Monitoring WASH Services at the Local Government level

In areas not served by formal, larger scale utilities, current approaches to monitoring WASH services often focus on simple measures of coverage: numbers of systems built and people served. But the reality is that many systems break down within a few years of installation due to lack of support for operations and maintenance and people who were counted as served are left without a reliable service. Communities that were considered Open Defecation Free (ODF) can slip back over time with the associated public health risks. Therefore, as well as assessing coverage only, monitoring systems should include aspects of the levels of service provided over time. In addition, where possible monitoring should include the performance of service providers or operators; ultimately the performance of Local Government itself in its role of assuring services should also be monitored.

Effective monitoring systems should not be stand-alone, or project-based, but rather align with and feed into broader Local Government information management systems that capture other basic service delivery indicators relating to health, education, nutrition for example. In this way, local authorities can build up an informed, comprehensive picture of what is happening in their jurisdiction and plan and react accordingly. Data collected at local level should also feed into national monitoring systems so that a picture is built up at regional and national level about overall progress and need for investments. The challenge is often how to integrate these flat, or horizontal systems (at Local Government level) and the more vertical demands for data from central government ministries.

Most importantly, monitoring systems at both local and national levels should enable feed-back loops to inform both operational and policy or decision-making, so that action can be taken to improve identified problems. At national level, monitoring systems should allow for sector performance measurement and analysis which in turn can inform decision-making about resource allocation and research into areas of poor – or of good – performance and to hold service providers to account.

Monitoring sustainable WASH services

Measuring the level of service provided by a system and its sustainability over time is a complex challenge. The most commonly used proxy indicator for sustainability is functionality, which is usually measured during a one-off check on a water or sanitation facility to determine whether the system is working and/or being used regularly. To provide a more meaningful assessment, functionality must be tracked over time to give a picture of sustainability. Functionality at the time of data collection may be 'zero' or 'sub-optimal', but if the capacity exists to take remedial action by the householder or operator this may still represent an acceptable overall level of service.

Reliable data and monitoring indicators that measure the service provided and establishing sector targets are both important elements in creating more sustainable WASH services at scale. Ultimately this should result in a comprehensive, national monitoring system that provides government, service providers and users with the information necessary to set

targets, monitor progress, take corrective action and ensure accountability. In larger, formal utilities operating in most major urban centres such data collection is usually a normal part of day to day working and many utilities subscribe to national and internationally accepted indicators of performance for coverage, water consumption and production, non-revenue water, billing and collections, financial performance etc.; for further details see IBNET (The International Benchmarking Network for Water and Sanitation Utilities).

Monitoring aspects to consider at the local level as a means of assessing and supporting more sustainable services include three key aspects:

- The **services** received by users, usually in terms of quantity, quality, accessibility and reliability over time;
- The **performance of service providers or operators**, in terms of fulfilment of basic technical, financial, management and organisation functions necessary to deliver a sustainable service;
- The **performance of the service authority**, in terms of fulfilment of planning, coordination, regulatory, and support functions necessary to ensure the establishment and performance of service providers.

Monitoring services

The service provided to consumers is often prescribed in sector norms in terms of a number of pre-set criteria. This is now also captured at the global level by the human right to water and sanitation which cites that access to services *"must reflect the criteria of availability, safety, acceptability, accessibility (including reliability,) and affordability"*, as well as monitoring to ensure increased access for those most in need and without discrimination (de Albuquerque, 2010).

To monitor a service, there first needs to be agreement on the service level. So, for example, a basic level of rural service could be defined as 20 litres per capita per day of safe drinking water, requiring no more than 30 minutes per day to collect, and provided with a reliability of 95%. Deciding on service levels is a political process that is negotiated between government authorities, service providers and users. Normally the parameters of a service are set out in normative or policy guidance documents developed by a central government ministry with responsibility for water and/or sanitation; such norms may vary across urban and rural contexts. Typical service parameters for rural water supply are provided in table 1 below.

Service parameter	Typical definition	Typical Unit
Accessibility – distance	Distance in meters to improved source	Ranges in metres
Accessibility – crowding	Number of users per improved source	Ranges in people (i.e. <500 people)
Quantity	Volume of water provided over a defined time period	Litres per person Cubic metres per connection
Quality	Presence/level of faecal coliforms	Count per ml
	Percentage of samples tested for residual chlorine that pass the relevant standard	%
Reliability (also continuity)	Average time of service availability over a defined period	Hours per day Days per week Weeks per month
	Average downtime	Days per week Weeks per month

Monitoring service providers

Service providers may be community water committees or public/private sector operators and for sanitation may also include utilities, but more commonly small private independent operators (for pit emptying) and households. They are expected to perform a range of functions, either themselves or by contracting specialised providers. Basic parameters for most rural or small town systems would include:

- Technical or operational functions: preventative and corrective maintenance, repairs and more major rehabilitation works, as well as source protection and chlorination.
- Financial functions: calculation and collection of tariffs, auditing of accounts; and
- Governance and management: keeping records and reporting, organising meetings with comsumers, resolving disputes where necessary, disconnecting a service for non-payment.

