SWA Collaborative Behaviours

SANITATION AND WATER FOR ALL

Enhance government leadership of sector planning processes

Strengthen and use country systems

Use one information and mutual accountability platform

Build sustainable water and sanitation sector financing strategies

3. Use one information and mutual accountability platform

*This paper is part of a series of briefs outlining the four **SWA Collaborative Behaviours**[1]. These papers draw on recent empirical evidence from a range of eight case-studies[2] carried out by partners of Sanitation and Water for All's Country Processes Task Team along with broader evidence drawn from both the WASH sector and beyond.*

A platform for information and accountability

Reliable data and critical joint reflection are crucial for making decisions about where to invest, how to sustain and improve water and sanitation services, and for understanding which policies and strategies work. And yet widespread lack of capacity for monitoring, inconsistent or fragmented gathering of data, and limited use of information management systems continues to impede effective decision-making in sector planning, resource allocation and policy development (GLAAS 2014).

Developing and strengthening a platform for information and mutual accountability requires:

- An inclusive system for monitoring sector performance against nationally established goals and targets;

- A framework that enables multi-actor involvement in a structured process of knowledge creation, transfer and mobilisation

- A forum for reviewing this information, to allow all partners to demonstrate and demand mutual accountability for sector progress.

Building national and local capacity to monitor sector performance by strengthening and using country results frameworks is a key component of strengthening country systems (Behaviour 2). But linking monitoring and sector learning to a robust accountability process requires commitments to learning and accountability from all sector actors.

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[1] The other briefs in this series can be found here.
[2] The case study material is drawn from the following countries: Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Ghana, Honduras, Liberia, Niger, South Sudan, Timor Leste. The case studies were conducted by IRC, WaterAid and the Water and Sanitation Programme of the World Bank.

The importance of mutual accountability

Effective development cooperation requires inclusive processes that encourage all partners to demonstrate and demand mutual accountability for progress in all areas of sector development. Development partners and developing countries need to be accountable to each other for their joint effectiveness in delivering development results and exercise transparency and accountability to citizens and civil society.

All development actors need to participate in a multi-stakeholder accountability process. Mutual accountability implies the assurance that progress in sector performance is being jointly monitored by partners and is focused on results and on the broader system capacity that is necessary to achieve strategic impact. It is supported by transparency of information for all stakeholders on national targets, national and external resources, their use and the results achieved, and is essential in building a mutual understanding of impact between sector players.

Mutual accountability is enabled by platforms for multi-actor dialogue on sector progress, such as Joint Sector Reviews (JSRs) and coordination platforms. The main purpose of Joint sector reviews is to provide for a platform to jointly assess sector progress and to hold each other accountable. The most effective sector reviews are those that enable a regular, truly joined and critical assessment and dialogue on the sector's progress, allowing for corrective action. Achieving this requires a process that is transparent, and inclusive of all sector partners including civil society.

However, evidence shows that the basic systems for monitoring, mutual accountability and learning are often not yet in place, are weak or are addressed as separate processes leading to fragmented and ineffective sector interventions.

Learning from current practice

Lack of sound national monitoring systems undermines accountability for sector performance. In Ghana and Honduras studies show that monitoring and reporting is mainly organised around the project implementation cycle, as development partners find that aligning with the government monitoring and reporting systems in the current fragmented and incomplete state makes it difficult to fulfil their internal monitoring requirements. In Honduras no development partners reported keeping track on project results after completion of the project and do therefore not have sound evidence on the longer-term sustainability of the sector investments made. The fact that each development partner has their own reporting requirements forms a heavy burden on government officials and often leads to information gaps, making it difficult to compile a central overview on all sector investments. This in turn can stifle government leadership, and undermine trust between Government and development partners.

Availability and accessibility of sector information is further undermined by the fact that few countries have an accessible sector information system in place that provides an interface between different institutional information systems and allows for aggregation and interpretation of information at sector level. But there are promising signs: within SWA, some countries have recognised the importance of coordinating information systems across sectors such as education and health, and this is helping to leverage further collaboration which will make it easier for the WASH sector to take stock of progress.

