

WaterAid in Malawi Country programme evaluation

WaterAid's Malawi (WAMA's) country programme is characterised by the excellent quality of its relationships with implementing partners and other stakeholders, a high degree of respect and influence in the sector, and above all by a highly professional and competent team which is committed to bringing about change. Overall the evaluation is very positive about the achievements and trends within the country programme, but the report presents a number of areas for further exploration and development by the programme.

In particular we highlight:

- the need to maximise the success of multi-stakeholder partnerships, through full involvement of all active players in a common set of goals, and expression of clear expectations about the outcomes of partnerships;
- the need to ensure the common goal of utilisation of safe sanitation, practice of sound hygiene behaviours, and proper management of drinking water supplies from source to point of consumption – with target populations enjoying all these benefits;
- the importance of turning monitoring and measurement exercises into published products (paper publications, film, presentations or other forms of dissemination), and investing more time and effort into research studies leading to such outputs;
- at the operational level, the crucial importance of assuring long-term on-going support to community-level and public and private sector institutions, in order to ensure continuing performance of those institutions;
- the need to review the mechanisms by which the poorest members of communities gain access to services provided by WAMA programmes.

Relevance

The programme, and the country strategy, are highly relevant to Malawi's national context as well as to the sector context. WaterAid Malawi (WAMA) has successfully moved from direct implementation to working through partners, while building their capacity to deliver sustainable sanitation and water supply services. WAMA's participation in sector processes such as the aid coordination meetings and the emerging NGO network, as well as its work through the Malawi Economic Justice Network on sector financing, are vital as Malawi takes tentative steps towards a sector wide approach. At the household and community level, WAMA's activities in water supply address a high priority for an essential service, while in sanitation WAMA's ground-breaking work in ecological sanitation is meeting an equally important need for soil nutrients, and so contributing to food security.

Effectiveness

WAMA's activities are broadly targeted at delivering sustainable services, including to the poorest, and bringing about changes in the sector as a whole. In terms of service provision, this evaluation has not been able to confirm total numbers of beneficiary households, although we have no reason to doubt the reported figures. The quality of products (water supply points, latrines) is generally high.

In relation to more strategic activities (monitoring, learning and advocacy), although the number of published reports is so far limited, they are of high quality, and influential in the sector. Our judgment from interviews with major development partners and Government, is that WAMA's participation in national sectoral processes is generally much appreciated and effective in stimulating change; the one exception perhaps is the limited progress made so far in coordinating the water and sanitation NGOs.

All WAMA's target populations are poor (by any absolute or relative measures), but the effectiveness with which the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable 5-10% are met is questionable. Only one of WAMA's programmes has a formal mechanism for exempting the poorest from payment or subsidising their services. In general such formal mechanisms are absent, or at least undocumented. This is an area that needs further attention, and it is understood that WAMA intends to undertake specific social exclusion studies in the near future. In general WAMA should be seeking a situation in which revenues cover the total operating costs of water supply services, but with the better-off cross-subsidising the poorest. In the case of sanitation Malawi is not ready for a full free-market approach, but payment in cash and kind for improved sanitation is rightly the norm.

Efficiency

Efficiency of operation is difficult to gauge, when there are multiple objectives, some focused on service delivery and others on more strategic goals. One crude indicator of efficiency is the total budget (for both strategic and implementation activities) divided by the numbers of people served – in WAMA's case about £24. This is not an excessive figure compared to other similar programmes elsewhere. In the absence of meaningful possibilities for cost/benefit analysis, another approach is to look for inefficiencies such as under-employed staff, expenditures which have little or no obvious utility. It is unlikely that no efficiency gains are possible, but no gross inefficiencies were obvious to the evaluation team.

Impact

WAMA's programme might be expected to have positive impacts on both health and socio-economic aspects. Health impacts are difficult to measure (far less attribute directly to programme interventions). Nevertheless it is generally accepted that if various surrogate indicators (safe water supply and consumption, handwashing practices and safe sanitation utilisation) are in place, then health benefits are being experienced. At different places in WAMA's programme all these practices are evident. The main concern in the evaluation however is the several examples where water, sanitation and promotion of improved hygiene practices are not being implemented together, in the same communities.

Socio-economic benefits in the context of WAMA's programme include enhanced privacy and dignity (in relation to sanitation), time and energy saving (in relation to water supply), and productive benefits (in the case of the compost or manure obtained from ecosan latrines). All these factors are clearly visible in WAMA's programme and they are measurable through WAMA's monitoring activities (especially the Water Users's Day activities).

Sustainability

In relation to rural water supply, our main concern is about the low level of maintenance contributions made by water users. In the urban water supply programme, full cost recovery is

being achieved, in relation to the (subsidised) tariffs currently charged by Lilongwe Water Board. This is impressive.

In relation to sanitation, sustainability at the user level depends on latrine construction quality (which is generally high), and proper usage of facilities (which is also mostly good). At the level of masons and promoters, we believe the partially commercial model being practised in CCAP's Livingstonia synod is an excellent compromise between an illusory "no-subsidy" approach, and an unsustainable "free-gift" model of sanitation delivery.

The sustainability of community institutions, such as the Cooperatives managing rehabilitated gravity flow schemes, and the Trusts managing water kiosks in peri-urban Lilongwe, is by no means assured without continuing support and encouragement. Just as hardware needs continuing maintenance, so does the "soft infrastructure" of community and local Government institutions.

Replicability/Scaling-Up

Realistically, few of WAMA's approaches can easily be scaled up within Malawi until local Government structures are significantly strengthened – and this will not take place overnight, despite the commitment and efforts of an increasing number of sector players. WAMA can continue to implement sound interventions at a local level, and encourage others to do the same, but this will not automatically enable "islands of success" to merge into a full sector wide approach. WAMA is contributing to the processes by which such a sector wide approach will eventually develop, but its full emergence will almost certainly take another 3-5 years.

Performance of Partnerships

WAMA's partnerships and alliances with central and local Government, development partners, other NGOs, faith-based organisations and CBOs are generally characterised by mutual respect and effectiveness. Inevitably each partnership or linkage has its own attributes, and in some cases difficulties and challenges. Overall however, this aspect represents a real strength of WAMA's programme.



WaterAid transforms lives by improving access to safe water, hygiene and sanitation in the world's poorest communities. We work with partners and influence decision-makers to maximise our impact.

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