

Organising and facilitating a Joint Sector Review for the WASH Sector

Experiences from Swaziland's first JSR

This learning note documents the process and lessons learned in supporting the Government of Swaziland to deliver their first Joint Sector Review for the water and sanitation sector.



This note was commissioned by WaterAid, and developed by Will Tillett (Aquaconsult), with inputs from Harold Lockwood (Aquaconsult), Clare Battle, Ncamiso Mhlanga and Mafupu Mokoena (WaterAid), and Nompumelelo Ntshalintshali (Government of Swaziland).

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Images: (left and bottom right) day one of Swaziland's first Joint Sector Review event; (top right) Community Representative Mr Machobane Dlamini delivering a skit to the high table representatives of the JSR. Credit: Will Tillett.

www.wateraid.org

47–49 Durham St, London SE11 5JD

wateraid@wateraid.org

020 7793 4500

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Background

WaterAid's research shows that the countries that do best in accelerating access to sustainable WASH services are those that i) embed senior diagnostic mechanisms capable of identifying the bottlenecks holding back progress, ii) set out a reform agenda with policy options to address these bottlenecks, and iii) adopt horizontal inter-sectoral and inter-departmental planning and progress chasing (WaterAid, 2016a). As an instrumental part of these processes, Joint Sector Reviews (JSRs) are widely recognised as features of best practice in the water and sanitation sector landscape, helping to strengthen governance, accountability, harmonisation, and aiding decision-making. JSRs are being undertaken in a large and growing number of countries, and are receiving increased attention from sector players such as the World Bank, who recently commissioned a global study on JSRs (Danert 2016).

However, recent evidence and experience (Danert, 2016; WaterAid, 2016b) suggests that few countries have a JSR process that is effectively fulfilling diagnostic, accountability and corrective functions within the sector, and the forms which JSRs take and their purpose varies considerably between countries. WaterAid is currently working across global and country teams to build understanding of what effective review processes look like and the inputs they require, in order to demonstrate how JSRs can be strengthened. As part of this work, WaterAid has engaged in a number of countries, including in Nepal and Uganda where reviews of the JSRs have been undertaken, and in Swaziland, where WaterAid supported the sector through its first JSR process.

Purpose of this learning note

In a global study on WASH sector JSRs, Danert (2016) remarks that 'international technical assistance, mentoring and mediation can be instrumental in supporting the JSR processes.' However, there is limited documentation on how this technical support would be best placed, or of lessons learned from where it has been provided.

Between July and November 2016 WaterAid provided technical assistance to the Government of the Kingdom of Swaziland, to organise and facilitate the first JSR for the water and sanitation sector.¹ The three-day JSR gathering was attended by 120 stakeholders, including four ministers and the Deputy Prime Minister opening the event. The event itself was co-funded between the Government of Swaziland, UNICEF, and other WASH sector partners. This learning note provides an overview of how the JSR process was developed and supported, with reflections and learning points which may be of interest for others supporting JSRs, particularly, although not exclusively, for countries undergoing their first JSR. It does not aim to be a prescriptive 'how to' guide or step-wise blueprint, but rather highlights some of the broader issues and principles which are potentially relevant for wider learning outside of Swaziland.

¹ This technical assistance was provided by Will Tillett, through the UK firm Aguaconsult; www.aguaconsult.co.uk

The Swaziland Water and Sanitation Sector Context

In Swaziland the ‘lead’ sector agency is the Department of Water Affairs, within the Ministry of Natural Resources and Energy. Rural sanitation sits within the Ministry of Health, whilst mandates for urban sanitation also include municipalities, the parastatal utility Swaziland Water Services Corporation (SWSC), and the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development. The Ministry of Agriculture and its associated agencies are major stakeholders in the water resources sub-sector.

Steady progress has been made in Swaziland on access to safe drinking water,ⁱⁱ and the Government’s National Development Strategy aims for universal access to water and sanitation by 2022. There have been recent advances in a number of areas, such as the nationwide mapping of water supplies, the sustainability assessment of the rural water supply sub-sector, climate vulnerability studies, and the development of the Integrated Water Resources Management Master Plan.

