

WaterAid Malawi Country Programme Evaluation

The evaluation of WaterAid Malawi Country Programme was conducted in July 2014 by a team of four people comprising one national and one international consultant plus two WaterAid staff – one each from headquarters and the regional office. Previous evaluations were conducted in 2004 and 2008.

National context

JMP data show that Malawi has already met the MDG target on clean water, with 85% of the population having access to an improved supply by 2012. There are, nevertheless, huge challenges in terms of equity and functionality. Malawi is also seriously off track in relation to the sanitation target of 73% access. Just 10% of the population has access to an improved household facility, although open defecation is also low at just 7%; the remaining 83% have access to a toilet, but of an unimproved type.

Sector framework

In 2008 the Government of Malawi took a decision to introduce a Sector-Wide Approach to planning (SWAp). Progress since then has been slow, although key building blocks are in place including Thematic Working Groups and Sub-groups and a system of annual Joint Water Sector Reviews (although these do not happen every year). A sector monitoring system is also under development and near completion with support from a number of external agencies including WaterAid, Engineers Without Borders and the African Development Bank.

The Second National Water Development Programme was launched in 2007 and is due to end in 2015. It has multi-donor support and was envisaged as a vehicle not only for sector investments but also for facilitating the establishment of a SWAp. It has so far failed to advance the process very far, however, as there is a lack of political commitment to put the SWAp in place. The 'Cashgate' scandal of 2013 was a further setback, particularly to the prospects for budget support.

A more positive development was the adoption in 2011 of a National Open Defecation-Free (ODF) Strategy, the aim being to make Malawi ODF by 2015. With the incidence of open defecation currently estimated at just 8% in rural areas and 2% in urban areas, this ambition does not seem unrealistic. The strategy also addresses the sustainability of existing toilets and includes a sanitation marketing component to encourage households with unimproved latrines to invest in more durable and hygienic options.

The lead sector institution is the Ministry of Water Development and Irrigation (MWDI). Agriculture was recently brought back into the ministry and a Sanitation Department established, even though this subject falls under the mandate of the

Ministry of Health (MoH). An effort has been made to harmonise the sanitation activities of the two ministries by appointing MoH as Chair of the Sanitation Thematic Working Group positioned under MWDI.

Sector financing

In recent years, Government funding to WASH (both capital and operational) has been small and declining, and the 2011 Sector Performance Report noted that 80% of expenditure in the sector was donor-funded. A Sector Investment Plan has been produced but is yet to be funded and implemented, although the African Development Bank is helping to develop a fiduciary framework setting out the processes and rules by which SIP funds should flow in the sector.

From 2008 onwards, following the introduction of a National Sanitation Policy, some district councils developed District Sector Investment Plans for WASH. Few, however, have been able to access funds for their implementation. The control of local government finances remains heavily centralised and council budgets are minimal, with as little as £100 per month allocated for WASH operations in many cases.

Malawi Country Programme

WaterAid operations in Malawi began in Salima District in 2000. Since then the Country Programme has grown geographically, thematically and in terms of the number of implementing partners. Trademark features of the programme have included support to improve the management of water kiosks serving low-income peri-urban communities in Lilongwe and a strong focus on ecosan in sanitation promotion.

Geographically, the urban programme operates in Lilongwe, one municipality (Kasungu) and one small town (Mponela). The rural programme supports WASH service delivery in five districts while policy and advocacy work is undertaken at national and regional level and in six target districts.

The framework for programme activities is the Country Strategy 2011-2015, which is founded on six Strategic Aims and associated Change Objectives. These are highly ambitious and include, for example, the establishment of a SWAp, improved sector co-ordination at national and district levels, increased Government and donor investment in the sector and the introduction of a national sector monitoring system. In terms of direct beneficiaries, programme ambitions are more modest and include 303,375 people gaining access to safe excreta disposal and hygiene and 133,980 gaining access to safe drinking water.

A new country strategy is to be developed shortly and the Country Programme Multi-year Plan and Budget (MPB) for 2014-2015 offers some clues as to future priorities. It includes, for example, commitments to:

- Realign the programme approach to sanitation in support of national ODF strategy. An immediate priority is to learn more about sanitation marketing.
- Prioritise support to geographically isolated communities in rural districts.
- Apply lessons from the piloting of a rights-based approach to WASH support.