Where data is available, it is not always used. In Honduras the WASH sector does not yet have the capacity in place to make effective use of the data available in national financial and administrative

system (SIAFI) for planning and accountability purposes. This would require linking the information in SIAFI with information on sector progress and results. Evidence also suggests information gathered by global processes such as GLAAS and JMP at country level is not always considered relevant for national planning purposes and is therefore seldom used for systematic monitoring of sector performance at national level.

Sector coordination platforms are many, but not always effective at fostering accountability. While sector coordination platforms are often effective for information exchange between stakeholders they are rarely used for facilitating formal accountability, where sector stakeholders are encouraged to assess and hold each other accountable. In Timor- Leste, for instance, the WASH Forum and Sanitation Working Group is principally used for information sharing between government and donor agencies, but it appears government officials have limited expectations of holding donors to account. In Niger, bi-monthly coordination meetings together with the annual review are central components of the sector performance review and accountability framework in the WASH sector, but by 2013 the effectiveness of the coordination meetings in driving accountability was still challenged by information gaps, and the fact that some of the main donors were not participating. In the WASH sector in Ghana, the absence of a clear accountability framework means the Government is accountable to Development Partners through a series of un-harmonized, overlapping and duplicative assessments, reviews, audits, missions and consultations. This not only results in high transaction costs, but can undermine – rather than strengthen – domestic accountability.

Joint Sector Reviews can provide a good foundation for information sharing and mutual accountability. The implementation of a joint sector performance review in countries with a further advanced sector wide approach, including a sector policy and one WASH programme like in Ethiopia and in Burkina Faso, provides for a better structure for monitoring aid in contribution to sector development and fostering mutual accountability. However, even where a joint sector review is in place this does not necessarily alleviate countries from their reporting burden to individual donors around specific project commitments. And challenges in ensuring that the reviews go beyond reporting, to critically address accountability and joint learning must still be overcome. Documentation suggests JSR's often put more emphasis on an annual key event in which sector stakeholders come together to assess sector performance and to formulate recommendations. In contrast, what is needed is a continuous process of data collection, assessment, decision taking, dissemination of results and follow-up on implementation of decisions made. To truly contribute to enhanced accountability and learning in the sector, these processes need to get beyond the implementation of a tool towards a continuous cycle of learning and reform.

But engagement of local players in national accountability processes remains limited. In Honduras accountability frameworks between local governments and development partners are non-existent, and the effective implementation of an accountability framework between service providers and the national government is hampered by lack of access to up-to-date information on service delivery levels. Widening national review processes to incorporate all actors – including those at a decentralised level such as municipalities and associations of service providers - will require additional efforts to engage local actors.

Recommendations

Various countries have elements of a sector monitoring, learning and accountability system in place, however they still face gaps in their capacity to plan, monitor and adapt in a structured and iterative way, based on evidence and joint reflection. It requires shifting the scope from monitoring project results to sector-wide monitoring, learning, accountability and performance impact.

To develop and use one information and mutual accountability platform, developing country governments should:

- Undertake mutual assessments of progress in implementing sector commitments – including the SWA behaviours;

- Strengthen mechanisms, tools and incentives that help to increase transparency and accountability by all players at all levels (national and decentralised levels);

- Prioritise strengthening national capacities for effective sector performance monitoring, learning and accountability in the national WASH agenda;

- Show leadership in encouraging and enabling sector stakeholders to work together to analyse projects, reflect, design and implement adaptations for improvement;

- Demand development partners to support and fully engage in national efforts to establish and strengthen structured multi-actor review and learning processes for enhanced service delivery.

Development partners should:

- Use and strengthen existing information and mutual accountability platforms. This may include JSRs and coordination platforms;

- Support and move towards a more bottom-up global monitoring process, focused on strengthening capacity at national and decentralised levels and using country results frameworks;

- Prioritise support to countries in building sector capacity for monitoring sector performance, use evidence based information, reflect, and undertake corrective action at all levels .

All partners should:

- Use nationally agreed and developed information systems;

- Support and actively engage in multi-stakeholder reflection and learning processes that can support the process of turning monitoring information and sector experience into actionable lessons for the sector.;

- Build cooperation and trust to support critical reflection;

- Demonstrate flexibility and openness to adjust policies, strategies and practices, based on sound evidence, good practices and innovations.