However, despite this progress sustainability of rural water services is a chronic issue (Lockwood 2015), and government datasets suggest access to improved sanitation is declining. Despite the Vision 2022 targets of universal WASH access, there is currently no sector-wide investment plan or programme in place, nor a sector-wide monitoring framework with common indicators that are systematically tracked. There have been various attempts at creating a Sector-Wide Approach to planning (SWAp) for the water and sanitation sector, however to date this has gained limited traction, with organisations, ministries and line agencies planning and budgeting in relative silos. The National Water Policy has remained in draft since 2009 and the Integrated Water Resource Management Plan has been criticised for not fully reflecting the intents of various stakeholders in the sector (notably the Ministry of Agriculture). There is an intention to develop a sanitation strategy, but this had not fully commenced at the time of the JSR event. The previously mentioned studies undertaken in the sector provide useful data and recommendations for the sector, but have received relatively limited post-study follow-up. The sector is undergoing a process of institutional reform and decentralisation, although the pace of change is relatively slow. There is a Government/UNICEF co-chaired ‘WASH Forum’ of NGOs and government stakeholders that meets monthly, but arguably less coordination in the water resources sub-sector, despite the presence of an overarching high-level committee (the National Water Authority).

The sector therefore currently lacks a number of the basic building blocks which could be used as foundations for the first JSR process, and that could be reviewed in the JSR event itself. However, this situation also presents a number of opportunities for discussion and decision-making within the first JSR about how to establish these building blocks.

An overview of the process

Support to Swaziland’s first JSR started when WaterAid supported a small delegation of government stakeholders to attend the 2014 JSR event in Uganda.

ⁱⁱ According to JMP (2015) figures, access to improved water supplies has increased from 39% in 1990 to 74% in 2015.

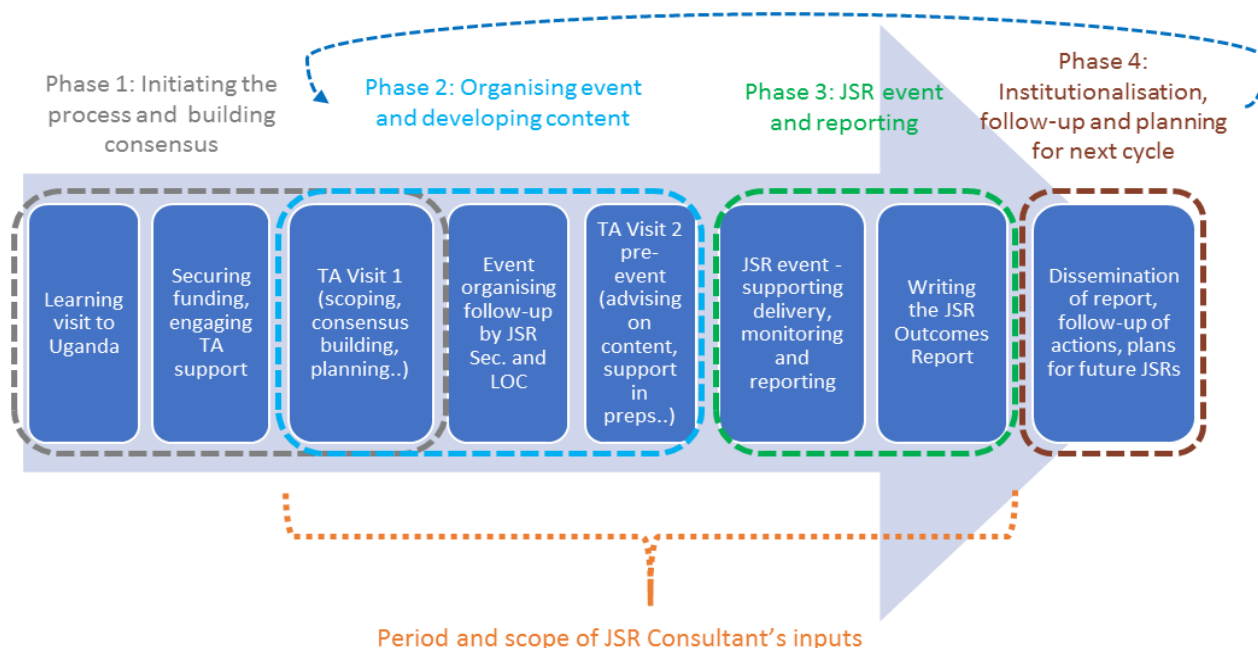
Following this visit there was demand to hold a JSR in Swaziland and a key 'champion' emerged within the Department of Water Affairs (DWA). In 2015 some of the key sector studies mentioned earlier were conducted, strengthening the evidence base for a sector review process.