In larger urban settings with formal utilities the performance indicators for operators are more invovled and complex covering non-revenue water, ratios of industrial to residential supplies and tariffs, staff per thousand connections, operational costs per cubic meter of water sold, maintenance response times etc.

Even in less formalised settings, where small local private operators or community management models may be the norm, well-performing service providers are critical for the long-term functioning of systems and therefore for the sustainability of services. There are a number of examples of monitoring frameworks which have been applied to systematically assess the performance of service providers. Examples of some of the more common parameters include:

Technical functions:
- No. of repairs carried out in a given reporting period
- Availability of spare parts and consumables
- Periodicity of water quality sampling

Financial functions:
- Presence of a bank account in name of management entity
- Periodicity of financial audits
- Proportion of annual revenue to operational expenditure
- Tariff setting in accordance with national norms and/or local byelaws
- Transparency of billing systems and/or tariff collection

Management and organisational functions:
- Actively functioning water or sanitation management entities (committees for most rural settings and boards or operators for small towns); this parameter commonly also includes a gender ratio
- Absence of political interference in decision-making
- Merit-based selection of technical and management staff
- Frequency and transparency of information sharing with consumers (financial audit, performance reporting etc.)

Monitoring service authority functions and performance

'Service authority' functions, often carried out by Local Government, include establishing and enforcing byelaws where appropriate, planning at the local level for new infrastructure or rehabilitation programmes, letting of contracts for construction and/or management of systems and monitoring and providing oversight and back-up support to service providers. In some contexts Local Government may act as the primary service providers and operate systems directly, although this is less common. In some countries Local Government is also mandated with performing some aspects of regulation.

Monitoring of service authority functions is valuable as it provides insight into whether or not these critical functions are being undertaken and introduces an element of performance assessment. In cases of decentralisation of service authority functions, monitoring can help to identify gaps and measure progress in strengthening local governments. It is important to note here that because local government functions extend well beyond only water and sanitation provision, the type and range of indicators used may reflect fulfilment of broader mandates and responsibilities. Two sets of examples are given below, the first from Ghana and the second from Malawi.

A recently developed monitoring framework being scaled up by the **Community Water & Sanitation Agency** (CWSA) in Ghana demonstrates how service authorities can be monitored at an aggregated level. Under the 'enabling environment' category, these service authorities (Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies) whose job it is to monitor and support service providers, are themselves monitored by the regional CWSA office (see table 2).

Table 2: Selected examples from Monitoring Performance Framework for Metropolitan and Municipal District Assemblies (MMDAs)

Performance parameter	Definition	Unit
Capacity for WASH service delivery at Metropolitan and Municipal District Assemblies	Presence, composition and resourcing of District Works Department	Presence/absence and level of resource/support
Monitoring of O&M functions	Ratio of Water and Sanitation Management Teams monitored at set times per year	%
District Water and Sanitation Planning	Presence and development process of district plan and integration into Medium-term Development Plan	Presence/absence
Budget allocation for WASH	Planned versus allocated budget dedicated to WASH by MMDA	Presence/absence; % of budget utilisation

Source: selected examples from CWSA, 2014 Framework for Assessing and Monitoring Rural and Small Town Water Supply Services, Community Water and Sanitation Agency, Ghana

In Malawi under the Local Development Fund financing mechanism the **Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development** has established a performance framework for assessing rural assemblies as part of an accountability and incentivisation process. These performance assessments are carried out regularly and apply to both general functions (e.g. governance, financial management, budgetary oversight, planning etc.) and to a number of sector-related performance indicators. The designers of the performance handbook specified a number of core indicators specifically for the WASH sector during its

development in 2009 as shown in table 3 below; these indicators are still under review and may have changed subsequently.