Urban service delivery work focuses on two thematic areas: support to the improvement of peri-urban water supplies via community-managed kiosks and the promotion of low-cost sanitation. There is also some support to peri-urban SWASH in Lilongwe.

Support to rural service delivery is on a larger scale and encompasses a range of projects, some which are nearing their end. They include:

- Support to district planning, co-ordination and monitoring via District Coordination Teams.
- Improvements to rural water supply and sanitation (including SWASH) in hard-to-reach locations.
- Initiatives to enhance the sustainability of small water supplies via orientation and training for village committees and caretakers, Area Pump Menders and Area Development Committees, plus the establishment of a ready supply of spare parts for sale.
- The rehabilitation and expansion of two gravity flow schemes, including the establishment of Water User Associations(s) to operate and maintain them.
- Household sanitation and hygiene promotion, with a focus on ecosan facilities (until recently the promotional approach involved the provision of subsidised facilities).

Policy and advocacy work has mostly taken place under the umbrella of stand-alone projects funded by DFID: initially the Governance and Transparency Project, then the Sector Policy and Governance project, which is ongoing. This work originally focussed on support to district-level coordination including the formulation of District Sector Investment Plans, and the establishment and strengthening of WESNet, an umbrella body which coordinates the work of sector CSOs and provides them with a voice at policy level. The second (current) phase has a broader remit and includes, among other things:

- Active participation in sector fora including Joint Sector Reviews to help ensure that sector policy and strategies are people-centred with due attention to equity and inclusion.
- Improving understanding among WASH-related organisations of sector budgets and financing processes, so that ongoing advocacy for increased sector funding can be effectively designed and targeted.
- A Citizens' Action Initiative which helps rural communities to lobby local government for improved WASH services via Citizens' Forums.

Programme funding

Funding received a boost in 2012 following the 'Big Dig' fundraising effort in the UK. WAMA had set a target of increasing the programme budget by 55% between 2010-11 and 2014-15, but surpassed this and the budget increased more than fourfold from 2011-12 to 2012-13. It currently stands at MWK 1,760 million (approximately £2.63 million).

Restricted funding (meaning grants earmarked for specific activities) has accounted for approximately 80% of the programme budget since 2010. Most of these grants will end within the next year (despite the boost provided by the Big Dig) and the programme therefore faces a challenge not only of developing a new Country Strategy but also of securing the funds for its implementation.

Findings: relevance

Programme activities are certainly relevant to the needs of the sector. Staff are well informed of sector developments at policy level and the programme is actively engaged in helping to create a stronger and more effective policy and institutional framework at national level.

Programme direction and positioning

From its origins in 1999 the Malawi programme has grown both in scale and scope. Today WaterAid has a substantial portfolio of partners and programmes, both urban and rural, and is a significant and respected player in the sector. This said, the evaluation also found that the strategic direction of the programme, which should provide the rationale for both service delivery and advocacy work, is not well defined. In the absence of this bigger picture, many of the projects do not have an obvious purpose beyond the delivery of direct benefits to participating communities. In short, critical changes in the sector which the Country Programme is pursuing have not been clearly defined and articulated.

This situation appears to have arisen in part from the Country Strategy which commits WaterAid to delivering a range of achievements at policy and institutional level. The Strategy does not spell out clearly what the programme's particular contribution will be to these higher order objectives, and where WaterAid's added value lies in relation to other players in the sector. The last point is important since there are other international agencies offering both operational and strategic support to Government, sometimes in the same districts as WaterAid. They include, for example:

- UNICEF, which is playing a lead role in national ODF strategy.
- The Global Sanitation Fund, which is supporting the implementation of national ODF strategy via Plan International and its local partners.

- Water for People, which is promoting its ‘Everyone, Forever’ approach to district support.
- InterAid, which is helping to establish district-wide operation and maintenance systems for rural water supplies in selected districts.
- Engineers without Borders (itself a WaterAid partner) which has demonstrated that high-quality technical support to districts can make a difference even without hardware investments.