In 2016 WaterAid and UNICEF committed to provide funds to support the first JSR event, and an external WASH expert (hereafter referred to as the 'JSR Consultant') was contracted by WaterAid to provide technical assistance (TA) to the process. Two technical missions by the JSR Consultant were conducted to support the Government to organise and deliver a successful JSR. Following the Uganda trip and sector studies, an initial step consisted of establishing roles and responsibilities of the JSR Secretariat,ⁱⁱⁱ and the multi-stakeholder Local Organising Committee (LOC), which was convened to support the organisation and decision-making for the JSR event. At the same time, the consultant was also involved in strengthening stakeholders' understanding on what a JSR is, developing the JSR scope and topics, and mentoring the (mostly government) personnel who were assigned to develop content for the JSR event. During this period donor proposals for co-funding the event, and the organisational master plan were developed. The JSR Secretariat and LOC then took forward the organising for the JSR process, with remote support from the JSR consultant. Later, the consultant was again engaged to support the more detailed preparation and delivery of the JSR event, supporting the JSR Secretariat with organisational issues and decision-making, and behind-the-scenes mentoring to presenters, chairpersons and rapporteurs.

After the JSR, a draft JSR outcomes report was prepared by the JSR consultant and reviewed by the JSR Secretariat and LOC. It was then the responsibility of the LOC to disseminate the outcomes report, to develop the JSR-agreed action points into a costed plan for ministerial approval, and to track its implementation; see Figure 1 for a summary of the process, which shows the four broad phases that the first JSR cycle in Swaziland followed. These four key phases are outlined in more detail in the following sections.

ⁱⁱⁱ The JSR Secretariat essentially consisted of the Department of Water Affairs Focal person for the JSR, and her colleague, who was also working on sector coordination issues.

Figure 1: An overview of the organisation and delivery process in Swaziland.



Phase 1: Initiating the process and building consensus

In 2014, a staff member of the Department of Water Affairs observed that numerous countries were undergoing JSRs, and mentioned to WaterAid interest in exploring the issue for Swaziland. WaterAid subsequently supported a delegation of government stakeholders from various ministries and agencies to attend the JSR meeting in Uganda, a country with a mature JSR process that has run for around 14 years. This was a good approach to get a core group of professionals aware of what a JSR is, and for them to reflect on how it may benefit the sector in Swaziland. Having a core group of 'champions' in government is arguably more effective in kick-starting a JSR process than having an external consultant or organisation coming to the government to 'sell' the idea. In addition to the learning visit to Uganda, WaterAid supported one delegate from Uganda to attend the Swaziland JSR event and share his experience on how JSRs are used in his country. This was a good example of south-south learning that could be replicated elsewhere.

In addition to the Uganda trip there was still need to build sector understanding and interest in JSRs more broadly. A series of presentations were made at the WASH Forum coordination meeting, to the LOC and to senior management of the Department of Water Affairs on what a JSR is and how it may help in the Swaziland sector context. These were made by the JSR Consultant based on a prior desk review to identify the key targets (e.g. for WASH access) and challenges of the sector. These presentations began with a recap of the overarching sector targets (universal access to WASH by 2022), followed by a series of questions: 'is there a sector-wide plan on how to achieve the targets?'; 'are there periodic reviews on

progress to the targets?'; 'is there a monitoring system effectively tracking progress?' These questions were raised in such meetings, and also posed as opening questions in the JSR event itself, before explaining what JSRs are, how they can help the sector and sharing experiences from other countries. These questions helped in building consensus among the stakeholders around the need for JSRs, without it being pushed by external consultants or organisations.

One area in these early meetings that required repeat emphasis was that JSRs are actually a **continuous and cyclical process** intended to strengthen sector performance through identification of bottlenecks and course correction based on ongoing analysis and feedback loops, rather than one-off events. This was important to stress in a sector more familiar with one-off conferences.