Table 3: Revised Performance Assessment Handbook; Service Delivery, Rural Assemblies

Local Council Performance Assessment sub-area: Water and Sanitation sector performance

Performance Indicators	Information Source, Assessment & Scoring Procedure
Evidence of Information on functionality and availability of water points and sanitation facilities updated on a quarterly basis	Get copies of quarterly water point monitoring and sanitation reports, If more than 3 reports are available score 3; between 2 and 3 reports, score 1 and less than 2, score zero.
Evidence of district driven monthly coordination meetings between key sectors (maybe of DCTs if they exist) working in water and sanitation, especially between health and water (and maybe community development)	Obtain copies of reports from DC's office, If more than 6 reports available score 1 if less than 6, score zero
Quarterly progress and financial reports for grants funded under the water sector from previous financial year submitted to council	Obtain copies of reports from DC's office, If more than 3 reports are available score 3; between 2 and 3 reports, score 1 and less than 2, score zero.
Water Information System is linked to the LAMIS	Obtain updated information on water and sanitation from MISO , if available score 1, if not score 0
Increase in services provided from previous year on key indicators (WASH sector defines)	Obtain data from MISO's office, look at key indicators compare data for the past two years In case of no increase score 0, if increase is between 1-5 % score 1, if increase is more than 5% score 3

Source: Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development, *Performance window handbook Local Development Fund, Performance Window Handbook,* Government of Malawi, MLGRD, May 2011

Integration of monitoring systems and use of data

One of the major challenges for monitoring of WASH services at the local level is the tension between so-called 'horizontal' monitoring, which attempts to integrate data about a range of sectors being delivered under the auspices of Local Government, and the more 'vertical' flow of data from local to central government. Sector monitoring systems rely on the upward flow of performance data to populate national systems from which macro-level decisions can be made about where to invest often limited resources and which districts are performing well or less well. There are examples of where this works relatively well and there is regular data collection, aggregation and reporting that then gets fed back down to local level. The water and sanitation sector in Uganda is often cited as an example of good practice with data on commonly agreed upon indicators (the so-called 'golden indicators') under a single sector performance measurement framework. This has been institutionalised over a number of years and there is now the ability to benchmark the performance of the country's 111 districts and to track trends over time.

However, more commonly there is a disconnect and a tension between data collection by Local Governments and the systems put in place by line ministries (Education, Health, Water) which extract data to inform ministry planning. It is not uncommon to find two systems of monitoring and data collation at local level as shown in figure 1., with yet a third

data flow from NGOs operating in the same area who are required to report upwards to their institutional donors.

Figure 1: Schematic of information flows and capture at Local Government level
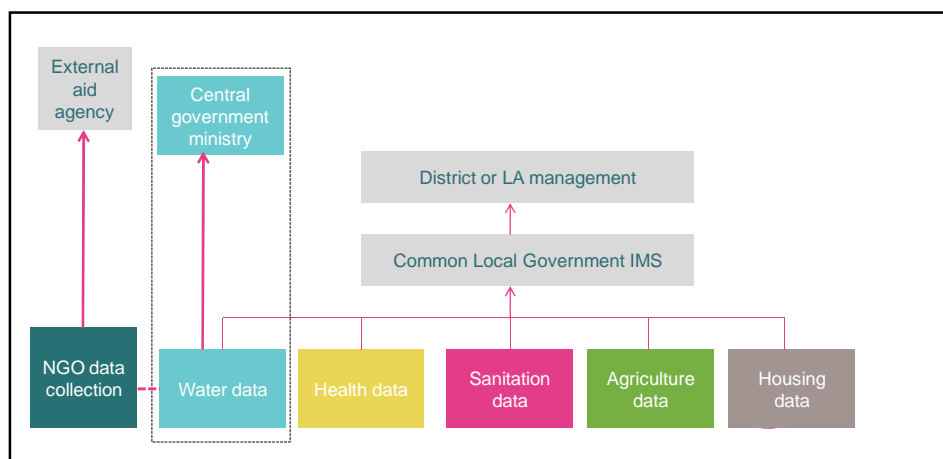
The main challenge for Local Government is to be able to coordinate data collection and aggregation given that they often are under-resourced and that the accountability line between decentralised WASH staff and central line ministries may remain strong.

Resources

CWSA, 2014 Framework for Assessing and Monitoring Rural and Small Town Water Supply Services, Community Water and Sanitation Agency, Ghana < http://www.ircwash.org/sites/default/files/framework_assessing_and_monitoring_rural_and_small_towns_wss_in_ghana.pdf>

De Albuquerque, C. 2010. Report of the independent expert on the issue of human rights obligations related to access to safe drinking water and sanitation. United Nations General Assembly.

IBNET The International Benchmarking Network for Water and Sanitation Utilities; https://www.ib-net.org/en/texts.php?folder_id=100&L=1&S=2

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Ssozi D. and Danert, K. 2012. 'National Monitoring of Rural Water Supplies: How the government of Uganda did it and lessons for other countries' RWSN Field Note No. 2012-4. [online] institution. Available at: < http://www.rural-water-supply.net/en/resources/details/383>