There are now different perceptions within the country team as to which of the numerous programme objectives is most important, a situation compounded by the fact that implementation of the strategy has not been monitored. Had there been periodic internal (or external) reviews then this could have prompted the programme to clarify and fine tune its priorities and modify strategy where necessary.

Geographical and thematic targeting of WaterAid support

WaterAid’s urban work in Malawi began in the capital, Lilongwe. With the Water Board struggling to meet the needs of low-income peri-urban residents there was a strong case for WaterAid involvement and the lessons from that long experience are now being adapted for use in small towns which have not, up to now, received a lot of external support. This makes sense and is potentially a good use of some of the additional funding generated by the Big Dig.

The first rural project, which began in Salima in 2000, is now in its final stages, with a focus on the sustainability of benefits already achieved. Other districts were added after 2000 with district selection influenced to a large extent by access data and social indicators. The choice of partner has also been a factor, as some partners (SOLDEV, for example) have an established ‘constituency’ and WaterAid support has enabled them to enhance or expand established programmes.

Rural policy and advocacy work (principally the Citizens Action Initiative) focuses on six districts while service delivery targets five others, with very little overlap between the two streams of work. Recent programme documents indicate that in future, WAMA will not have separate advocacy and service delivery districts but will bring the interventions together in line with the ‘programmatic approach’ advocated by WaterAid globally, so that they are mutually supportive and aligned with common goals.

The programme has gone to some lengths to incorporate a number of WaterAid global agendas into its operations, including the Rights-Based Approach (currently being piloted in a few locations not visited by the team) and Equity and Inclusion. The evaluation found that efforts to adapt water and sanitation facilities to meet the needs of disabled users were relevant, but that ‘inclusive’ designs had been adopted without a prior assessment of needs, preferences and existing support mechanisms in the communities concerned. The evaluation also questions the programme’s overt focus on ecosan – this is discussed further below.

Approaches used to engage and involve marginalised and excluded groups

Arrangements are in place to ensure that services developed or improved with WaterAid support are available and affordable to the poorest members of the community. Work to improve the coverage and sustainability of water supply kiosks in peri-urban areas is one long-standing example; a more recent one is the decision to support Lupachi, one of the most remote and inaccessible locations within Nkhosakota District. Working with Area Development Committees at sub-district level in Salima has also helped the programme to establish close links with rural households including the poorest.

Relevance of the vision and purpose of programme partnerships

In general terms there is a good match between the interests of WaterAid Malawi and its partners, both implementing and strategic. This said, it seems that WaterAid's own vision of the partnerships does not extend much beyond the delivery of specific outputs. Two notable exceptions are the partnerships with:

- Engineers Without Borders (EWB), an INGO which does not provide hardware investments but offers targeted technical assistance to Government agencies at national and local level, to help them make best use of the limited resources at their disposal (WAMA regard this as strategically important).
- WESNet, which was established with WaterAid assistance to fulfil a long-term role of providing a voice for CBOs and NGOs in sector debate at national and regional level.

In most other cases, the relationship with partners has been primarily a contractual one for the provision of services.

Programme managers acknowledge that more needs to be done to help partners become strong and effective organisations in their own right that serve as a resource for the sector. In the current year WAMA will help two partner NGOs to develop their own strategic plans; the latest Multi-Year Plan and Budget (MPB) also signals an intention to develop a strategy setting out WaterAid's principles and objectives for working in partnership.

Findings: effectiveness

Monitoring, evaluation and learning

A key finding of the evaluation was that programme effectiveness is being undermined by insufficient critical analysis and questioning in programme management. This is most apparent in the following areas:

1. **Localising WaterAid's global agendas.** The concern for equity and inclusion has not been contextualised, resulting in the installation of some

specially adapted toilets and water points that are neither used nor usable by disabled people.

2. **Learning from programme experience.** There have been surprisingly few internal reviews or external evaluations in the past few years. Regular partner roundtables are used for sharing experiences, but routine monitoring is evidently missing some important issues, for example ongoing problems with the use and functionality of school ecosan toilets.
3. **Innovation and strategies for replication or scaling up by Government.** WaterAid's earlier work to establish sustainable water supply provision in low-income urban areas was impressive. There is, however, little recent evidence of the programme breaking new ground in order to address key challenges in the sector.