Phase 2: Developing content and organising the event

Defining the scope and objectives and developing building blocks for the JSR

One question that arose during the initial presentations introducing the JSRs was "what are we reviewing?" This is a valid question considering that the sector lacks an overarching plan or strategy. Because individual ministries, agencies, NGOs and development partners have their own plans and targets, presenting each of these in turn would not have been different from 'project update' meetings, which lack reflection or analysis. Another question from a participant trying to understand both JSR and SWAp concepts, was "what comes first, the JSR or the SWAp?" In some countries JSRs are oriented around existing sector-wide plans or programmes; in other contexts, JSRs exist in the absence of a SWAp. In Swaziland, the first JSR was used to gain consensus and traction for laying some of the building blocks for a strong WASH sector and for subsequent JSRs, rather than waiting for the building blocks to be in place before initiating the JSR process. Table 1 suggests examples of how JSRs can help establish, or utilise such building blocks,^{iv} depending on the sector context; the cells highlighted in grey show the approach taken in Swaziland where many building blocks are not yet in place.

Table 1: JSR as a mechanism to develop new, or strengthen existing, sector building blocks.³

Building block	Does not exist	Does exist
A sector-wide monitoring system with common indicators	Build consensus on the need for key features; discuss how JSRs can be institutionalised within such a system.	Utilise and review the data in the JSR. Identify improvements to be made in the monitoring system.
A sector-wide plan with clear targets	Build consensus on the need for one (if appropriate). Discuss how to improve current planning and budgeting processes and align different stakeholders.	Review progress toward targets, and discuss plans for the coming year(s). Discuss bottlenecks and lessons, and agree course corrections where necessary.

^{iv} These building blocks are non-exhaustive and focus predominantly on aspects of the sector that relate closely to JSR processes.

Updated sector policy, strategy and legal frameworks	Use the JSR to build consensus and consult on ideas for the policy / strategy content, and identify sector issues to integrate into them.	Identify gaps in existing strategies and frameworks or areas for modification. Identify progress to strategic objectives.
Key studies that identify blockages holding back sector progress/performance	Identify gaps in knowledge / specific studies needed to identify and understand bottlenecks, and agree to undertake them, including resource mobilisation for studies.	Utilise the evidence base, recap key findings, review progress on implementing study recommendations.
Coordination and learning platforms and/or thematic working groups	Discuss gaps and build consensus with commitment on establishing such platforms. Identify how they can feed into future JSRs, and establish leadership and key roles and responsibilities for this.	Use the groups (where appropriate) to drive forward the JSR and develop/review content for the JSR, and execute/follow-up outcomes.

Once the broad objectives of the JSR were agreed, the next question was ‘which topics should be covered, and which to leave out?’ It was agreed that Water Resources Management (WRM) should be included together with WASH. With this relatively large scope, it was necessary for the first JSR to whittle down the focus to have a manageable set of discussions within the 2.5 day event, for example not covering transboundary issues, as this was to be covered in a conference a few weeks after the JSR. The Ministry of Health decided to omit WASH in Health Facilities from the first JSR scope, to allow more time to discuss critical issues on rural sanitation.

Developing the content

While the JSR consultant led in developing the content for the opening and orientation sessions and the working groups, the development of the sub-sectoral presentations was the responsibility of individuals within key government agencies. These individuals, nominated by the LOC, were expected to collaborate with others working in the sub-sector, so that the presentations were reflective of the sub-sector, and not only of their own organisation. In this JSR experience, it was challenging to get some of these presenters to collaborate effectively between agencies, possibly reflecting broader challenges in cooperation between some government entities. One agreed action from the JSR was the establishment of thematic working groups in the sector, which could potentially be used as platforms to develop and review such presentations in future. Other actions that could have built collaboration in the run-up to the JSR event could have included joint monitoring visits to ongoing programmes in the country, as practised in some other countries.

In Swaziland presenters initially seemed more accustomed to presenting project progress updates rather than reflecting and reviewing what is working, where there are challenges, and agreeing sector reforms to address these. There was a reluctance on the part of some presenters to share what is **not** working, as it may

reflect badly on their organisation; this may reflect a general culture in the country rather than the specific institutions and people involved. Nonetheless, getting participants to be more frank and open about their areas of weakness took significant effort, emphasising the point in LOC meetings and in the one-to-one mentoring and feedback with presenters.

The Swaziland experience highlighted the added value of technical assistance in guiding and mentoring the presenters to collate and analyse sector information, define objectives, and ensure the presentations are oriented to the JSR purpose. However, to ensure ownership and capacity development, the JSR consultant needed to avoid requests and expectations (from some presenters) to develop the actual session content. Simply taking the time to go through the process of collecting and analysing information helped some presenters become much more aware of sector issues, and strategise on ways to address these.

