitoring, procurement, and reporting remain weak or lacking.

Incentives for improved cooperation and harmonisation

Both institutions and the people who work in them respond to incentives and equally may be dissuaded from action by disincentives, either perceived or actual. For example, weak (cultural) traditions of participation may limit the extent to which individuals are willing to either consult citizenry, or for citizens to voice their views and concerns. There may also be an absence of incentives in government/sector policies for participation in service delivery. The converse may also be true whereby government policy and administrative frameworks actively seek to incentivise participation (for example, in Namibia there is a decree under the law for decentralisation to attract civil servants to be posted in remote rural areas or difficult peri-urban settings (UNDP/CLGF, 2012).

One way of incentivising improved harmonisation is by the ‘stick’ of legislation which sets out requirements for CSOs to coordinate and collaborate with local planning bodies, such as district water and sanitation committees or platforms. Ultimately this relies firstly on the awareness about such legislation and secondly a willingness to comply on the part of non-state actors. However, this can be effective, for example, in Ghana the government’s parastatal Community Water and Sanitation Agency passed a new legal instrument in 2013 to enforce sector regulations, one of which is compliance on the part of NGOs to coordinate, share information and harmonise their actions at local level with District Water and Sanitation Teams.

Other means of persuasion for NGOs to coordinate and harmonise planning is to charge a fee for operating in the area, although the fee may be more symbolic than providing any serious level of income. This has been introduced by some exasperated districts with extreme issues around coordination (for example in Napak district Uganda) and the idea behind it is that if the NGO in question is serious it will pay the fee and coordinate.

In terms of incentivising local government and its staff to cooperate many aid projects have historically achieved this via the payment of cash per diems, sitting allowances or attendance payments; in short, a financial incentive to participate. Whilst this is probably an effective short-term measure it often results in a culture of expectation and undermines initiative for personal development. There are a growing number of positive examples of incentivising local government staff through non-financial means, such as training, professional recognition and creating ‘league tables’ where the prize, or incentive, is to see the district be rewarded simply by coming ‘top’. This has worked particularly well for example in India where such performance rewards have been institutionalised and high performing districts take great pride in seeing their efforts recognised by state sponsored ‘Clean Village Prize’ (WSP, 2007).

Other mechanisms can include motivate district staff to take pride in what they do. International NGOs partnering with district local government often take part in international conferences, presenting work done and sharing experiences. Providing the opportunity for Local Government staff to attend and present can be highly incentivising and will often be the only chance such staff will get to travel internationally.

Resources

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