Sanitation and hygiene promotion

The evaluation gave rise to a number of concerns with the current programme approach to sanitation promotion. These are explained in some detail below.

1. **Household sanitation.** WaterAid has promoted ecosan options in Malawi since the early days of the Country Programme. Today, the option most commonly promoted is the twin-pit *fossa alterna*, which produces fertiliser from excreta mixed with soil and ash.

There is evidently some community interest in using the fertiliser, although whether the programme has stimulated a significant increase in the use of improved latrines in targeted locations is not clear. Whatever the case in the past, field visits found that that latrine construction has ground to a halt during the past year, following the withdrawal of hardware subsidies. The immediate reasons are clear – masons do not have the resources to purchase and transport cement at market prices, while few households are able and willing to pay the full cost of an ecosan latrine.

The programme now finds itself somewhat out of step with national sanitation strategy, which is focussed on ending open defecation, not the production of fertiliser from latrines, and seeks to avoid the blanket application of hardware subsidies. Programme strategy needs revision to respond to the new sector agenda.

2. **School sanitation.** For schools, the programme is promoting a relatively expensive ecosan option, the Skyloo, which has raised twin vaults. This was designed for use in areas of high water table but seems to be used in most locations now, irrespective of ground water conditions.

There were some problems with the functionality and use of toilet blocks seen during field visits, including several cases of bad smell and flies around squatting holes. These problems were not severe, but most of the facilities

were fairly new and hence had not yet been heavily used. The problem relates both to the design and to user behaviour – users are supposed to deposit a handful of ash and three handfuls of soil in the pit after defecation, but this habit is not easily established among students, especially when they do not have ecosan toilets at home.

Even more demanding is the fact that skyloos incorporate a urine diversion system, requiring students to urinate in one hole and defecate in another. Teachers and implementation partners at three sites confirmed that getting the students to use the facilities as intended was challenging, for example some children would defecate and urinate in the wrong places.

Equity and inclusion

The programme is responding to the needs of disabled students in the design of school toilets by installing a wheelchair ramp with handrail on at least one of the skyloos in each school and fitting it with wide doors. Some also have a pedestal over the toilet. Unfortunately, many of the ramps seen were quite steep and it seemed doubtful that a student or teacher would have been able to push a wheelchair user up them. Some of the schools visited were in any case located in places where it would be very difficult for a wheelchair user to reach the school in the first place.

A similar story applies to water supply, although the team only saw one adapted water point. This was in the 'model' village described above, which had full coverage with basic latrines. The village was set on a small hill while the borehole was on low ground accessed via a steep and bumpy track. It would have been impossible to reach the water point with a wheelchair, but here, too, a wheelchair ramp was provided on the borehole apron.

These findings suggest that the programme has addressed equity and inclusion in a rather simplistic way, and that more could be done to establish how best the needs of disabled people could be met in the local physical and social context.

Internal coherence

The structure of the WaterAid Malawi team is clearly defined, however the evaluation found that the work of the various teams is not fully harmonised. Two particular concerns are that:

1. It is not clear how the PSU and programme teams complement each other, and where the boundaries lie between their respective roles. For example, PSU has a monitoring officer who visits all of the partners, but who has lead responsibility for ensuring that projects are on track and delivering good quality work?
2. Policy and advocacy work operates as a project in its own right and does not draw heavily on programme experience on the ground.

Policy engagement

Programme partners report that WaterAid has influenced other development agencies in the sector, for example by encouraging them to do more on handwashing promotion and to adopt ecosan. The programme seems to have had less influence on Government operations, however – at least in recent times – and lacks explicit strategies to promote the replication and scaling up of effective operational approaches.

At national level, WaterAid has achieved a level of recognition in the sector which gives it a seat at the table in decision-making fora. What exactly the programme is trying to achieve through its policy level engagement, however, remains undefined.

Rights and access

WaterAid has helped citizens to lobby for better water and sanitation services via the Citizens Action Initiative. This is one part of the county programme that has been independently evaluated, with positive findings. The potential of the initiative is, however, limited by the fact that local governments have only meagre resources at their disposal and cannot always respond to public pressure even if they wish to. Clearly an appropriate balance is needed between supply and demand-side interventions.