Defining roles and responsibilities

Establishing inter-agency involvement and participation was essential from the outset of the JSR process. In the absence of a coordination/technical group that covered both water and sanitation (aside from the high-level National Water Authority group, deemed too senior to commit to meeting regularly for the JSR organisation), a specific committee was convened to support the organisation, delivery and follow-up of the JSR. This committee included representatives from various government ministries,^v parastatal utilities and UNICEF, but lacked representation of key development partners and NGOs, which in hindsight was a weakness in the process.

Because the main driver for the JSR is the Department of Water Affairs (which also hosted the JSR Secretariat), effort was needed to ensure the Ministry of Health saw the JSR as something they were substantively involved in, and also ensure that the JSR focus and invitation list adequately reflected the sanitation topic. A multi-ministerial meeting between ministers or principal secretaries early in the JSR process could have helped garner commitment and collaboration between ministries.

The role of the ministers and permanent secretaries should have also been clarified regarding the JSR event itself. They were well represented at the JSR opening ceremony; however, at the end of this ceremony they departed. This gave the impression to some on the first day of the JSR that participation was optional, as their seniors had departed. Attendance suffered initially as a result. It was subsequently agreed that a senior representative such as a principal secretary attend all sessions. This helped give more credibility to the event and helped such officials become more familiar with the sector as a whole.

The role of development partners was also not fully optimised in this first JSR. They were approached more as potential donors to the event and to attend the opening ceremony as dignitaries, but not necessarily engaged as participants throughout the event. Their absence reduced the opportunity for mutual accountability between

^v These include the Ministries of Natural Resources and Energy, Health, Agriculture, Economic Development and Planning, and Finance.

donors, the Government and non-government sector players, and also for donors to listen to sector priorities and potentially commit to supporting to them. Garnering the interest and commitment of high-level stakeholders to attend more than the opening ceremony of the first JSR was challenging, as they may not understand the difference between the JSR and other sector conferences. This would be less of an issue for the second JSR, as stakeholders become familiar of the importance of the JSR, and their role within them.

Practical considerations in organising the JSR event itself^{vi}

Regarding the participant invitation list, efforts were needed to ensure not only a balance between water and sanitation invitees, but as the event was organised primarily by central government ministries, further efforts could have been made to balance central-level stakeholders with sub-national stakeholders, such as river basin authorities and local governments. It was decided to invite some local community (e.g. WASH committee) representatives, which was a good move for improving accountability and ensuring discussions were grounded in field realities. However, their participation was hindered by the lack of translation services during the event, which was conducted in English. Invitees were not required to register in advance for the event, meaning arrangements had to be made for a larger number of people than were potentially going to attend, making planning for actual numbers more difficult. This was mitigated to an extent by not including the date on the JSR branded conference packs (so unused packs could be used in the 2nd JSR), and having flexible arrangements with the venue to modify catering numbers on the day.

As this was the first JSR event, and somewhat of a point of pride of the organisers, there was some push to include some cost items, such as cocktail dinners, which were not strictly essential for the JSR. While this was not negative in principle, efforts were needed to remind the organisers to minimise non-essential costs, as the first JSR may somewhat 'set the standard' for future JSR events, which may not be as well funded.

The organisation of the JSR event itself was highly time consuming, and the secretariat consisted of a government staff member and assistant, neither of whom were full-time solely allocated to the JSR. In reflection, organisations that support the JSR process could also consider administrative support to the secretariat. Efforts to garner commitment from senior management of the organisation hosting the secretariat would also assist here.

Phase 3: JSR event and reporting

The majority of the JSR event sessions were in plenary with group sizes of 80–120 people. This presented challenges to effective engagement, participation and decision-making. To address this, participants were given 'traffic light' voting cards (red, orange, green). These were used in voting on recommendations from the presentations, and also to give opinions to various questions, monitoring their satisfaction of the event. The votes helped prompt discussions in the plenary, and

^{vi} For further details see Annex 1 of the Swaziland JSR Outcomes Report, 2016.

provide regular participant feedback to the event organisers to help modify subsequent sessions, and learn lessons for the future JSRs.

To encourage widespread readership, the outcomes report included a brief executive summary of the main agreed JSR decisions and action points. However as the report also aimed to capture some of the session content and discussions during the event, overall it was a relatively large document, which may have put some potential readers off. In hindsight, there may have been merit in separating the summarised JSR outcomes document, from the write-up on the content and discussions.

Although it was not done in Swaziland for this first JSR, some other countries have the outcomes report signed by senior representatives of key stakeholders in the sector, such as representatives from government, development partners and civil society. This may have been effective to build joint commitment and accountability in the JSR event outcomes.

Phase 4: follow-up and institutionalisation

As indicated, this first event was used to discuss how future JSRs could be institutionalised within the sector landscape. This was done through working groups on the last day, which reviewed the existing planning, budgeting, monitoring and reporting cycles, to identify how processes could be strengthened and how the JSR could be integrated into them to add value. While the first JSR was not deliberately timed to coincide with the planning and budgeting cycle in the sector, the discussions in this first JSR helped build consensus regarding when future events should be timed. In the JSR event a working group was also tasked to review sector coordination arrangements, and identify what roles the proposed sector working groups would have in future JSRs. As Danert (2016) mentions, it may take years for JSRs to be fully integrated into the sector processes and decision-making. However, early stage (e.g. first, second) JSRs can help to develop these processes and gain consensus for JSRs to be integral into the system.

JSR events involve considerable efforts for those involved, and there can be a 'quiet after the storm' after the event. Efforts were needed to ensure the momentum was not lost, that the outcomes report was finalised and disseminated, and that actions are followed up through a cyclical monitoring and reform process. For example, following the JSR event a three-day retreat was held by the LOC members to review the outcomes report, and discuss plans for future JSRs. The JSR outcomes report included items agreed during the event, but the event did not go into the detail of establishing responsibilities, timelines and indicators. It was therefore the responsibility of the LOC during the retreat to develop this subsequent costed action plan.

Conclusions and recommendations

The experiences learned in Swaziland add to the increasing body of evidence on how water and sanitation sector JSRs can be effective, and how they can be supported. The experiences lead to the following key recommendations:

- a) Ensure that the objectives of the JSR, in particular its role as a cyclical process that will identify bottlenecks and drive sector reforms, is understood by all participants from the outset. This will help increase the willingness of stakeholders to have critical conversations on what is working, and what is not working in the sector.
- b) Where common building blocks for JSRs are weak or missing in the sector, for example a sector-wide plan, robust monitoring system or effective coordination mechanism, the JSR can be used to build consensus for developing or strengthening these.
- c) Senior government officials (e.g. ministers, permanent secretaries) and key development partners should be engaged from the outset, to be clear on their commitment and roles and to ensure their full participation throughout the process and event (as opposed to perceiving themselves as dignitaries and/or donors to the JSR event).
- d) South-south exchanges to other countries with existing JSRs can be an effective way to create the demand for JSRs where they do not yet exist. Facilitating delegates from other countries to attend JSR events can foster cross-country learning and mentoring.
- e) Joint monitoring trips may help strengthen inter-agency collaboration in the run-up to the first JSR event, and increase the evidence base for discussion in the JSR.
- f) Do not try to address all issues in the sector in the first JSR. Start in a focussed and simple way and look to expand and evolve over time. Use the first JSR to identify how future JSRs can be institutionalised within sector coordination, planning and monitoring processes to ensure feedback and course correction.
- g) A first JSR is a 'learning through doing' process for those involved. Technical assistance is very valuable to guide and mentor the process, to avoid common pitfalls and advise on the content to ensure sessions are as strategic as possible. However, such assistance should remain 'hands-off' in terms of not developing content or directly facilitating sessions for the event, so as to ensure ownership, and to develop capacity of stakeholders for subsequent JSRs.
- h) JSR events should not be 'talking shops' but propose concrete actions and solutions that can help the sector build consensus around a reform agenda. Presentations and sessions should be designed with outcomes in mind and the chairperson should be clear on this to help guide the event discussions.
- i) Participatory methods such as traffic light voting cards can be effective in aiding decision-making in large groups. Such methods can also be used for garnering feedback from participants on the event in real-time, which is particularly useful for improvement and learning from the first JSR process.
- j) There is a need to ensure follow-up actions are clear and linked to a cyclical process of monitoring and reform, and that support extends to following up the outcomes of the JSR, not just to the event itself. Having the outcomes report signed by representatives of sector stakeholders could increase commitment and accountability to JSR outcomes.

- k) Efforts and commitments are needed to support countries in their infancy in the JSR process to go through not only one, but several successful JSR cycles, to help embed the process in the sector, and ensure momentum is not lost.

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