Sustainability

WaterAid lays great emphasis on measures to secure the sustainable functioning and use of water supply facilities. In Nkhotakota District, for example, the programme has rehabilitated and expanded the capacity of a large gravity flow system, and is heavily involved in the establishment of a Water Users' Association to manage the assets. Elsewhere a recent Impact Evaluation and Post-Implementation Monitoring Survey (PIMS) in Salima District found good evidence of water point sustainability.

The evaluation found no documented evidence on the sustainability of latrine use in programme areas and it is therefore difficult to comment further, particularly on the sustained use of ecosan latrines, either school or household. It is noted, however, that as far back as 2004 the Country Programme evaluation was satisfied that genuine demand for ecosan latrines had been demonstrated.

The institutional sustainability of programme benefits is a further challenge. More could perhaps be done, in collaboration with other support agencies working in the same districts, to support the adoption of Government-led, district-wide operations and maintenance systems.

Similar to School WASH, the impression gained is that WaterAid supports a few schools in project areas, but has less involvement with the Ministry of Education at a strategic level to explore how basic standards could be achieved for all schools in a district, or nationwide.

WaterAid alone cannot take on such challenges, but it is possible for programme support to be aligned with multi-stakeholder initiatives, and to provide insights into the design or implementation of Government-led programmes based on field experience.

Conclusions

The Malawi Country Programme has many strengths and WaterAid is highly regarded both by Government and other external agencies supporting the sector. At a strategic level, the key areas of concern arising from the evaluation relate to programme direction, insufficient rigour and critical analysis in programme management and monitoring, the need for more synergy between the programme teams, and inadequate attention to the institutional sustainability of programme achievements. A more specific need at the operational level is to review and revise the programme approach to sanitation and hygiene promotion. These challenges are important and point to the absence of the 'programmatic approach' advocated by WaterAid globally. They are all resolvable, however, and this is an opportune time to address them as WAMA develops its new Country Strategy.

Recommendations

Relevance

1. In developing the new Country Strategy, the WaterAid Malawi team should make time for internal reflection and analysis to define what changes WaterAid Malawi wants to see in the sector, and identify how the programme will contribute to this change at national and local level. The existing programme portfolio should be reviewed and revised only after this analysis.
2. Review and revise the programme approach to sanitation promotion to ensure alignment with the priorities of National ODF Strategy. This does not mean that ecosan should be avoided, but promotional strategies should enable poor households to access hygienic latrines without depending on hardware subsidies.

Effectiveness

3. Clarify the roles and responsibilities of PSU in relation to the urban and rural programmes and the Policy and Advocacy Team, with particular regard to operational strategies and partner performance.
4. In developing the new Country Strategy, ensure coherence between programme content and higher level goals. In support of this, make provision for periodic internal reviews and an external mid-term review, of the strategy overall and of key projects. The findings of these reviews should be used to revise and fine-tune strategies and priorities where necessary.
5. Invest more time in collaboration with other international agencies working in the same districts, to ensure synergy and coherence in support of local governments.

Partnership and capacity building

6. Adopt a broader approach to partner support that considers not only what is needed to enhance project delivery, but also the longer term support needed so that partners can become strong and effective players in the sector. Organisations which warrant more comprehensive support should be identified and prioritised as part of the Country Strategy development process.

Sustainability

7. Maintain a focus on district-wide impact while working in smaller areas. With this in mind, pursue a proactive role for Government agencies in implementation and monitoring, even when field work is mostly done by partner NGOs.

Sanitation and hygiene promotion

8. In developing a new approach, it would benefit WAMA staff to learn more on emerging best practices in sanitation marketing, drawing on experience from other countries and INGOs.

9. A review of the outcome of household ecosan promotion by WAMA (similar to PIMS) could also provide insights to guide the revision of programme strategy.

10. Introduce more rigorous monitoring of the functionality, use and suitability of the single latrine design currently used by partners for school latrines in rural areas – including the extent to which fertiliser from the toilets is actually used. Modify as necessary processes for technology selection and the range of designs offered.

Equity and inclusion

11. Make prior assessment of needs, preferences and existing community support mechanisms before designing facilities for use by disabled people.